



# Christmas

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The Story - The Traditions - The Facts

## Isaiah 9:6-7

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and peace  
there will be no end.  
He will reign on David's throne  
and over his kingdom,  
establishing and upholding it  
with justice and righteousness  
from that time on and forever.  
The zeal of the LORD Almighty  
will accomplish this.

## Luke 1:26-38

### *The Birth of Jesus Foretold*

<sup>26</sup>In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, <sup>27</sup>to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup>The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

<sup>29</sup>Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup>But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup>You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. <sup>32</sup>He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup>and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."

<sup>34</sup>"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

<sup>35</sup>The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. <sup>36</sup>Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. <sup>37</sup>For nothing is impossible with God.”

<sup>38</sup>“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.

## **Matthew 1:18-24**

### *The Birth of Jesus Christ*

<sup>18</sup>This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. <sup>19</sup>Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

<sup>20</sup>But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. <sup>21</sup>She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

<sup>22</sup>All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: <sup>23</sup>“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel”—which means, “God with us.”

<sup>24</sup>When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife.

## **Luke 2:1-20**

### *The Birth of Jesus*

<sup>1</sup>In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. <sup>2</sup>(This was the first

census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

<sup>3</sup>And everyone went to his own town to register.

<sup>4</sup>So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. <sup>5</sup>He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

<sup>6</sup>While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born,

<sup>7</sup>and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

### *The Shepherds and the Angels*

<sup>8</sup>And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. <sup>9</sup>An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. <sup>10</sup>But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. <sup>11</sup>Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup>This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

<sup>13</sup>Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, <sup>14</sup>“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

<sup>15</sup>When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

<sup>16</sup>So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. <sup>17</sup>When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, <sup>18</sup>and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. <sup>19</sup>But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. <sup>20</sup>The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

## **Matthew 2:1-12**

### *The Visit of the Magi*

<sup>1</sup>After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup>and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.”

<sup>3</sup>When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup>When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. <sup>5</sup>“In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

<sup>6</sup>“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,  
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;  
for out of you will come a ruler  
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”

<sup>7</sup>Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup>He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

<sup>9</sup>After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. <sup>10</sup>When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup>On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. <sup>12</sup>And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

## The Tradition of Gift Giving

One of the main reasons we have the custom of giving and receiving presents at Christmas, is to remind us of the presents given to Jesus by the Wise Men: Frankincense, Gold and Myrrh.

Frankincense is the gum or resin of the *Boswellia* tree, used for making perfume and incense. The Hebrew word for the perfume is *labonah*, which means “white,” referring to the gum’s color. The English word for frankincense comes from a French expression meaning “free incense” or “free burning.” The perfume was used in Jewish worship and, as a gift, it showed that people would worship Jesus.

Gold was associated with Kings and Christians believe that Jesus is the King of Kings.

Myrrh is an expensive spice, used for making perfume, incense, medicine and for anointing the dead. As a gift, it showed that Jesus would suffer and die.

Myrrh comes from a small bushy tree, cultivated in ancient time in the Arabian peninsula. The grower made a small cut in the bark, where the resin would leak out. It was then collected and stored for about three months until it hardened into fragrant globules. Myrrh was used raw or crushed and mixed with oil to make a perfume. It was also used medicinally to reduce swelling and stop pain. Today myrrh is used in Chinese medicine for a variety of ailments.

Christmas itself is really about a big present that God gave the world about 2000 years ago - Jesus! One of the most famous Bible verses, John 3:16, says: ‘God loved the world so much, that he gave his one and only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not be lost but have eternal life.’

## **The Tradition of the Christmas Tree**

Germany is credited with starting the Christmas tree tradition, as we now know it, in the 16th century when devout Christians brought decorated trees into their homes. Some built Christmas pyramids of wood and decorated them with evergreens and candles if wood was scarce.

Most 19th-century Americans found Christmas trees an oddity. The first record of one being on display was in the 1830's by the German settlers of Pennsylvania, although trees had been a tradition in many German homes much earlier. The Pennsylvania German settlements had community trees as early as 1747. But as late as the 1840's, Christmas trees were seen as pagan symbols and not accepted by most Americans.

## **Why December 25th**

The Bible offers few clues: Celebrations of Jesus' Nativity are not mentioned in the Gospels or Acts; the date is not given, not even the time of year. During the first 300 years of the Church there was no known celebration of Christ's birth. The earliest mention of December 25 as Jesus' birthday comes from a mid-fourth-century Roman almanac that lists the death dates of various Christian bishops and martyrs. The first date listed, December 25, is marked: *natus Christus in Betleem Judeae*: "Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea." Almost a full 300 years after Jesus was born, we finally find people observing Jesus' birth in mid-winter.

