

Christmas Stump the Pastor—Part 2

I. Christmas Trees:

- a. **How did a Christmas tree get involved with Jesus' birth? What is the history of the Christmas Tree? Why do we decorate a Christmas Tree?**
 - i. Christmas trees are not linked with Saturnalia any more than to any other cultures use of evergreens
 - ii. It is linked to Medieval Adam & Eve Festivals' Paradise Plays and Paradise Trees decorated with Apples, fruits, nuts, and pretzels
 - iii. Tradition holds that Martin Luther introduced candles and one of his disciples, Martin Bucer put one in his church in 1539.
 - iv. They came to England in 1800, North America in the late 18th century, and the first White House Christmas Tree was 1889
 - v. The Bible does NOT Forbid Christmas Trees, unless you are worshiping them as idols (cf. Jer. 10:2-5ff; Isa. 44:9-20)

II. Christmas Gifts:

- a. **Where did the tradition of giving gifts at Christmas come from and when?**
 - i. This is also NOT linked to Saturnalia, but instead since the 4th century to the Magi's gifts
- b. **What did Mary and Joseph do with the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh?**
 - i. They were likely used to fund Mary and Joseph's escape to Egypt (cf. Matt. 2:13-15)

III. The Christmas Star:

- a. **Was the "star" an actual celestial body or something else? Did it come and go? (The magi seem to be a little lost in Jerusalem and they follow it again to Bethlehem)**
 - i. The star apparently disappeared (cf. Matt. 2:2)
 - ii. And then reappeared and led the Magi directly to Jesus (cf. Matt. 2:9)

- b. Stars, comets, planets, and supernovas do not do these things, but something else does: _____
(cf. Matt. 3:13-17; 17:5ff; Ex. 13:20-22)

IV. The Wise Men (Magi):

- a. **Why 3 wise men when the Bible doesn't say and why are they often included in Nativity Scenes?**
 - i. We don't know how many, only that there was more than 1, because magi is plural: *magi* = *magos* (μάγος) = "wise man and priest"
 - ii. Caspar, Melchior, and Balthazar are just folklore
- b. **How long did it take the Magi to reach Bethlehem? Were the wise men at the manger or did they arrive later? Why do traditional Christmas plays depict the wise men as visiting Jesus when He is a baby when the Gospel of Matthew and Luke describe the wisemen coming after Jesus' birth possibly months to two years later?**
 - i. 800-mile journey from Babylon to Jerusalem took Ezra 4 months (cf. Ezra 7:8-9)
 - ii. Herod ordered all babies 2 years old and under murdered (cf. Matt. 2:16-18)
 - iii. The Magi found Jesus in a *house* (cf. Matt. 2:11)
 - iv. Mary & Joseph probably stayed in Bethlehem at least 40 days, until her purification ritual (cf. Luke 2:22)
 - v. Taken together, the Magi should not "technically" be in our Nativity Scenes
 1. But because they arose in the 13th century when their arrival was celebrated 13 days after Jesus' birth, it made sense to keep them there for richness and simplicity of story telling.

V. The Angels:

- a. **Are there really angels? Do angels exist?**
 - i. _____ (angels are mentioned over 180 times in the Bible)
 - ii. They bring messages from God, worship in heaven, and are spiritual warriors (cf. Matt. 1:20-23; Rev. 4; Jude 9)
 - iii. Demons are fallen angels (cf. Rev. 12:9)

- iv. Angels are intimidating (cf. Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10; Matt. 28:5; Ezek. 1:4-28; Dan. 6:20-23)

b. **What is the difference between angels and archangels?**

- i. *archangel* = (*archangelos* / ἀρχάγγελος) = “chief angel” = infer a greater degree of authority and power (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16; Jude 9)

c. **Why were angels used to announce Christ's birth rather than God?**

- i. *angel* = (*mal'ak* / מַלְאָךְ & *angelos* / ἄγγελος) = “messenger”

VI. **Mary & Joseph:**

a. **What happened to Joseph after Jesus was born since you do not hear much about him after that?**

- i. He moved back to Nazareth
- ii. He returned to his trade: *carpenter* = *tektōn* (τέκτων) = “one who uses various materials (wood, stone, and metal) in building—builder, carpenter.” (cf. Matt. 13:35)
- iii. He had 4 natural born sons and at least 2 daughters with Mary (cf. Mark 6:3)
- iv. He passed away before Jesus began His ministry (

b. **Do we know much about Mary before becoming pregnant?**

- i. She was from Nazareth
- ii. She was a normal faithful Jewish girl; NOT sinless!!
- iii. She was a virgin
- iv. She was Elizabeth's cousin
- v. She was definitely NOT a “co-redemptrix” and should receive NO veneration

VII. **Why Celebrate Christmas?**

a. **Why do Jehovah's Witnesses not celebrate Christmas?**

- i. They are NOT Christians because they do not believe that Jesus is God incarnate
- ii. They don't celebrate Christmas for the same reasons many Christians don't either:

- 1. The Bible doesn't tell us to
- 2. Jesus was most likely not born on December 25th
- 3. Some of Christmas' traditions may have their roots in paganism

b. **What to say to people (Believers or not) who say that Christmas is a pagan holiday?**

- i. I would partially agree with them and turn the conversation back to Jesus and the Gospel
- ii. If necessary, I would explain that words, symbols, and customs change meaning over time and that even if some Christmas traditions began as pagan, they aren't anymore

c. **If the Bible doesn't command it, and many of its traditions may have pagan roots, then Why Celebrate Christmas?** (My summarized words)

- i. Celebrating Christmas is a matter of conscience in Christians Liberty.
- ii. With that said, here are three reasons why I personally think it is “wise” to celebrate Christmas:
 - 1. The Bible says to not argue over days and festivals, but to do all things “for the Lord”, therefore as long as your Heart Motivation is Pure, Your Worship is Biblical Based, and it's For the Glory of God, whether you celebrate Christmas or not, it can honor God (cf. Rom. 14:5-6; 1 Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:17, 23-24)
 - 2. Jesus WAS Born!!!
 - 3. It is a golden opportunity to share Jesus and His Gospel!!!