

ARTICLE II.

THE TRUE DATE OF CHRIST'S BIRTH.

From the German of Wieseler: Continued from Bih. Sac. No. IX. p. 184. By Rev. George E. Day, Marlborough, Mass.

OF the four data for calculating the year of Christ's birth, with which we are furnished in the gospels, two have already been considered, viz. the reign of Herod the Great and the appearance of the star in the east. We now proceed to the

THIRD DATUM. *The census instituted by Augustus Caesar, in consequence of which the parents of Jesus journeyed from Nazareth to Bethlehem and during the taking of which he was born.* Luke 2: 1—7. To the credibility of Luke's narrative in respect to this census, five objections have been brought. It is said that during the entire reign of Augustus, history informs us of nothing beyond the censuses of single provinces; that admitting a general census of the empire to have occurred, it could not have been taken in Judea at the time Jesus was born, because Judea during the reign of Herod was not a Roman province; that if such a census were taken in Judea, by the Romans, they would not have obliged Joseph to travel to the city of his ancestors, because their rule was to take the census in the place of actual residence; that the journeying of Mary to be enrolled, considering her situation, is doubtful; and that, even if a census was taken at about the time Christ was born, Luke in affirming that it occurred during the procuratorship of Quirinus under whom a census was actually taken ten years later, has at least confounded the two.

1. In regard to the occurrence of a general census of the Roman empire, at about the time Jesus was born, the difficulty has been exaggerated both by friends and enemies. Admitting that the phrase *πᾶσα ἡ οἰκουμένη* does not admit of being confined to Judea, but must be understood according to the *usus loquendi* of the age, as designating the Roman empire, the existing *orbis terrarum*, we think it can be conclusively shown that such a census was taken. We think it can be proved that Augustus did institute a *general census of the provinces*, and that the edict to this effect was issued before the year 750 U. C.

For, aside from the testimony of Luke we have the witness of

two other writers, Casiodorus and Suidas.¹ Both indeed were Christians and lived in a later age. Still, from the fact that Casiodorus mentions the *survey* of the empire in addition to the census, and that Suidas relates the appointment of twenty men to take it, and comments upon the wisdom of Augustus in respect to it, it is evident that they must have obtained this information from other sources than Luke's gospel.

It is true, that with the *exception* of Luke no contemporaneous writer has expressly mentioned this census. But whom should we expect to do so? And what would be the consequence of denying credit to a historian, merely from the silence of others? As Huschke has well observed: We know of the *legis actiones* and their abrogation, which were quite as important in respect to the early period of Roman history, as the census of the empire was in respect to a later period, not from the *historical* works of Livy, Dionysius or Polybius; but from a legal work, the institutes of Caius. In like manner had the works of Paullus or Ulpian *de censibus* come down to us perfect, and were no mention made in them of the census of Augustus, we should deem it strange; while it would be no matter of surprise whatever, that in the ordinary histories of that age it should be passed over in silence. If Suetonius in his life of Augustus does not mention this census, neither does Spartian in his life of Hadrian devote a single syllable to the *edictum perpetuum* by means of which, in later times the memory of Hadrian has chiefly been respected. The annals of Tacitus begin with Tiberius. The fifty-fifth book of the Roman history of Dion Cassius, in which the period between the years 745 and 761 is treated of, has come down to us only in an epitome, and even this leaves extensive gaps between the years 748—752, exactly the period in which Christ must have been born. If we consider then, on the one hand, that the institution of the imperial census only had regard to the provinces, and on the other, that the edict respecting it was not carried into execution, in all parts of the empire at the same time, and of course would attract less attention, the silence of history respecting it will not surprise us. All that can justly be expected is that the statement of Luke, together with the confirmatory notices of later writers, should be shown to be in harmony with the known condition of the Roman empire at that time.

Now at the commencement of the imperial government, it is evident that a marked tendency towards centralization existed.

¹ See the passage in Bib. Sac. No. 111. p. 463.

In 726, the supreme authority was vested in Augustus. Till that time, the taking of the census had been intrusted to the governors of the several provinces, but in the year 731 U. C. Augustus subjected *all* the procurators of the empire, to his own supervision as proconsul. Ought it to occasion any surprise that, in consequence of this, one general census should be undertaken, even though carried into effect in the different provinces and divisions of this great empire in different years, and with the utmost regard, so far as circumstances would allow, to provincial and national peculiarities? Of no little weight also in confirmation of what has been advanced is the *general survey of the empire or descriptio orbis*, mentioned by Frontinus,¹ which although made somewhat earlier, was a measure kindred to the census and equally comprehensive. Finally, a *rationarium* or *breviarium totius imperii*, in the words of Suetonius was instituted by Augustus, the contents of which is thus described by Tacitus:² *Opes publicae continebantur: quantum civium Sociorumque in armis, quot classes, regna, provinciae, tributa aut vectigalia et necessitates ac largitiones.* So much did Augustus prize this catalogue, that he copied it off with his own hand, and ordered it in his will to be publicly read in the senate. It should be observed also that the *Socii* and *regna* had their places in it.

From all this external and internal, direct and indirect evidence, the statement of Luke, in regard to the institution of a general census by Augustus, is placed beyond doubt. The *time* also at which he relates the edict to have been issued, shortly before 750 U. C., agrees with the testimony of history. Augustus was then at the summit of his power. At the same time, nearly the whole empire was enjoying profound peace. On this account the order was issued in the year 747 to shut the temple of Janus, although in consequence of disturbances in Dacia it was not executed till the year 752. What more favorable period for attending to works of peace and securing a firm internal organization for the great Roman empire?

2. In respect to the objection that a Roman census in Judea could not have been taken, till Judea was reduced to a Roman province, which did not occur till the year 759, it may be answered, that the impossibility affirmed, is a mere assumption. We admit that in the kingdoms of allies, a milder and in some instances a very mild form of taking it was observed. Especially would this be

¹ De Coloniais: in *Rei agrar. Auct.* ed. Goes, p. 109.

