

Pope Says Jesus' Birth Date Is Wrong

Jesus was born several years earlier than commonly believed, according to a new book by Pope Benedict XVI. The pontiff argues in his book *Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives* that the Christian calendar is based on a miscalculation.

This latest publication, which delves into the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, completes Benedict's trilogy. His first book was about Jesus' public ministry, and the second about His death.

"The calculation of the beginning of our calendar—based on the birth of Jesus—was made by Dionysius Exiguus, who made a mistake in his calculations by several years," 85-year-old Benedict explains in his book, which has a print run of 1 million copies.

"The actual date of Jesus's birth was several years before," he states in the book, published just a month before Christmas.

Dionysius Exiguus, or Dennis the Small, was a European monk in the 6th century. He is best known as the inventor of the Anno Domini (AD) era, which is used to number the years of both the Gregorian and Julian calendars.

Although several other academics have made similar claims, this is the first time the pope has expressed doubts over Jesus' birth date.

Alessandro Speciale, Vatican correspondent for the Religion News Service, told CNN the pope was not so much aiming to debunk myths as trying to show that the Jesus depicted in the Gospels is a real historical figure, who walked on earth and

talked to people like anyone else.

Speciale also said Benedict looks at scholarly studies of the Bible, some of which have for decades indicated that Jesus' traditionally accepted birth date is incorrect.

In addition, the pope's book—published under his real name, Joseph Ratzinger—claims that although traditional nativity scenes always include animals, there were no oxen, donkeys or other animals present at Jesus' birth.

"In the gospels, there is no mention of animals," he writes. The leader of the world's 1 billion Catholics believes they were most likely a pre-Catholic Hebrew invention.

However, Speciale says the pope is not suggesting the animals be thrown out of the nativity scene.

"The pope is a traditional man and he doesn't want people at all to change their traditions," Speciale said.

Monsignor Phillip Whitmore, who translated the book into English, told CNN that Benedict used his writing to explore "the inner meaning of the infancy narratives, showing how they pick up on Old Testament themes and develop them in new and unexpected ways."

"The pope helps us to understand the world where Jesus was born. Caesar brought peace to the Roman Empire, but this tiny child brought something much more wonderful: God's peace, eternal life, an end to sin and death," Whitmore added.

"Anyone who's wondering why Christmas came to be such a great celebration in the West can find the answer right here. The pope explains how the birth of Jesus changed history forever."