

# History of the calendar



▶ A calendar is a tool used to mark the passing of time. People of ancient times based their calendars on the most obvious regular events they knew—the changing

positions of the Sun, Moon, and stars. These calendars helped them figure out when to plant and harvest their crops. Over time, different groups of people developed other calendars based on their own needs and beliefs.

▶ The earliest calendars must have been strongly influenced by the geographical location of the people who made them. In colder countries, the concept of the year was determined by the seasons, specifically by the end of winter. But in warmer countries, where the seasons are less pronounced, the moon became the basic unit for time reckoning; an old Jewish book says that ‘the moon was created for the counting of the days.’



**A large stone carved ancient calendar**

▶ In 46 BCE, the Roman ruler Julius Caesar decided on the 365 1/4 days for the length of the year. Every fourth year had 366 days. This calendar was named ‘Julian’ after its creator. It had the 12 months at the lengths used today.

▶ The Gregorian Calendar, also known as the Western or Christian Calendar, is the most widely used calendar in the world today. Its predecessor, the Julian Calendar was replaced because it did not properly reflect the actual time it takes the Earth to circle once around the Sun, known as a tropical year.



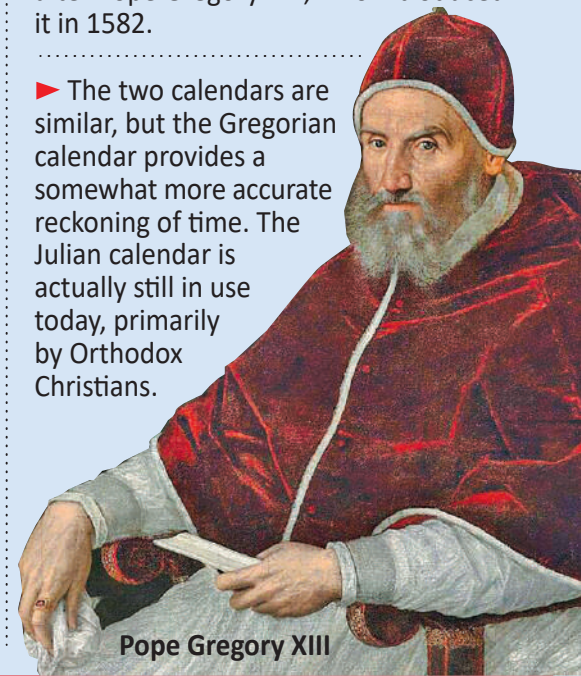
## Why does the new year begin on January 1?

*The Roman republican calendar and the Julian calendar both recognised January 1 as the beginning of the New Year. The date was chosen partly in honour of Janus, the Roman god of beginnings and the month’s namesake. Though medieval Christians attempted to replace January 1 with more religiously significant dates, Pope Gregory XIII created a revised calendar that officially established January 1 as New Year’s Day in 1582. That date was gradually adopted in Europe and beyond; it subsequently spread to countries without dominant Christian traditions.*



▶ The Gregorian calendar was first introduced in 1582, but it took more than 300 years for all the countries to change from the Julian Calendar. It is named after Pope Gregory XIII, who introduced it in 1582.

▶ The two calendars are similar, but the Gregorian calendar provides a somewhat more accurate reckoning of time. The Julian calendar is actually still in use today, primarily by Orthodox Christians.



**Pope Gregory XIII**

## What does BC and AD stand for?

The use of *anno domini* and ‘before Christ’ to mark time began in the early days of Christianity, and they are still used to track calendar years today.

▶ When reading historical texts or delving into archaeology stories, it’s common to see ‘A.D.’

and ‘B.C.’ added to dates. AD is After Jesus was born. BC is Before Jesus was born. AD comes from Latin word *Anno Domini* meaning ‘In the year of Our Lord’ BC comes from Before Christ. Most people today use the Western calendar (also known as the Gregorian calendar) for everyday purposes.



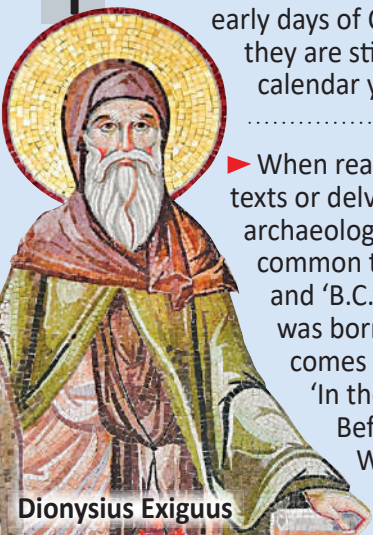
▶ About 255, a 6th century Eastern Roman monk named Dionysius Exiguus marked the year Christ was born as 1. The Western calendar tells us that we live in 2025, which is sometimes written AD 2025.

▶ The years before the birth of Christ are numbered backward from his birth. The year before AD 1 was 1 BC, or one year

‘before Christ.’ When referring to dates before the birth of Christ, the higher number the earlier the year. Since we mark years from a set point known as 1 – there is no year 0 – 3500 BC was 5513 years ago.



Source: Britannica.com, Graphic: Mahil Wijesinghe



**Dionysius Exiguus**