² *Annal.* 1, 11. *Comp. Sueton.* Aug. 28. 101. *Dio* 53, 30. 56, 33.

the case in the census of Palestine under Herod, and with a people so much inclined to revolt as the Jews. Probably the execution of it was entrusted, as much as possible to Herod and his officers. The character of Herod as a *rex Socius* presents no difficulty. The Clitae although governed by their own princes, were still included in the Roman census. Besides, the relation of Herod to Rome leaves scarcely room for a doubt in respect to the possibility of a Roman census in his kingdom. Pompey had already levied a tribute upon the Jews. Two edicts of Julius Caesar in respect to taxation are also preserved by Josephus, Antt. 14, 10, 5, 6. The latter of these is generally misunderstood. It clearly speaks of a *double tax*; the first, a *yearly* one, the amount of which is not given, and which not improbably may have been a *poll tax*; the other a land tax, as appears from the requirement of a fourth part of what was sown. Further, Antony according to Appian¹ appointed Herod king of Idumea and Samaria *ἐπὶ φόροις τεταγμένους*, that is, on condition of establishing the same or a similar tax with that imposed on Judea from the time of Julius Caesar. The same writer relates that the poll tax upon the Jews was very high, and that the oftener they rebelled the more oppressive it became.² The assessment of this poll tax, therefore, rendered it advisable to take a census. The position of Herod made it impossible for him to offer any resistance to the plans of the Roman emperor. A tributary king, holding his throne at the hands of Rome, hated by the Jews and dependent upon the grace of Augustus, his independence was only apparent. Without the permission of Rome he could neither wage war, conclude peace, nor appoint his successor. Towards the end of Herod's life, the supervision of Augustus over Palestine appears to have been more carefully exercised, Antt. 16, 9, 3; and there are circumstances which render it not improbable that he may have contemplated the reduction of Judea, on the decease of Herod, into a Roman province. All this confirms the testimony of Luke in respect to a census of Palestine under Herod.

But why is it not mentioned by Josephus, especially since he has given an account of the census under Quirinus, and the history of the latter shows that the Jews would not be likely in the time of Herod to endure quietly a Roman census? The answer is, that there was a great dissimilarity between these two censuses. Both indeed, in the last instance, were set on foot by Au-

¹ De Bell. civil. 5, 75.

² Syr. 50.

gustus Caesar. But the former, aside from its probably milder form, was taken under the direction of Herod, while the latter was taken under the direct supervision of the Roman officer, Quirinus. The former appeared to guarantee the relative independence of Judea; while the latter was connected with the subjugation of Judea to the immediate government of Rome. The importance of these two censuses in respect to the political state of Judea, was therefore widely different; and hence Josephus might very properly mention the more important one under Quirinus, and take no notice of the one under Herod. Besides this there is in Josephus a visible avoiding, as far as possible, of whatever might render the Roman authorities suspicious of the permanent obedience of his countrymen. Hence his fragmentary account of their expectations in respect to the Messiah, and the manifold effects of these expectations upon the nation. In the same category belongs also the mention of the views entertained by many of the Jews in respect to the Roman census and the disturbances to which they already had given, and might give, rise. His dread of exciting Roman suspicion is further evident from the manner and brevity of his account of Judas the Galilean and his party, Antt. 18, l. 6. In accordance with this character of Josephus, as a historian, we should not expect to find in his writings a distinct account of Herod's census and the excesses it occasioned, in case they occurred; but rather a concealed allusion to them, which readers accustomed to his style would easily understand. This trait has been recognized by men of learning, from Wernsdorff and Kepler down to Huschke, in respect to the refusal of the six thousand Pharisees, in the time of the Syrian procurator, Saturninus, to take the oath of allegiance to the Roman emperor as well as to Herod, Antt. 17, 2. 4. The requiring of such an oath is to be regarded as preparatory to the further measure of taking a census. And in fact Josephus relates that a short time before the death of Herod, a wide-spread insurrection broke out among the Jewish zealots, which he may well suppose to have been occasioned by the abhorred census, Antt. 17, 6. 2—4. As instigators of that insurrection, Matthias, the son of Margalothus, and Judas, the son of Sariphaeus, are mentioned. While Herod was suffering under a terrible disease, they began to stir up the people against him, representing his misfortunes, and especially this disease, as a punishment from God on account of his violation of the law. Josephus then mysteriously adds: ἦν γὰρ τῷ Ἡρώδῃ τινὲς ἀπραγματευθέντα παρὰ τὸν νόμον, αἳ δὲ ἐπεκάλουν οἱ περὶ τὸν Ἰούδαν καὶ Μαθθίαν.

Of the *certain* unlawful things, however, he proceeds only to mention the erection of a large golden eagle over the great gate of the temple. Upon the premature report of the death of Herod, the insurgents rushed in crowds to the temple, in order first of all to destroy the Roman eagle, the hated symbol of Roman authority. While they were engaged in tearing down the image, the king's captain appeared with his troops, and apprehended about forty of them, including the leaders, Matthias and Judas. The high-priest Matthias, who is represented by Josephus as strikingly faithful to the ancient customs, was implicated in this revolt and displaced. In his stead Joazar, the son of Boethus, was appointed high-priest, and this, on the ground that he was devoted to the Roman government and perhaps had advised the Jews to submit quietly to the census then taking. At least the adherents of the rebel Matthias demanded of Archelaus his removal, Ant. 17, 9, 1; and it is expressly mentioned, Ant. 18, 1, 1, that he was an advocate of the *census* under Quirinus. In addition to this, it appears to me not a little remarkable, that among the grievances presented by the Jews to Archelaus after the death of his father, the most prominent is that which refers to the *annual tax*, Ant. 17, 8, 4, and probably also to a census which was shortly before taken for the purpose of raising it.