The first mention of a date for Christmas (c. 221) by Sextus Julius Africanus, and the earliest celebrations that we know about (c. 250–300) come in a period when Christians were not borrowing heavily from pagan traditions in such an obvious manner. After Constantine converted to Christianity. From the mid-fourth century on, we do find Christians deliberately adapting and Christianizing pagan festivals.

## **Magi or Three Kings?**

The designation “Magi” refers to a Persian religious caste, but when this gospel was written, the term was loosely used for astrologers, seers and fortune tellers. Matthew does not call them kings; that was used later, in legends. They may have been royal astronomers, advisers to kings. Matthew reveals nothing of these visitors’ ancestry. Over the centuries, legend has assigned them names: Gasper, or Casper; Melchior and Balthasar. Balthasar has a Persian sound. If indeed these men were scholars from Persia, they would have been familiar with Daniel’s prophecy about the Messiah or “Anointed One.” (Daniel 9:24-27, NIV)

## **Was Jesus born in a stable?**

Luke 2:7 states “And she brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”

From this passage comes the tradition that Jesus was born in a stable. It has been assumed because there is mention of a manger (an animal feeding trough) that the birth took place in a barn. The term for “inn” has multiple translations. A small number of flock animals were traditionally housed in the ground floor rooms with the rooms above used for travelers. There were several reasons for this arrangement. First, by housing the animals on the first floor, there was protection from theft. Flock animals were important as a food source, transportation, and income so were thus treated with importance. Secondly, by housing animals beneath the guest room, there was added heat. Lastly, the waste products (poop) served as a heat source as it was burned in fireplaces. The word used in this passage is more accurately translated “guest room” as there is another word (which Luke does not use here) in the Greek language for “hotel”. So, no, Jesus was probably not born in a barn surrounded by cattle and sheep but rather in one of the lower rooms which was more traditionally used for that purpose. Luke 2:6 states that “while they were there the days were accomplished that she should be delivered” indicating that Mary and Joseph had been in Bethlehem for a period of time prior to the birth.



## **Timeline for Jesus as recorded in the Bible**

- Birth: Luke 2: 6-7
- 8 days old: Luke 2: 21, Presented in the temple
- 2 years old: Matthew 2, Visit of the Magi
- 12 years old: Luke 2:42, Stayed behind at the temple
- 30 years old: Luke 3:23, Began ministry that lasted approximately 3 ½ years

### **Mary**

Mary was a young Jewish teenager, engaged to be married, when she was visited by the angel Gabriel and told of God's plan for her. She is described as "highly favored" in Luke 1. Mary lived in Nazareth with her parents before she was married. Her family was of the tribe of Judah and the lineage of David according to Luke 3. She is mentioned a few other places in the Bible, including at the wedding in Cana, in Capernaum a couple of years later, and at the cross. Her death is not mentioned in the bible or recorded elsewhere.

### **Joseph**

Mary was found with child of the Holy Spirit before she and Joseph were married. Mary was betrothed to Joseph, a just man (an upright man). He did not want to make Mary a public example but wanted to put her away secretly. An angel of the Lord appeared in a dream saying to him, "Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife because she has conceived by the Holy Spirit." A son will be born. His name shall be called Jesus, the Savior of the world. Joseph took Mary as the angel commanded for his wife, but did not know her until she delivered her child, Jesus.

Joseph was a direct descendant of Abraham to King David, which are 14 generations. From King David to captivity in Babylon are 14 generations and from the captivity to Jesus Christ are 14

generations. Joseph's father was Jacob.

Joseph left Galilee from the city of Nazareth into Judea to the city of David called Bethlehem because he was of the house and line of David. This was the census decreed by Caesar Augustus. Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to Jerusalem to the temple to present Him to the Lord, according to the Law of Moses. Joseph and Mary went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.

Wise men on a journey to see the Christ child had stopped at King Herod's palace and told him about the King that was born in Bethlehem. King Herod feared that this King would replace him. King Herod sent forth a command that all male children, two years and under, in Bethlehem and surrounding areas should be put to death. And the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream saying, "Take the young child and flee to Egypt and stay there until I bring you word of the death of King Herod." An angel then appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Arise and take your child and go to the land of Israel for those who sought the young child are dead."

When Jesus was twelve years old, He and his parents were in Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When they left to return to Nazareth, Jesus lingered behind. His family, Joseph and Mary, returned to Jerusalem to find Jesus in the temple, listening and talking to the teachers. All who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers. His mother asked Him why He had done this to them because both His father and mother were worried about Him. Jesus said to them, "Why is it that you sought me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" But they did not understand Him.

