

## *Anno Domini*

It is almost three weeks into January, and I am finally remembering to write “2007” instead of “2006” when recording the date. The date and time can occasionally be a frustrating item of information; it is always tricky to remember how many days of the current month have elapsed, or to know which hour of the day it is without a watch. Yet there is something profound and significant about how we record time.

In ancient times (and this is still quite visible in monuments in Rome), time was measured by the reign of the current king or emperor. This dating is found throughout the Old Testament, as well as other non-biblical inscriptions from the near east. One would calculate the years beginning with the reign of a king, and after his death, begin counting again with the reign of the new king. Thus, the numbers would rarely get higher than 20 or 30 as the life expectancy of kings was not long.

What most people do not fully realize, however, is that we use the same system today. The current year is AD 2007 – and the “AD” is an abbreviation of the Latin “*Anno Domini*” (in the year of the Lord), which is itself a shortened form of “*Anno Domini Nostri Iesu Christi*” (in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ). We still measure time according to the reign of our King. But in this case, it is not a temporal king, but *Dominus Nostrus Iesus Christus* (our Lord Jesus Christ), who is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The calendar we use today was designed to begin with the birth of Christ. Current scholarship suggests that the actual date of Jesus' birth was probably a few years before AD 1, but the meaning is unchanged: time itself is relative to the incarnation. When, around AD 525, our distant ancestors began to reckon time according to the eternal King rather than fleeting, mortal ones, they did so because they saw that the reign of Jesus Christ impacted not only the whole world, but all of time. *His* reign was everlasting, *his* kingdom would have no end (Lk 1:33).

And so the current year, 2007, is in fact a staggering assertion of the sovereignty of our Lord. Seldom did an earthly ruler rule more than 30 years, but every time we write the date we acknowledge that our Lord, who has eternally transformed the universe through his incarnation, has reigned as the Son of Man for well over two-thousand years and continues to do so. This incredibly long reign is a testimony to Christ's resurrection: he has been raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him (Rm 6:9). As the living Lord, he will be the King of the universe until the end of time, when everything will be united in him (cf Eph 1:10).

Christ's coming in the flesh has so transformed humanity and the world that everything must be reckoned in relation to this extraordinary event. Not only do we designate time after the incarnation with the letters “AD,” but we indicate time before this event as “BC” (before Christ). Rather than counting from the beginning of the world, or the beginning of written history, or from the reign of the first king of

Mesopotamia, we do something shockingly odd: we count backwards. The theological meaning of this is deep: all the time before the coming of Jesus, and everything that happened in those times, was in some way related to Christ.

We measure his reign from his incarnation, but the entire history of the universe which led up to that point 2007 years ago was a preparation for and a 'focusing' upon that particular point, when the divine would break into the material universe, bathing it and permeating it with the divine glory that no man nor creature had ever before seen.

Something as simple as writing down the date, then, can be a profound opportunity for meditation. Despite modern attempts to neutralize the real meaning of the current year by writing "CE" instead of "AD," the fact remains that the year is like a brilliantly-tipped arrow pointing directly at an event that unbelievers find scandalous: the incarnation of God. This divine 'infiltration' has transformed the meaning of the universe so that both space and time are forever branded with the sign of the Redeemer.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick Fletcher', with a stylized, cursive script.

Patrick Fletcher

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Washington, DC