A further confirmation of the view here presented in respect to the insurrection of Matthias presents itself to my own mind, in the speech of Gamaliel before the Jewish sanhedrim, Acts 5: 36, in which he speaks of a certain Theudas, who found some adherents, but whose party was destroyed on the death of their leader. This Theudas, I do not doubt, in opposition to the views of Olshausen, Tholuck and others, who hold that Josephus has not referred to him, is the same person with that Matthias, who about the close of Herod's life, caused the Roman eagle in the temple to be torn down. All the marks given by Luke are found in this Matthias, even as far as the *name*; for תודא is only the Hebrew expression for Θεόδωρος = Θεωδᾶς, and the change of the Hebrew into the Greek form is as easily explained as the change of Κηφᾶς into Πέτρος in the New Testament. This too explains why Gamaliel mentions the insurrection under Theudas in connection with that under Judas the Galilean. They both occurred upon the taking of a census, although the latter census under Quirinus, being the best known and most hated of the two, is distinguished by him from the other by calling it *the census*. On these grounds therefore, the narrative of Luke in respect to the

occurrence of a Roman census in the kingdom of Herod is shown, not only to be not improbable in itself, but to be perfectly supported by the historical evidence in favor of the existence of such a census.

3. The objection that if a Roman census had been taken in Judea, Joseph and Mary would have been enrolled in Nazareth, the place of their residence, instead of Bethlehem, needs but a brief consideration. This was a *provincial* census, not a census of Roman citizens. And if Luke had described it as having been taken in the Roman manner, we should have had room for suspicion. But as his narrative reads, what can be more natural? Augustus respects as far as possible the Jewish nationality. One of its most prominent features, the ancient division according to *lineage* is made the basis on which it is executed. Then too, the nature of the case is to be regarded. If this was a *census capitum*, as is probable, taken with reference to the better raising of the poll tax, what easier or more effective mode of taking it, than through the connection of the public genealogical registers? That Joseph should journey to Bethlehem on such an occasion is, therefore, just what we should expect.

4. The objection based on the account of Luke, that Mary accompanied her husband to Bethlehem, is the most insignificant of all. Even admitting that no legal necessity compelled her to make the journey, who in our day is sufficiently well acquainted with her feelings and relations, to be sure it would not be made? It is at least as probable that Mary, in the excitement and disturbance attending a census, would rather prefer to be with her natural protector Joseph, than to remain at home. Besides it has been shown by Huschke that in certain cases, the wife would be obliged to be personally present on such an occasion.

5. We now pass to the objection that Luke by the expression *ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρηναίου* shows himself to have confounded the census which he affirms to have occurred under Herod, with that which was taken by Quirinus, in the year 759 U. C. or nine years later. We may safely assume at the outset that this is at least improbable. Luke everywhere shows himself a competent writer of history. His professed object is to write *with accuracy* (*ἀκριβῶς*). Is it credible that he did not know that the well known census of Quirinus, was contemporaneous with the reduction of Judea into a Roman province, and consequently could not have occurred in the closing part of the reign of Herod, in which he places the birth of Christ? The supposition is con-

tradicted by his own mention of the census of Quirinus (Acts 5: 37) and of particulars connected with it, perfectly agreeing with those given by Josephus. On the other hand, he gives a faithful and accurate description, as we have seen, of the census taken at the time of Christ's birth; so that we are almost forced to expect that he will distinguish in respect to time between the census under Herod and that of Quirinus. Let us examine the manuscripts and see whether they justify our expectation. Perhaps not only a more simple criticism, but a new solution may be the result.

The common text (Elzevir) of Luke 2: 2 reads thus: *Αὕτη ἡ ἀπογραφὴ πρώτη ἐγένετο ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρίνου.* The collected variations, aside from the different spelling of the name Quirinus, relate either to the article *ἡ* which is sometimes inserted and sometimes omitted, or to the position of *πρώτη* and *ἀπογραφὴ πρώτη*. According to the larger edition of the New Testament by *Lachmann* (Berol. 1842), the manuscript *A* has the article *ἡ*, while it is omitted by *B, D*. He himself reads: *αὕτη ἀπογραφὴ πρώτη ἐγένετο ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς Συρίας Κυρίνου.* Internal grounds also favor this reading. For, first, the insertion of the article by transcribers or readers can be easily explained, but not its omission. Misunderstanding the genuine Greek expression, *αὕτη ἀπογραφὴ ἐγένετο*, i. e. *that*¹ *became* (not, *was*; for *γίγνεσθαι* is not synonymous with *εἶναι*) *an ἀπογραφῆ*, or, 'in consequence of this an ἀπογ. was accomplished,' they connected *αὕτη* closely with *ἀπογ.* and of course naturally inserted the article. Secondly, the insertion of the article gives a wrong meaning, not only at variance with the facts of history, but with the intention of the evangelist. For the expression *αὕτη ἡ ἀπογ.*, *this census*, on account of its close connection with the words, *πᾶσαν τὴν οἰκουμ. ἀπογράφεσθαι*, could only designate a *general* census of the Roman empire, occurring *simultaneously* in all the provinces, at the time of Christ's birth. But this is at variance with the testimony of history. It is also at variance with the meaning of the Evangelist. For he describes the census which occurred at the birth of Christ, on the one hand, in such a manner by connecting it with the time in which Quirinus governed the province of

¹ *Αὕτη* refers back to v. 1: "the circumstance that Augustus issued an edict, to take a census of the whole empire, issued in an ἀπογ." The feminine *αὕτη* is used instead of the neuter *τοῦτο*, because in Greek the pronoun takes the gender, *per attractionem*, of the following predicate. Luke 8: 11. 22: 53. Comp. *Winer's Gram.* § 63.