Joseph is never mentioned in the Bible again. We can conclude that Joseph was a good man and probably a successful carpenter. Jesus worked with him as He grew into manhood. Joseph and Mary had other sons and at least two daughters. Joseph was a man of God who kept the law and served God. He was chosen by God to be Jesus' father on earth.

## Elizabeth

The account of Elizabeth's role in the Christmas story is recounted in Luke 1: 5-25. Elizabeth was the wife of Zacharias, both of whom were of priestly descent from the line of Aaron, division of Abijah. Zacharias was a priest. While they were righteous and obeyed the commandments of God, they were childless. Elizabeth was older and she was "barren", meaning she had been unable to conceive. One day as Zacharias was performing his priestly duties in the temple an angel appeared to him. Zacharias was afraid, however, the angel reassured him and shared good news. The angel (who was not named) shared with Zacharias that he and Elizabeth would have a son. They were to name the baby "John". The child was to be great in the sight of the Lord and was to be filled with the Holy Spirit while still in Elizabeth's womb. This child was to have a special purpose "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17) Zacharias doubted and questioned the angel and was thus rendered unable to speak until the child's birth. Elizabeth became pregnant after the angel's appearance to Zacharias. She remained secluded for five months and expressed that God had "looked with favor upon me to take away my disgrace among men." (Luke 1:25) In Biblical times lack of children was considered an indication of divine disfavor and often brought with it social reproach (see Genesis 16:2, 25:21, 30:23, I Samuel 1:1-18, Leviticus 20:20-21; Psalms 128:3, and Jeremiah 22:30) When Elizabeth was in her sixth month she was visited by Mary. Elizabeth recognized that Mary was to be the mother of her Lord. Mary remained with Elizabeth until John's birth three months later. Upon the eighth day of John's life, he was circumcised as was the tradition of the Jewish people of the time. Elizabeth was insistent that the child was to be named John. When Zacharias proclaimed that the child would be named John (by writing on a tablet) his speech was regained.

## **Zechariah** Luke 1:5-25

Zechariah was a priest who lived in the time of Herod the King. Both he and his wife, Elizabeth, were righteous in the sight of God. They were elderly and had no children because Elizabeth was barren.

In his duty as priest, Zechariah was burning incense in the temple's inner chamber when the angel Gabriel appeared to him. Gabriel told him that his wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son, and that he should name him John. The angel prophesied that John would be used by the Lord to make people ready for the Messiah. Because Zechariah questioned the possibility that he and his elderly wife could conceive a child, he was struck dumb until the child's birth.

### **Christmas Story Questions**

1. Mary and Elizabeth were cousins. True or False
2. John The Baptist was Elizabeth's first son. True or False
3. How long did Mary stay with Elizabeth?  
A. 6 months B. 3 months C. 9 months
4. Mary was informed by which angel?  
A. Michael B. Gabriel C. not stated
5. Who issued the decree for a census?  
A. Herod B. Ceasar Augustus C. Quirinius
6. Joseph was from which town?  
A. Bethlehem B. Judea C. Nazareth
7. Jesus was born in a \_\_\_\_\_?  
A. cave B. manger C. stable D. not stated

8. Mary gave birth to Jesus the night after they arrived in Bethlehem. True or False
9. The shepherds were the first to hear about the birth of Jesus. True or False
10. The heavenly host was angels. True or False
11. The heavenly host sang praises. True or False
12. Which would not have been at the manger scene.  
A. cattle B. sheep C. donkeys D. wise men
13. The Magi were \_\_\_\_\_.  
A. three kings B. wise men C. from the east  
D. camel riders
14. The Magi found baby Jesus under the star. True or False
15. The Magi found Jesus in a \_\_\_\_\_?  
A. stable B. inn C. manger D. house
16. How far did Mary and Joseph travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem?  
A. 10 miles B. 30 miles C. 70 miles
17. An angel spoke to?  
A. Mary B. Joseph C. Shepherds D. Magi

1) True, 2) True, 3) 3 months, 4) Gabriel, 5) B, 6) C, 7) D, 8) Probably False, 9) True, 10) True, 11) False, 12) None are mentioned, but the wise men would not show up for approx. two years, 13) B & C, 14) False, Jesus was no longer a baby, 15) D, 16) C, 17) A, B, C and most likely D

This Christmas story, written approximately 2000 years ago,  
is as true today as it was back then. We hope that it will  
be read out loud with your family at some special time  
this Christmas.

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