

CHRISTMAS

Lesson

Christmas: Facts vs. Traditions w/Answers

At various times during my teaching ministry, I have taught the lesson below during the period of Advent. In this version, I will focus on separating the Biblical facts from the historical traditions that surround Christmas.

We will look at such questions as:

- How many wise men actually visited Jesus at the manger?
- Where did the Christmas Tree come from?
- Was December 25th actually Christ's birthday?
- Where did the "hot cross buns" come from? and others...

I think that it's important to our faith, and to our witness to others, for us to know the real story behind Christmas and the real reason we celebrate.

Now don't get me wrong: I don't have it in for Santa, and I particularly like the flying reindeer, but this time of year I'd rather have you appreciate the real Christmas story. So for this particular Christmas lesson, let's examine the traditions and see if we can separate fact from fiction. Some of our findings may really surprise you.

Read the scripture passages cited below and answer the associated questions.

1. Read Matthew 2:2, Luke 2:21-22 and Leviticus 12:2-8 and answer the following questions about Christ and the wise men.
 - a. How old was Christ when he was visited by the wise men?
 - i. ANSWER 1: At least two years old. For example, notice that they saw the "child" at a "house", and not the "baby" in a "manger". Further, Herod ordered all boys in Bethlehem two years of age or younger to be killed, clearly because, based on what the Magi had told him, he believed Jesus could be two years old.
 - ii. ANSWER 2: We also know from the Leviticus and Luke readings that Mary would not have traveled away from Bethlehem before the seventh day of purification. Most likely Jesus was two when the Magi visited him; and following the visit, Mary, Joseph and Jesus left for Egypt so that Herod's men would not kill him.
 - b. Where did the wise men visit Christ?
 - i. ANSWER: In a house, not the manger.
 - c. How many wise men were there?
 - i. ANSWER: We do not know. The "three wise men" assumption arises simply from the fact that three gifts were brought. There could have been any number of wise men—from two to more than three.
2. Read Mark 6:3 and Matthew 12:46-47. How many brothers and sisters did Christ have?
 - a. ANSWER: The correct answer is none. However, he did have four half-brothers. Remember that Jesus' father was God, not Joseph. We also know he had "sisters", implying more than one.
3. Read Luke 2:8 and Luke 3:23. When was Christ actually born? Do you know why we celebrate his birthday on the 25th of December?
 - a. ANSWER 1: Sheep were kept in the fields in spring and summer, and not in the winter. From these verses, the most-likely time of Christ's birth was just prior to Passover. The sheep being tended were probably the sheep that would become the Passover Lambs to be sacrificed for Israel's sins. How ironic it is that the 'Lamb of God' would be born at the time of Passover, approximately the same time that Christians celebrate the holiday of Easter—the day of His resurrection. It is also ironic that Jesus was crucified at the beginning of Passover and was likely 33 years old, given that his ministry began when he was about 30.