Syria, as to exhibit it as a particular census; and on the other hand, his description which follows, allows us only to think of a census taken in Palestine. It must certainly be regarded as singular that commentators have taken so little pains to inquire whether the *article* should be read or not, when the sense and construction of the verse are entirely dependent upon it.

What bearing, now, has this upon the explanation of the text? If we understand *πρώτη* in a *comparative sense* (nearly synonymous with *πρωτέρα*) and make the genitive *ἡγεμονεύοντος Κυρίνου* dependent upon it, as is done by distinguished critics,¹ and as the syntax and the *usus loquendi* abundantly justify,² we shall find it much favored by this slight correction of the text; and the plain reading will be: the *ἀπογ.* occurred *as the first and before* Quirinus was governor of Syria, especially if *πρώτη* be placed immediately before the genitive it governs, as is done in several manuscripts. So far from falling into the error therefore of confounding these two censuses, it appears that Luke has *expressly* distinguished them from each other.

It now only remains to inquire at what *time* according to Luke, this census occurred. In general, we have found that it took place in the closing part of the reign of Herod the Great. We have obtained, however, a more specific date, if it is true that the insurrection of Matthias or Theudas was occasioned chiefly by a census then taken. Since he was put to death on the twelfth of March 750 U. C., the census must have been taken shortly before that date. Consequently Jesus if he was born, as the evangelist relates at the time of this census, must have been born in the winter of 749—50 U. C., and *at least before the twelfth of March 750*, the day on which Matthias was put to death.

FOURTH DATUM. *This is furnished in the words* ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἦν ὡς ἐτῶν τετράκοντα (Luke 3: 23), *which define the age of Jesus at the time of his baptism, or the beginning of his public ministry. If this beginning can be accurately ascertained, we have only to subtract the ὡς ἐτῶν τετράκοντα, to obtain the year of Christ's birth.* Should the preceding data, therefore, be imperfect or even prove nothing, this alone would be sufficient to establish the system we propose.

First of all, then, let us look at the passage in Luke 3: 23, and

¹ Clericus, Perizonius, Usher, Petavius, Noris, Ernesti, Tholuck, Huschke and others.

² For examples of the superlative used in a comparative sense see, Odyss. 11, 481, 482. 5, 105. Herod. 3, 119. Thucyd. 1, 1. Aristot. de Sensu c. 4.

determine its meaning. As it stands in the commonly received text, it reads thus: *Καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ὥσει ἐτῶν τριάκοντα ἀρχόμενος*. The variation *ὡς* for *ὥσει* may be passed by as not affecting the sense, and the only question we have to decide is, whether *ἀρχόμενος* should be read *before or after ὥσει ἐτῶν τριάκοντα*. According to Lachmann, three cdd. A, D, a (Verc.), agree with the *textus receptus* in respect to the position of *ἀρχόμενος*, while three other cdd. B, b (Veron.), c (Colbert.), have *ἀρχόμενος before ὥσει ἐτῶν τριάκ.*; likewise the Vulgate, Origen, Irenaeus, (quasi incipiens XXX annorum). So important did this critic regard these authorities, that he did not venture to sanction decisively the usual position of the words, but placed the other beside it as being likewise authorized. In addition to this, we find in the New Testament of Schulz a multitude of manuscripts, which Lachmann, in consistency with the principle of criticism on which his recension of the text was made, could not employ, and nearly all authorizing (e. g. L. 1. 118. 131. 209. Germ. 1.) the placing of *ἀρχόμενος* first. On merely critical grounds, therefore, the reading *ἀρχόμενος ὥσει ἐτῶν τριάκοντα* may be the correct one.

This result of external criticism is moreover confirmed by the *interpretation* of the passage. For if we read *ἀρχόμενος after ὥσει ἐτῶν τριάκοντα*, to say nothing of the clumsy construction *ἀρχόμενος ὦν, ὡς ἐρομίζετο*, which Paulus proposes, we are obliged to choose between the two following explanations. First, we can make the genitive *ὥσει ἐτῶν τριάκοντα* dependent upon *ἀρχόμενος*, and with Meyer render the passage thus: "Jesus was in the beginning of about thirty years." To this however it has long since been well objected by Bengel: *Initium hoc loco innuitus non anni trigesimi, quod neque cardinalis numerus neque particula quasi ferebat*. Or we can take the other and more generally received explanation (Bengel, Grotius, Künöel, de Wette, Olshausen, and others): And he was, namely Jesus, about thirty years old, when he began (to teach or exercise his Messianic office). Against the *sense* which this rendering gives, I have nothing to say; but how *ἀρχόμενος*, beginning, or in the beginning, can express this sense, in *the place* it usually occupies, without the addition of *διδάσκων*, is more than I can discover. And then the clumsiness of the whole construction!

On the other hand, the declaration of the Evangelist is perfectly clear, if on the numerous and good authorities already cited, we read *ἀρχόμενος before ὥσει ἐτῶν τριάκοντα*, thus: *Καὶ αὐτὸς ἦν, ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀρχόμενος, ὥσει ἐτῶν τριάκοντα, ὦν υἱὸς x. τ. λ., i. e.* "And

