



Washington Supplement

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Greetings Sir Knights—

In contemplating this year's message, I thought that I would expand on something I touched on in last year's message – the date we celebrate the birth of our savior, Jesus Christ.

In attempting to calculate this date certain assumptions were made by the early church that seem a little surprising. One is that the date of Annunciation, the date that Mary was told that she would bear the child Jesus, would also be the date of his death. As we know that the crucifixion occurred at the time of the Jewish Passover celebration, then the date of the Annunciation would be the same date, 33 years earlier. This was determined to be March 25<sup>th</sup>. Nine months later then the date of the nativity would be December 25<sup>th</sup>.

Another attempt concerns a tradition in the early church at Jerusalem of celebrating the birth of the Savior on the same date of his baptism, January 6. One manuscript records a letter from the patriarch of Jerusalem to Julius, patriarch of Rome (Pope Julius 1).

On one day I cannot be both at Bethlehem and at the Jordan. In fact the Jordan is 25 miles east of Jerusalem, while the holy Bethlehem is 6 miles to the south of the city; nor can I in one day complete both celebrations.

He went on to request that Julius examine the commentaries and determine the exact date that Jesus was born and on what day He was baptized. Julius responded that Jesus birth date was indeed December 25<sup>th</sup> and He was baptized by John on January 6<sup>th</sup>.

Supposedly this did not go over well in some quarters and there are reports that in Palestine the practice of combining the celebration of Christmas and the baptism of Christ continued well past this time. Although there is some question about Julius I making this declaration, there is other external evidence of the 25<sup>th</sup> of December being considered an official date by some, at least as early as 354 CE as Julius' patriarchy was from 337 to 352 CE this would seem to support his fixing this date of December 25<sup>th</sup>.

Another theory refers to the Christianization of the Roman Festival of Saturnalia which took place between December 17<sup>th</sup> and the 23<sup>rd</sup>; again, by Pope Julius I. In this tradition Julius commissioned a special night time mass, Christ's Mass (Christmas) to further ensure the Christianization of this celebration.

Other theories concern co-opting the celebration "Sol Invicti" (the birthday of the unconquered sun) which also was celebrated on December 25<sup>th</sup>; or the Solstice, approximately December 21<sup>st</sup>.

So, again whenever you celebrate Christmas it is important to remember that together we are celebrating a real event that occurred sometime around 2000 years ago. As you celebrate remember to include time to contemplate your vows as a Christian Knight for Christ.

Merry Christmas Sir Knights!

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