

## LESSON XXVIII.

## CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST

DATE OF OUR LORD'S BIRTH—A Roman abbot, Dionysius the Little, living in the sixth century, fixed upon the year 754 after the founding of Rome as the date of the Nativity. This has since been regarded as the beginning of the Christian era. It is generally agreed, however, that the birth of Jesus took place at least four years earlier—not later than 750 of Rome, that is, 4 B.C., according to our reckoning. Tradition fails to decide the question, but several hints are furnished by the Gospels.

1. Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great (Matt. 2 : 1), and it is known that Herod died about the first of April, 4 B.C. This fixes one limit of the period. But Matthew and Luke narrate events that occurred between the birth and Herod's death—The Massacre of the Innocents, and The Flight to Egypt—and months, perhaps years, were necessary for these.

2. Luke (ch. 2 : 1-7) says He was born during a census taken in Judaea when Quirinius was governor of Syria under Augustus. This statement has been seriously questioned. It has been said that Luke fell into error and that history knows of no such general enrolment. But investigation shows that in Egypt, another part of the Roman empire, there was a system of enrolments every fourteen years. If this was general throughout the empire, there was a census in Judaea about 7 B.C. As to Quirinius himself, there is evidence that he was in Syria in 6 B.C., suppressing a rebellion, and he may have been thought of as the highest representative of the Roman power at the time, and therefore called "governor."

3. After the birth of Jesus wise men from the East were led to visit Him by observing His star, Matt. 2 : 1. The account of this star gives no sure help, but if it was a conjunction of planets resembling to the naked eye a very brilliant star, then astronomers may be able to confirm the date. They have actually found that in 7 B.C. Jupiter and Saturn came into conjunction and that in the next year Mars was added. This may have been the star of the wise men.

These notices make it certain that the

birth of Jesus took place not later than 4 B.C., and probably as early as 6 B.C.

MONTH AND DAY OF THE NATIVITY—Nothing is really known. The oldest tradition in the East names January 6, the oldest in the West, December 25. Our Christmas festival was not observed before the fourth century, and December 25 was probably chosen to make it coincide with a heathen festival. The only indication of the season of the year is, that the shepherds were watching their flocks in the field, Luke 2 : 8. This would indicate summer rather than winter.

LENGTH OF OUR LORD'S PUBLIC MINISTRY—A very early opinion in the church was that it covered little more than a year. Many of the Fathers found the answer to the question in Isaiah 61 : 2, which Jesus said was fulfilled in Himself. "The acceptable year of the Lord" was taken to mean a ministry of one year.

The first three Gospels seem to favor this view. They mention but one Passover and one Journey to Jerusalem. The general impression they give is that no long time elapsed. The events narrated might easily have happened within one year. But a close examination of Mark indicates a longer period. In Mark 2 : 23 the plucking of the ears of corn points to early summer, and this is followed by early spring (Mark 6 : 39), the green grass upon which the five thousand were fed. Another year is involved in the events between Mark 6 : 56 and Mark 10 : 52. Two years at least are required for the account of Mark.

Then John makes mention of three Passovers, chs. 2 : 13; 6 : 4; 12 : 1. Hence two years at least were required for the ministry of Jesus. It seems probable, too, that John 5 : 1 refers to a Passover, so that the duration of His ministry would be over three years.

This issue ends the Teacher Training material for 1904-5. The Handbooks (Professor Murray's and Dr. Tracy's) in the Department of The Art of Teaching are already in use. Those in the Department of Scripture,—New Testament, Principal Falconer, Old Testament, Principal Scrimger,—and that in the Department of Doctrine, Professor Kilpatrick, will be ready before the 1905-6 Course begins. The price will be 10c. each, 50c. for the five.