When was Jesus born?

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Tertullian wrote that Pilate sent a letter to the emperor, Tiberius, recommending that Jesus be added to the Roman roster of deities.[1] Now to make a suggestion like that involved an element of risk. But evidently Pilate was sufficiently convinced that he took the risk. So what convinced him? Presumably it was Jesus' resurrection, as evidenced by the miracles that the Apostles did in His name. But the Apostles did not start proclaiming the Resurrection and doing miracles until after Pentecost. I conclude that the month of June would be the earliest that Pilate could write such a letter, but it was probably a month or two later.

Presumably the letter was sent by boat, which would take a while to get to Rome. But Tiberius was no longer in Rome, he was on the island Capri, so the letter had to go to Capri. Tiberius finally submitted the question to the Senate, but how long did it take for him to come to that decision? How much importance would he assign to a letter from Judea, and how long did the people in Rome delay before sending it on to Capri? And how much importance would the leaders of the Senate assign to such a suggestion? How long did they mull over the suggestion before submitting it to the full Senate for debate?

Enter Sergius Sejanus: he was the commander of the Praetorian Guard and the *de facto* ruler of Rome at the time. When the suggestion about Jesus came up for debate by the Senate, Sejanus "inflexibly" opposed the suggestion, and it was not approved.[2] Historians generally give a different reason for that decision, but my point is that Sejanus was there, whatever the reason for the decision. Now then, Sejanus was executed for treason on October 18, 31 AD. (The people of the city 'loved' him so much that they dragged and kicked his corpse around the streets of Rome!) So what is my point? Just this: there simply was not enough time between April and October of that year for all of that to happen; and we do not know the interval between the debate and the execution. Conclusion: Jesus could not have died in 31 AD; He died on April 5 and arose on April 7, 30.[3]

Luke 3:1-2 states that John began his ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar, which was 26 AD. He would have begun when he turned 30, as did Jesus,

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[1] *Apology*, 5 and 21.

[2] Paulus Orosius, *Seven books of history against the pagans*, pp. 325-26 (book 7,4). Histories of the life of Sejanus are in general agreement that he hated the Jews, and Jesus was a Jew.

[3] Floyd N. Jones also concludes that Jesus died in April, 30 AD, using a different line of reasoning. *Chronology of the Old Testament: A Return to the Basics* (The Wood-lands, Texas: KingsWord Press, 14th edition, 1999), pp. 230-33.

Luke 3:23. I take it that John began in the Spring and Jesus in the Fall of that year. Since Jesus' public ministry lasted about 3.5 years, He died at Passover, 30 AD.

If we know the date of His death, we can calculate the date of His birth. Calculating time across the BC/AD divide is tricky, because there is no year 'zero'. Jesus lived 29.25 years after the divide. From the Gospel accounts we know that Jesus lived about 33.5 years. 33.5 – 29.25 = 4.25. Jesus lived 4.25 years before the divide, which takes us to around October 1, 5 BC. (A calculation based on John the Baptizer also places the birth at the September/October divide.) Since the Herod who ordered the massacre died at Passover time in 4 BC, the claim that Jesus was born in 4 BC is difficult to defend (1 BC is impossible). If the star that the magi saw appeared when Jesus was conceived, early January, 5, then the 'two years' is easier to explain (a suspicious type like Herod would give himself a good margin).

So when was Jesus born? Around October 1, 5 BC.