

The birth of Jesus may therefore be assigned to the period 7 to 5, before the death of Herod, at the time of a census made by Herod in accordance with a decree of Augustus and when Quirinius was exercising extraordinary authority in Syria--Varus being the regular legate of the province, i.e. probably in 6.

Baptism of Jesus:

The Synoptic Gospels begin their description of the public ministry of Jesus with an account of the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1; Mark 1:1; Luke 3:1; compare of in John 1:19; John 4:24; Josephus, Ant, XVIII, iii, 3) and Luke definitely dates the baptism of Jesus by John in the 15th year of Tiberius. Luke also designates this event as the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and by stating Jesus' age approximately brings it into connection with the date of His birth.

But if, as seems likely, the method of reckoning by imperial years rather than by the yearly consuls was not definitely fixed when Luke wrote, it is possible that he may have counted the years of Tiberius from his appointment in 11 or 12 to equal authority with Augustus in the provinces. This method seems not to have been employed elsewhere. The coins of Antioch in which it is found are regarded as spurious, the genuine coins reckoning the reign of Tiberius from the death of Augustus (ibid., III, 278). If Luke reckoned the reign of Tiberius from 11 or 12, the 15th year would fall in 25 or 26, probably the latter, and Jesus' birth about thirty years earlier, i.e. about 6 or 5.

First Passover:

At the time of the first Passover in Jesus' ministry the Herodian temple had been building 46 years (John 2:20). Herod began the temple in the 18th year of his reign.. As Josephus reckons from the accession of Herod in 37, the 18th year would be 20 to 21 and 46 years later would be 27 to 28. The interval implied in John between this Passover and the beginning of Jesus' ministry agrees well with the Lucan dating of the baptism in 26.

Death of John the Baptist

The imprisonment of John the Baptist, which preceded the beginning of Jesus' Galilean work, was continued for a time (Matthew 11:2-19; Luke 7:18-35) but was finally terminated by beheading at the order of Herod Antipas. Announcement of the death was made to Jesus while in the midst of His Galilean ministry (Matthew 14:3-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9). Josephus reports that the defeat of Antipas by Aretas, in the summer of 789/36, was popularly regarded as a Divine punishment for the murder of John; But although Josephus mentions the divorce of Aretas daughter by Antipas as one of the causes of hostilities, no inference can be drawn from this or from the popular interpretation of Antipas' defeat, by which the interval between John's death and this defeat can be fixed.

Length of Jesus' Ministry

The Synoptic Gospels mention the Passion Passover at which Jesus' ministry was terminated, but they contain no data by which the interval between the imprisonment of John the Baptist and this Passover can be fixed with certainty. Yet indications are not wanting that the interval consisted of at least two years.

The Sabbath controversy broke out in Galilee when the grain was still standing in the fields (Matthew 12:1; Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1) and the condition of the grass when the Five Thousand were fed (Matthew 14:15; Mark 6:39; Luke 9:12) points to the springtime, the Passion Passover marking the return of still another springtime (compare also Luke 13:7; Matthew 23:37).

But the Gospel of John mentions explicitly three Passovers (John 2:23; 6:4; 11:55) and probably implies a fourth (John 5:1), thus necessitating a ministry of at least two years and making probable a ministry of three years after the first Passover. The Passover of 6:4 cannot be eliminated on textual grounds, for the documentary evidence is conclusive in its favor and the argument against it based on the statements of certain patristic writers is unconvincing. The indications of time from John 6:4--the Passover when the Five Thousand were fed in Galilee--to John 11:55--the Passion Passover--are definite and clear (John 7:2; 10:22). But the interval between the first Passover (John 2:23) and the Galilean Passover (John 6:4) must have been one and may have been two years. The following considerations favor the latter view:

Jesus was present in Jerusalem at a feast (John 5:1) which is not named but is called simply "a" or "the" feast of the Jews. The best authorities for the text are divided, some supporting the insertion, others the omission of the definite article before "feast." If the article formed part of the original text, the feast may have been either Tabernacles--from the Jewish

point of view--or Passover--from the Christian point of view. If the article was wanting in the original text, the identification of the feast must be made on contextual and other grounds.

But the note of time in John 4:35 indicates the lapse of about nine months since the Passover of John 2:23 and it is not likely that the Galilean ministry which preceded the feeding of the Five Thousand lasted only about three months.

In fact this is rendered impossible by the condition of the grain in the fields at the time of the Sabbath controversy. The identification of the feast of John 5:1 with Purim, even if the article be not genuine, is extremely improbable; and if so, a Passover must have intervened between John 2:23 and John 6:4, making the ministry of Jesus extend over a period of three years and the months which preceded the Passover of John 2:23.

While the identification cannot be made with certainty, if the feast was Passover the subject of the controversy with the Jews in Jerusalem as well as the season of the year would harmonize with the Synoptic account of the Sabbath controversy in Galilee which probably followed this Passover (compare the variant reading in Luke 6:1).

Death of Jesus

Jesus was put to death in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea (Matthew 27:2; Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1; John 18:29; John 19:1; Acts 3:13; 4:27; 13:28; 1 Timothy 6:13; Tac. Ann. xv.44),

Caiaphas being the high priest (Matthew 26:3,17; John 11:49; 18:13) and Herod Antipas the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Luke 23:7). Pilate was procurator from 26 to 36 (Josephus), Caiaphas was high priest from 18 to 36 and Antipas was tetrarch from 4 to 39.

If the first Passover of Jesus' ministry was in 780/27, the fourth would fall in 783/30. The gospels name Friday as the day of the crucifixion (Matthew 27:62; Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54; John 19:14,31,42) and the Synoptic Gospels represent this Friday as Nisan 15--the day following (or according to Jewish reckoning from sunset to sunset, the same day as) the day on which the paschal supper was eaten (Matthew 26:17; Mark 14:12; Luke 22:7).

But the Fourth Gospel is thought by many to represent the paschal meal as still uneaten when Jesus suffered (John 18:28; compare John 13:29); and it is held that the Synoptic Gospels also contain traces of this view (Matthew 26:5; Mark 14:2; 15:21; Luke 23:26).

Astronomical calculations show that Friday could have fallen on Nisan 14 or 15 in 30 according to different methods of reckoning but the empirical character of the Jewish calendar renders the result of such calculations uncertain. In the year 30 Friday, Nisan 15, would fall on April 7.

7. Summary of Dates:

1. Birth of Jesus, 6.
2. Death of Herod the Great, 4.
3. Baptism of Jesus, 26.
4. First Passover of Jesus' ministry, 27.
5. Death of Jesus, 30.