

## **The journey to 25 December**

[Diarmaid MacCulloch]

In the 3rd century, early Christians wanted to celebrate the birth of Jesus, but they didn't know when it was.

So how did they come up with December 25? Well, there are two leading theories.

Theory one: Believers saw Jesus as the 'New Adam', born to redeem the world from the sins committed by the first Adam in the Garden of Eden.

So they considered March 25 as a good date for Jesus' birthday because it was the first day of spring and traditionally linked to Adam and the creation story.

But then a North African scholar, called Sextus Julius Africanus, suggested March 25 should mark the date of Jesus' conception, which was when he was created in the womb.

So after a nine months pregnancy, his birth would be on December 25.

Theory two: The Gospels said Jesus died at Passover. Some scholars may have converted this date from the Jewish lunar calendar and ended up with March 25.

Now there was an ancient Jewish belief that prophets, like Jesus, had an integral age – this meant they were conceived or born on the same day as their deaths.

So Christians may have thought Jesus was conceived and died on March 25. Going forwards nine months again brings us to December 25.

Either way, there were good theological reasons to have Christmas Day in the middle of winter.

Animation from BBC iWonder and Earth London