- b. ANSWER 2: Christ's birth became a holiday during the Roman Empire. During those times, the Romans declared December 25th to be a "free" holiday, and people could celebrate anything that they wanted to. The early underground church used this day to celebrate Christ's birth. Later, this was adopted by the Roman Catholic church, and so it continues to this day.
4. Read Jeremiah 10:3-4. Where did the Christmas tree come from?
- a. ANSWER: Originally a pagan practice, the early Christians used it as a tool to witness to the Pagan world by incorporating some of their practices into the celebration of Christmas.
5. Read Ezekiel 16:4. What does "swaddled" or wrapped in "swaddling" mean?
- a. ANSWER: It means to take strips of clothing and wrap a new born child tightly—the theory being that bones would grow straighter and the child could not harm itself during its early development.
6. Read the passages below and highlight what each one says about the reason that Christ was born into the world?
- a. Romans 15:8-13
- i. ANSWER: God has brought the Messiah into this world. Christ seals God's promise of redemption for all of us.
- b. Hebrews 2:10 and 2:17
- i. ANSWER: God became fully human through Christ, so that Christ could atone for our sins.
- c. John 14:9
- i. ANSWER: Through Christ, we have seen God, and we know that he lives!
- d. Hebrews 9:26
- i. ANSWER: Christ's suffering and death was only needed once— and through this act, Christ paid the price for us that does away with all of the sin in our lives.
- e. Mark 10:45
- i. ANSWER: He gave his life as a ransom for us. What greater thing could we celebrate!
- f. 1 John 3:5
- i. ANSWER: He literally took our sins away!
- g. 1 John 3:8
- i. ANSWER: He destroyed the devil's work.
- h. 1 Peter 2:21
- i. ANSWER: He set an example for us to follow.
7. There are many verses of prophecy in the Bible about Christ. See if you can list what each of these Old and New Testament verses about Christ and his birth have in common. Compare each Old Testament verse with its New Testament counterpart.
- a. Isaiah 9:6-7 and Luke 1:32-33
- i. ANSWER: He will reign on David's throne.
- b. Micah 5:2 and Luke 2:4-7
- i. ANSWER: He will be born in Bethlehem.
- c. Daniel 9:25 and Luke 2:1-2
- i. ANSWER: He was born at the exact time prophesied in Daniel. We know this because of the record of who ordered the Census and when it was taken.
- d. Isaiah 7:14 and Luke 1:26-31
- i. ANSWER: He will be born of a virgin.
- e. Jeremiah 31:15 and Matthew 2:16-18
- i. ANSWER: God's son Jesus ultimately returns to Israel after fleeing to Egypt.

8. See if you can find out where the name "Kris Kringle" came from.

- a. ANSWER: The name comes from the German word for Christ Child, "Christkindl", and was first used by Martin Luther who wanted to divert the Catholic Church's focus away from the saint that was the focus of Christmas in those days: Saint Nicholas. The English term "Kris Kringle" was their pronunciation of the German words for Christ Child.

9. Where did the tradition of "Hot Cross Buns" come from?

- a. ANSWER: The use of a cross on hot buns harkens back to many pagan origins. Over time it became a traditional Easter food, with the cross being recognized for the cross of Christ.

10. Why do some folks refer to Christmas by spelling it "XMAS"? Is there any significance to this spelling?

- a. ANSWER: Contrary to the popular belief among many present-day Christians that it is an attempt to take the word Christ out of Christmas, it was actually the early Church's method for abbreviating the word Christ, using the "X" as the first letter in the Greek spelling of "Christos". It represented the mass celebrating Christ's birth.

11. What does the word "Christmas" actually mean?

- a. ANSWER: As indicated in the answer to the previous question, it is a derivative of the old English term for "Christ's Mass".

In summary, God, creator of all and sovereign ruler of the universe, knew before he created anything that a sacrifice would be needed if man was to have the hope of salvation. He also knew that only one perfect sacrifice would accomplish this, and that only His Son could be that sacrifice.

And so He chose to send Jesus to earth, as the son of a simple Jewish carpenter, born in a barn, in a stable; and this baby would ultimately bear the sins of the world on a cross. All of this so that, today, you and I can have the hope of heaven—the hope of eternal life through Jesus. His birth meant that that hope was now here among us, and because he came, suffered, died, and rose again, we have the gift of eternal life.

Happy Birthday Jesus, and Glory and Peace and multiplied blessings to all of you who have him as your Savior! If you study with us online and haven't yet accepted Christ into hear, I urge you to make that decision today. He is calling to you as he has called to us. There is room at the cross for who takes this step on faith and believes that He is the only Son of God who died for us, and rose again. What greater Christmas present could anyone receive!?

Thanks for studying this important lesson with us. All of us should know the real truth behind our Christmas celebration.

Merry Christmas everyone, and may God richly bless you during this holiday season!

In Christ,

Wes