

You may have heard the BBC announce, a little while ago, that scientists had shown the actual 2000th anniversary of Jesus Christ's birth to be this September. Astronomy proves, they said, that Jesus was not born on December 25th 1AD. This is hardly news, since the Bible says the same thing. Still, it seems remarkable that we don't know the birthday of history's most famous man.

Jesus's birthday was remarkable in other ways, too. For example, it is the only occasion when astrologers claimed a baby's birth to have determined the position of stars in the sky, rather than the other way round. And it is amazing how a Roman emperor's need for more money resulted in Jesus's birth fulfilling an 800 year old Jewish prophecy so accurately as to knock the likes of Nostradamus into a cocked hat.

We normally celebrate the birthdays of people we love, and the same is true of religious leaders. Those who follow the Buddha, or the prophet Mohammed, would no doubt wish to remember the date of their birth in this way. But Christians do not commemorate Christmas to celebrate the date of his birth, but the fact of his birth.

For if the Christian Gospel is true, then Christmas did not see the birth of a great teacher, or a mighty prophet, or a shining example. Instead, it saw the eternal Son of God himself, who created and sustains the universe, take on human nature. God himself lay in a manger at Bethlehem... No other religion claims such a thing for its founder. If it is true, then no other birth in the world is so important to our troubled world

But is it true? That Jesus existed cannot reasonably be doubted, but was he really God's Son? The answer to this cannot be found in the cave at Christmas, but only in the empty tomb of Easter. Then this same man defeated death, and was seen by over 500 people, who carried their testimony to the whole world.

The resurrection of Jesus is possibly the best attested fact of ancient history, and is nowadays confirmed by millions who have found in the risen Christ the answer to their deepest needs, and those of the suffering world. Perhaps this Christmas is a time to examine more closely that remarkable event of 1993 - or was it 2000 - years ago.

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