he was, namely Jesus, when he began—or as we should say, in the beginning—about thirty years of age, being a son, etc. This interpretation, aside from the untenableness of the other, has the following reasons in favor of its correctness: *first*, the immediate adjunct *ὁ Ἰησοῦς*, as explanatory of the preceding *αὐτός*, is somewhat singular in the common reading, inasmuch as the verses just before (vv. 21, 22) leave no room for doubt that by *αὐτός*, Jesus is intended. According to our understanding of the passage, however, this adjunct is not only not superfluous, but is really necessary, since otherwise the reader would naturally have connected the *ἀρχόμενος* immediately with *ἦν* (*ἦν ἀρχόμενος = ἤρξατο*). Secondly, in Acts 1: 1, 2, Luke appears to confirm our explanation of the passage before us, for the words *ὡς ἤρξατο ὁ Ἰησοῦς ποιεῖν τε καὶ διδάσκειν, ἄχρι ἧς ἡμέρας — ἀνελήφθη*, on account of the emphatic position of the *ἤρξατο* and its close connection with the succeeding words *ἄχρι ἧς ἡμέρας*, should be rendered “what in the beginning Jesus did and taught until the day in which he was taken up.” Thirdly, with this explanation, the aim and connection of the paragraph, Luke 3: 23—28 becomes perfectly plain. It is in fact a *parenthetical* paragraph, added to the narrative of the baptism of Jesus (vv. 21, 22) and containing a statement of his age at that time and of his Messianic genealogy. This is evident from the comment of the fourth chapter, in which the narrative is resumed with a reference to the baptism, and also from the form of v. 23—first, the copula, then the pronoun, then the *ἦν* belonging to it, etc.

We pass now to the chronologically important question, what the *ὡσεὶ* joined by Luke to the thirty years was intended to express. In opposition to Scaliger who regarded it as the so called *ᾤ veritatis* of the Hebrews, i. e. as in fact superfluous, and to many other expositors who have attached to it an indefinite chronological character, we maintain that it must be taken in its literal and precise sense. In our view, what Luke intends to say is this: Jesus was, at his baptism, *ἐτῶν τριάκοντα*, not however just thirty years old, but *ὡσεὶ ἐτῶν τριάκοντα*: and this can either signify that he was thirty years old and somewhat under, but not so much as to be only twenty-nine years old; or thirty years old and somewhat over, but not so much as to be thirty-one years of age—more probably the latter. In a different connection, the expression might indeed signify *some years* more or less than thirty, since thirty, including as it does the number ten, is often a round number. That it is not a round number here,

however, I infer not so much on the commonly assumed ground that the priests and Levites entered upon their office at the age of thirty, which must be received with very great limitations, as from the declared *design* of Luke in writing his gospel. This he affirms to be to state the facts relating to the history of Christ with accuracy and precision. Now if the public ministry of Christ continued only about three years, or as some think only one year, how would it be possible to define the age of Jesus at the *beginning* of his ministry, by a round number which might just as well designate his age at the *end*. On these grounds, I cannot permit myself to doubt that Luke means to tell us that Jesus, at the time of his baptism was somewhat over or under thirty years of age, though not so much as to be either thirty-one or twenty-nine.

The only question we have to settle then is this: *When did the baptism of Jesus take place?* The evangelist John, in Chap. 1: 31—34, Comp. 1: 26, where the baptism of Jesus is assumed to have already occurred, mentions a *passover* (2: 13) which Jesus observed at Jerusalem. If the date of this *passover* can be accurately ascertained, we shall have a *terminus ad quem*, before which the baptism of Jesus must have certainly occurred. Now this date is actually furnished us in the conversation between Jesus and the Jews at this very *passover*, in which they declare: forty and six years was this temple in building. The temple referred to—the so-called Herodian, as is indicated by the word *this*—was not fully completed, according to Josephus, Antt. 20, 9. 7, till a short time before the commencement of the Jewish war. If we add forty-six years then to the date at which Herod began to repair the second temple, we have the year in which this *passover* occurred. These repairs were begun in the eighteenth year of the reign of Herod, reckoning from the death of Antigonus or the third month of 717 U. C. which would give us from Nisan 734 to 735 U. C. There is every reason to believe that the corner stone was laid in the month of Kisleu 734 U. C. and probably on the appropriate festival of the dedication of the temple. For Josephus relates, Antt. 15, 11. 5 and 6, that the outer inclosures of the temple were built in eight years, and the interior, with which the priests alone were concerned, in a year and six months, making together a period of nine years and six months; and that then a thanksgiving festival was observed, which fell on the anniversary of Herod's inauguration, i. e. in the third month or Sivan; comp. Bib. Sac. p. 169. Reckoning

now six months back from Sivan, we obtain Kisleu as the month in which the repairs of Herod were begun. If this event, then, occurred in Kisleu 734, and of course before the passover or the fifteenth of Nisan 735, (because the eighteenth year of the reign of Herod was completed before the first of Nisan 735,) the passover in John, between which and the beginning of Herod's temple, forty six years had elapsed, must have been the passover in the year 781.

We obtain the same date again, by comparing the time of this passover, with that of the last passover mentioned by John, during which Christ was crucified. For between these two, (if with the majority of expositors at the present day we regard the *ἑορτή* *σ. Ἰουδ.* John 5: 1 as not a passover,) only one passover, John 6: 4, occurred. Consequently if the first passover occurred in 781, the last must be placed in the year 783. Now it is a striking fact, that the first day of the passover or the fifteenth of Nisan, (on which Jesus was crucified,) in the year 783 or A. D. 30, was exactly *Friday*, the very day of the week, on which the four evangelists unanimously affirm that he suffered. We must therefore regard it as fairly established, beyond all question, that the baptism of Jesus, according to the Apostle John, took place at least *before* the fifteenth of Nisan (March 30th) 781.

Reckoning then thirty years back from the close, or more probably, the summer of the year 780, at which time we may fairly place the baptism of Jesus, we obtain the summer of 750; and if we remember that Jesus was born, according to Luke, while Herod the Great was still living, and that this prince died in the early part of April, we see clearly that Luke by the *ἄσσει* joined to the thirty years, intended to say, that Jesus at the time of his baptism was thirty years old and some months *over*, not under. The *ἄσσει* from the summer of 750, however, cannot well extend beyond the *beginning* of the year, because if extended beyond that point, the evangelist would have been obliged to designate his age as about *thirty-one* instead of thirty.

