

Ancient Words—The First New Year's Day

It was a very busy time in the land of Judea as the timeline for BC (Before Christ) came to a close. Quirinius was governor of Syria (Luke 2.2), Caesar Augustus called for a census of the entire Roman world (Luke 2.1), and Herod the Great was king over Judea (Matt 2.1). Quirinius had recently lost his job in Judea and was reassigned as prefect to Syria---but it was “Q” who would see to the chore of counting the people with a census in this region as King Herod was above this task ordered by Augustus. Herod was on his throne in Jerusalem waiting to hear from the noble eastern strangers who had inquired a few days earlier about “the one born king of the Jews”. It was protocol for royalty from one country to address the royalty of another country upon a visit, so this band of travelers who had been following the star for months stopped for the brief inquiry with this king. Herod must have given this traveling convoy time to find the newborn king, spend some time to worship on the Jewish Sabbath, reload supplies for their long distance journey back home, and report back to him with a courtesy visit. It is not unlikely that King Herod may have waited at least 40 days for all of this to be accomplished before realizing he had been outwitted (Matt 2.16-18). Knowing that Quirinius needed 30 days or so to complete an accurate census for Augustus, Herod certainly did not want to ruffle the feathers of his superior Caesar.

Bethlehem, which means house of bread, was the final destination for the “kings from distant shores” and just a very short distance, about 6 miles, south of Jerusalem. King Herod requested these kings/magi/wise men report back where the child might be found so that he might worship this new king as well (so he said!). While Herod allows time for this search to be completed, Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem must complete the circumcision of their son on the 8th day as required by Jewish law. No mention is made of where this procedure takes place-- could have been Bethlehem or more likely Jerusalem where rabbis and doctors would be found at the temple awaiting any opportunity for work (Bethlehem was full of shepherds). Reported tradition of the time indicates that a rabbi or doctor who performed circumcision was called a “Mohel”. The circumciser of Jesus is unnamed in Luke’s account, but he may have been a rabbi or doctor who performed the cutting duty on a daily basis. Joseph would have discovered where

to contact the nearest circumciser who was a member of a class of respected and important functionaries in either town. They bore the title *Mohel* and the sacred rite they performed with a sharp knife was called *Bris Milah*. Originally the order to circumcise, by tradition, was given to the boy's father but it became custom to delegate that responsibility to a trained and practiced circumciser, the *Mohel*.

"Throughout all generations, every male shall be circumcised when he is eight days old...This shall be my covenant in your flesh, an eternal covenant. The uncircumcised male whose foreskin has not been circumcised, shall have his soul cut off from his people; he has broken my Covenant". "God spoke to Moses, telling him to speak to the Israelites: When a woman conceives and gives birth to a boy ... on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." (Gen 17.9-14 and Leviticus 12.1-3)

Regardless of where the event took place or who did the procedure, the newborn infant, Immanuel, was circumcised on the 8th day and was "named Jesus" (Luke 2.21), the name the angel, Gabriel, had given him nine months earlier. All of time by definition has been calculated from this event and this day. Over 500 years later history would be designated as B.C. (before Christ) for all events before his official name and A.D (Anno Domini) for all events after his official name. The first day of the first month of 1AD (1/1/1 AD) must be the day Jesus was circumcised and named Jesus. The accuracy of this day recorded in Luke 2.21 leads to the accuracy for the widely accepted date when Jesus is crucified in 33 AD. (To place Jesus birth in 4-7 BC, as some do, just doesn't fit the BC/AD timeline.)

All of Judea was busy on this day; the Mahel's were busy with their cutting business, "Q" was busy with his census takers so that proper tax could be gathered to make Augustus smile, Herod was waiting and confident the royal band would report back to him, the royal international convoy was making plans to depart Bethlehem, (They were warned later in a dream, after the time of purification for Mary—40 days, to take another route home, Matt 2.12) and Joseph was busy finding the right Mahel for Jesus.

Today, circumcision is circumcision of the heart: **Rom 2:27-29** “The one who is not circumcised physically and yet obeys the law will condemn you who, even though you have the written code and circumcision, are a lawbreaker. A person is not a Jew who is one only outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a person's praise is not from other people, but from God.”

May our New Year's Day bring renewal of circumcision of the heart performed by the “Mahel” of our day—The Holy Spirit—as the Ancient Words have instructed! And may the “cutting” of our heart by the “Bris Milah” of our day—The Word of God (sharper than any 2-edge sword)--produce the most powerful name on earth within us—“For greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world”. The name of Jesus Christ the Lord (the Ancient of days) is the Author and Finisher of our salvation for all of our days (Heb 8)! The first New Year's day for Jesus was about a new covenant and a new name---no wonder New Year's resolutions are needed this day! Sj-12-27