

***Question: Most of us believe what the Bible says about the birth of Jesus, but some of the traditional “Christmas story” is not in the Bible. Can you help us sort out what the Bible says from human traditions?***

Through the years of Christian history, the story of the birth of Jesus as told at Christmas has been influenced by religious myths, legends, and by pagan influences. To even suggest this may sound offensive to some people. This is not my intention. Dr. Harold Hazelp, one of my former professors, gave the following list of things that are in the Bible and things that are not. Before passing judgment, please consider the following:

(1) *The Bible does teach that a male child named Jesus was born in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago (Matt. 2:1).* Even without the Bible, we can establish the fact that Jesus lived from the writings of Jewish, secular and Christian historians like Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger and Josephus.

(2) *The Bible also says that Jesus was born of a virgin (Matt. 1:18-21).* The actions of Mary were not those of one trying to cover an adulterous affair. She went immediately to the house of Zachariah, a priest, who could have condemned her for adultery (Luke 1:40). She remained silent at the cross when her Son died for claiming to be the Son of God and not of a man. Skeptics must claim that she withheld the truth to save her own life but gave up the life of her son. Such a claim lacks credibility.

(3) *The Bible says that Jesus was born in a stable because an innkeeper turned Joseph and Mary away (Luke 2:1-7).* The credibility of this story is supported by archeological discoveries referring to the census at the time of the birth of Christ.

(4) *The Bible teaches that angels announced the birth to shepherds keeping watch over their flocks at night (Luke 2:8-14).*

(5) *The Bible also teaches that wise men came from the East to worship the newborn king (Matthew 2:1-12).* However, *the Bible does NOT say that there were three wise men.* Because three gifts are mentioned, many assume there were three men. But each wise man could have brought more than one gift, or several men could have brought the same gifts. *Neither does the Bible say that the wise men came to see the Christ while he was an infant in the manger.* When the wise men came, Joseph, Mary and Jesus were living in a house

(Matthew 2:13-14). Since Herod had ordered all the male infants two years and under killed, he must have believed that the star of his birth could have appeared as much as two years earlier (Matthew 2:7, 16).

(6) *The Bible does not teach that Jesus was born on December 25.* The first mention of this date as his birthday was in 354 A.D. The Encyclopedia Britannica comments: “Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church and before the Fifth Century there was no general consensus of opinion as to where it should come in the calendar . . .” Also, in the Bible Jesus does not teach us to have any one day in honor of his birth. This does not mean he would be offended by having a time to call attention to his coming into the world.

However, it is appropriate to know the facts about what he has or has not commanded. Most important is the FACT that the Son of God has come into our world to save his people (Matthew 1:21). I’m thankful for the celebrations of Christmas and the attention given to Jesus our savior at any time of the year. But it is also helpful to separate FACT from FICTION about the birth of our Lord.

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