Comparing, now, the result of our inquiry in respect to the year of Christ's birth, derived from the four chronological data with which we are furnished in the gospels, we find the following surprising coincidence. First: Since Jesus was born during *the life-time of Herod the Great*, his birth must have occurred before the month of April 750 U. C., in the early part of which Herod died. This is the farthest *terminus ad quem* of the birth of Jesus.

Secondly: The *Star* which brought the wise men from the East to Jerusalem, in search of the Messiah, appeared between February and April 750 U. C.

Thirdly: The *census*, in consequence of which Jesus was born in Bethlehem, must have occurred in the latter part of the reign of Herod the Great, and probably a short time before the twelfth of March 750, at which time, the rebel Matthias (the Theudas of the New Testament) was executed.

Fourthly: About *thirty years*, according to Luke 3: 23, from the *baptism of Jesus* (summer of 780) brings us in like manner to a date somewhat earlier than April 750, but hardly farther back than the *beginning* of the year.

These four chronological data unite in the *same year, 750 U. C.*; and what is more, the same part of this year, namely its *beginning*. Although it is not impossible that Jesus might have been born towards the *end* of the year 749 (B. C. 5), yet upon the grounds already surveyed, we hold it to be incomparably more probable that he was born in the *first month of the year 750* (B. C. 4).

We pass now to the *second* inquiry proposed: In what *month* and on what *day* of the month was Jesus born? From the earliest ages of the church, this matter has been investigated again and again. The several opinions entertained in ancient times, especially in Egypt, where the study of astronomy prevailed, are given by Clement of Alexandria, Strom. I. p. 339, 40. ed. Sylburg. Of these however only two have been extensively embraced: one which fixes upon the twenty-fifth of December, the other which assigns the sixth of January, the day of the festival of Epiphany. Are either or them historically correct?

Let us begin with the twenty-fifth of December. If we compare this with the dates of some of the principal festivals of the church, viz. the twenty-fifth of March as the day of the annunciation of the virgin Mary, the twenty-fourth of June as the birthday of John the Baptist, and the twenty-fourth of September as the day of the conception of Elizabeth, we can hardly avoid the suspicion at the outset, that these are not strictly historical dates. And our suspicion will be confirmed by noticing that these are exactly the four *cardinal points* of the year as corrected in the calendar of Julius Caesar; comp. Ideler II. 124. Undeniable as it may be, however, that these four data in the absence of a fixed historical basis, were skilfully selected, with a certain allegorical meaning,

we must beware on the other hand of regarding the *whole* as arbitrary. For instance, the interval between the birth of Jesus and that of John the Baptist, is evidently based upon the narrative of Luke (1: 26). Now since the four data we have considered, all give us the winter of 749—50 U. C., and each one confirms the correctness of the three others, it may be allowed that the twenty-fifth of December designates, though in a *very general manner*, the true date of Christ's birth. This supposition is confirmed by the second extensively received and perhaps more ancient opinion, which places the birth of Jesus at about the same time, namely on the eleventh of Tybi or the sixth of January.

With these views I must express my dissent from the somewhat widely received theory, propounded by Jablonsky and adopted by Creuzer and Ullmann, that the sixth of January as the birth-day of Jesus, was derived from the Egyptian festival, *inventio Osiridis*. Starting with the testimony of Clement, that the Basilidians in Egypt observed a festival in honor of the birth and baptism of Christ, on exactly that day, it assumes it as unquestionably true, that they borrowed this date from the *heathen* festival of the sun-god Osiris, as the Christians in Rome did theirs from the festival of *Sol invictus*; and that thus, from the heretical sect of the Basilidians, the observance of the day of the Epiphany passed over to the Eastern church. Now the basis of this whole theory is incorrect; for the festival *inventio Osiridis* was celebrated, as we learn from Plutarch, not on the sixth of January, but on the seventeenth or eighteenth of November. Besides there is no evidence of any kind in favor of the Egyptian origin of the festival of the Epiphany, except on grounds common at the same time, as Neander observes, to the Christians in Syria and Palestine; and it is altogether improbable, that a date of a Christian festival should be received by the church from the hated heretical sect of the Basilidians in Egypt.

Whether, therefore, the opinion that Jesus was born on the sixth of January, proceeded from tradition or calculation, it would well agree with the results at which we have thus far arrived. Still, inasmuch as traditions vary and calculations may be erroneous, the only decisive ground for a conclusion must be furnished in the canonical gospels.

By referring to them we find three separate data. The first is the statement of Luke, that Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist belonged to the course of Abia, (Luke 1: 5,) the eighth

of the twenty-four divisions into which the priests were divided by David (1 Chron. 24: 4 sq.), and as a member of the same was offering sacrifice (Luke 1: 8, 9), when he received the promise of the birth of his son John. For since Elizabeth became pregnant shortly after (Luke 1: 24), and Mary in the sixth month afterward (Luke 1: 26), we have only to add about fifteen months to the period at which the ministration of the class Abia was finished, to obtain with considerable accuracy the date of Christ's birth.

This was first employed as the basis of a chronological calculation by the celebrated Scaliger. His result, however, was necessarily erroneous, both because he miscalculated the year of Christ's birth, (placing it in 751 U. C.,) and because he proceeded from no fixed *terminus a quo*. Reckoning from the restoration of the temple-service under Judas Maccabaeus on the twenty-fifth of Kisleu 165 B. C., and assuming that the *first* course of priests, that of Joiarib resumed the services, he calculates the twenty-eighth of July 750 as the day on which the course of Abia went out in the days of Zacharias. But this assumption that the temple-service was re-commenced by the *first* course of priests is mere *hypothesis*. It is, to say the least, quite as probable that the course next in order when the service was interrupted, would proceed with the service.

Solomon van Till and Bengel have adopted the correct method, at least so far as relates to the *terminus a quo* of the calculation, in making use of the tradition recorded in the Talmud, that the temple was destroyed by Titus on the ninth of Ab (A. D. 70), just as the *first* course, Joiarib, entered upon their duties. Although in itself it is not improbable that the Jews would prize the recollection of such a fact, pertaining as it does to a period never by them to be forgotten, yet fortunately for us this tradition does not stand alone. Josephus also has preserved the date at which the temple was destroyed, Bell. Jud. 6, 4. 5 and 8. According to him it was the tenth of Lous, the *same* month and day on which the temple of Solomon was destroyed by the Babylonians. But this took place according to 2 Kings 25: 8, on the seventh, according to Jer. 52: 12, on the tenth of Ab. Josephus and the Talmud then agree perfectly in respect to the month. Do they also in respect to the day? Josephus names the *tenth* of Lous or Ab, evidently with reference to Jer. 52: 12; the Talmud the ninth, at evening, which according to Jewish usage which reckoned the evening as the beginning of the succeeding day, would give us the eighth of Ab. In perfect accord-

ance with this Josephus relates, Bell. Jud. 6, 4. 1 and 2, that on the eighth of Lous (Ab), the temple was first set on fire; and though he mentions, farther on, the tenth of Lous, it is only to designate the end of the destruction of the temple, in order to make the parallel with Jer. 52: 12 as exact as possible. The credibility of the Talmud in this respect is still farther confirmed by the calendar of the Jewish festivals, in which the ninth of Ab is designated as a day of general fasting, in commemoration of the event; comp. Ideler I 528, 567. There is still another proof. The first of Ab, A. D. 70, occurred on the twenty-eighth of July, at which time the new moon became visible. This was the Sabbath. Consequently, the eighth of Ab or the fourth of August would give us another Sabbath; and if the course of Joiarib began to minister on the ninth of Ab (Aug. 5) at evening, they began, according to our mode of reckoning time, on the fourth of August, (Josephus's eighth of Lous;) immediately upon the close of the Sabbath. This exactly accords with the fixed order of the *orbis hieraticus*, according to which each course of priests must actually enter upon its weekly service at the close of the seventh day or the Sabbath.

Assuming now, as we are justified in doing, that the course of Joiarib commenced its ministration on the fifth of August 828 U. C. or rather on the evening of the day preceeding, it follows that the ministration of the course of Abia, 74 years, 10 months and 2 days, or (reckoning 19 intercalary years) 27335 days = 162 hieratic circles; and 119 days earlier, fell between the third and ninth of October 748 U. C. Reckoning from the tenth of October, at which Zacharias could reach his house and allowing nine months for the pregnancy of Elizabeth, to which six months are to be added (Luke 1: 26), we have in the whole one year and three months, which gives us the tenth of January as the date of Christ's birth.

It is certainly remarkable that the Basilidians, according to Clement, fixed upon this tenth of January, although some of them preferred the sixth. The latter date appears to be only a modification of the former and perhaps arose from reckoning the nine months as lunar months which would give us just this result. In this ancient date of the Epiphany, therefore, we seem to possess a calculation of the day of Christ's birth based upon Luke's statement in regard to the course of Abia. Whether this be so or not, however, it is evident that that statement does not furnish us with the necessary grounds for *this degree* of definiteness; since it is by

no means certain that the conception of Elizabeth is to be reckoned from the day on which Zacharias returned home, and since the expression "in the sixth month" may not be intended to be pressed as far as possible. All that we can certainly infer, therefore, from this investigation, is that Jesus could hardly have been born *before* the early part of *January* 750 U. C. and that this event probably occurred somewhat later.

Secondly: We obtain a new basis for calculating the month of the nativity, by consulting the succession of events in the narrative relating to the infancy of Jesus. The time at which he was presented in the temple (Luke 2: 22 sq.), must have preceded, as I hope to show hereafter, the visit of the Magi. Now since Herod was living at the time, and also at the time of the flight into Egypt which immediately followed, and the almost simultaneous murder of the infants in Bethlehem; and since children must be presented according to the Mosaic law (Lev. 12: 2 sq.), forty days after birth, Jesus must have been born at least forty days and upwards before the death of Herod (April 750). This brings us to the month of *February* as the *latest* limit of the birth of Christ.

Thirdly: Inasmuch as our choice, upon these grounds, appears to be only between the months of January and February, we may perhaps arrive at a final decision by means of the statement of Luke, that shepherds with their herds were then spending the night in the open air (in huts). From this it has been inferred that the birth of Jesus could not have taken place in the winter months; and in support of this, the tradition in the Talmud has been cited (see Lightfoot on Luke 2: 8), that the herds were driven out to pasture in March and brought under shelter again in the beginning of November. But by this, it surely cannot be meant that herds might not have been driven out to pasture, in none of the many years in which the winter was especially favorable, and at no single place, and under no peculiar circumstances, before the month of March.¹ We are to consider also the great variations in temperature and the difference in this respect between the mountains and valleys in the same vicinity.² The re-

¹ On the temperature of *modern* Palestine, especially Jerusalem, have lately treated: *Schubert*, *Reise in das Morgenland in den Jahren 1836 und 1837*. III. 103 sq.; and *Robinson*, *Biblical Researches in Palestine, Mount Sinai and Arabia Petrea; a journal of travels in the year 1838*, II. 96 sq. *Comp. Winer Art. Witterung*.

² *Schubert* says: "In the present state of science, we may well ask, where upon earth can we find equal height and depth so near to each other, as here

lation of the Talmud must therefore be received as only very general and vague, and in fact as stating little beyond the time of the early and latter rains, in connection with the pasturage of the herds. It is to be observed also that the evangelist does not affirm that the herds remained at pasture over night, *every year* at this season, or that at this time they were *every where* at pasture. In the great concourse of people with which Bethlehem was crowded while the census was taking, and the consequent want of room, which rendered it necessary to use the stalls of the cattle for lodging, as was done by the parents of Jesus, it is very conceivable that the shepherds of Bethlehem, the weather permitting just then, should have driven their herds into one of the warm valleys in the neighborhood. On these grounds therefore, we are relieved from the necessity of placing the birth of Christ, according to this statement of the Talmud, in the month of March, which would not agree with the results already obtained.

On account of the climate of Palestine, however, it appears decidedly probable that the herds could not have been driven out to pasture before the month of *February*. For, first, even *at present* in Palestine, there are signs of spring as early as February, while January is the depth of winter, and during the preceding months, November and December, long and violent rain-storms prevail. Schubert, after observing that the heat is for the most part, very great in the autumnal months, goes on to say: "And even after the early rain, which falls between the autumnal equinox and the winter solstice, about seven weeks before Christmas, has revived the thirsty land, such mild days are brought back by the southwest winds, that Christmas is often¹ the most lovely season of

(in Jerusalem), where in a course of seven hours, are found a depression below the level of the sea, of at least six hundred feet, and an elevation more than four times as high." Robinson remarks: "The barley harvest precedes the wheat harvest by a week or fortnight. On the fourth and fifth of June, the people of Hebron were just beginning to gather their wheat: on the eleventh and twelfth, the threshing-floors on the Mount of Olives were in full operation. We had already seen the harvest in the same stage of progress on the plains of Gaza on the nineteenth of May; while at Jericho, on the twelfth of May, the threshing-floors had nearly completed their work." Josephus observes of Jericho and the vicinity, de bell. Jud. 4, 8. 3, "the atmosphere is so mild that the inhabitants are clad in linen, while the rest of Judea is covered with snow."

¹ Schubert restricts this observation with reference to Christmas, by adding in a note "but not always." With this compare Robinson II. 97: "The autumnal rains, the early rains of Scripture, usually commence in the latter half of October or beginning of November, not suddenly but by degrees; which gives opportunity for the husbandman to sow his fields of wheat and barley.

the whole year. In general, the cold weather begins to be more settled about the middle of January, and it *sometimes* freezes as late as February. The first tree which buds, is the almond-tree. It blossoms in the deep valleys even before the entrance of the cold days of February. The vicinity of Bethlehem and Hebron we found adorned in March with blooming fruit trees, among which were the apricot, apple, and pear." Still, as both of the authors just cited confess, our knowledge of the climate and temperature is not entirely perfect. Schubert has promised to treat more at large upon the natural history of Palestine, but has not as yet done so, so far as is known.

Secondly: the climate of Palestine must have somewhat changed in the course of centuries, so that cold weather must now extend farther into spring, than it did in the age of Christ. This phenomenon appears nearly universal in lands which gradually sink into barbarism, and where the mind and hand of man cease to struggle with nature. This has been often maintained in respect to Palestine; to me it appears to be placed beyond doubt, by the following considerations. According to the law, the beginning of the *harvest* fell upon the 16th of Nisan, which not unfrequently was one of the last days of our March. According to Robinson, II. 97, the settled limits of the early and latter rains are now lost. Several kinds of trees, e. g. the palm, which need a milder climate, have, as Schubert expressly mentions, almost wholly disappeared. Comparing too the time of harvest in several parts of Palestine, already given on p. 671, it is evident that the grain at the present day becomes ripe later than formerly; for in the age of Christ, the harvest must all be gathered in, according to the law, at the commencement of Pentecost or fifty days after the 16th of Nisan. Finally, several passages in Josephus confirm this view; for instance, that in which he relates, Ant. 14. 15, 14. de bell. Jud. 1, 17: 8, that Herod, in order to besiege

The rains come mostly from the west or south-west, continuing for two or three days at a time, and falling especially during the nights. Then the wind chops round to the north or east, and several days of fine weather succeed. During the months of November and December the rains continue to fall heavily; afterwards they return only at longer intervals and are less heavy; but at no period during the winter do they entirely cease to occur. Snow often falls in Jerusalem in January and February to the depth of a foot or more, but does not usually lie long. The ground never freezes; but Mr. Whiting had seen the pool back of his house (Hezekiah's) covered with thin ice for one or two days. Rain continues to fall more or less through the month of March, but is rare after that period. During the present season, there had been little or none in March, and indeed the whole quantity of rain had been less than usual."

Jerusalem, broke up his winter quarters before the end of winter. For since he took that city in Sivan, the third Jewish month (our June) after he had besieged it *five* months, the end of winter at that time must have occurred at about the beginning of our February.

In respect therefore to the month and day of Christ's birth, we are brought to the conclusion that the *day* must be left undecided; and that of the *months*, the *close of December* together with *January and February* should be taken into consideration, of which, however, *December has the least, January a greater, and February decidedly the greatest probability in its favor.*

ARTICLE III.

A PHENOMENON IN CHURCH HISTORY.

By Rev. Leonard Withington, Newbury, Mass.

Sapientia præcedit; religio sequitur.—Lactantius, Lib. IV. c. 4.

IN order to understand the spirit of antiquity, it seems necessary for us, not only to receive single customs and insulated impressions, but to trace their associated ideas as they are connected in the whole mental chain. This is very difficult; and here is the source of our inevitable ignorance. We are told by Niebuhr, in his prelections on Roman history, that "as there is nothing the Asiatics find it harder to conceive than the idea of a republican constitution, as the Hindoos are utterly unable to look upon the India-Company as an association of proprietors, as in any other light than princes, so it fares with the acutest of the moderns in the history of antiquity, unless by critical and philological studies they have stripped themselves of their habitual associations.—P. 20, Introd., ed. 1835, Philadelphia. This is true in insulated cases. But this is not all. Though our moral ideas are far more permanent than the impression of material objects, and an ancient description of the one more easily comprehended than that of the other, yet our moral conceptions are linked in a chain; they reflect each other's hue and color, and we must almost comprehend the whole spirit of a given age to understand fully any single term presented to our contemplation.

Take the words for example: *virtue, patriotism, slavery, for-*