

Misconceptions About Christmas

Introduction

- As familiar as the Christmas story is, it is surprising how many details we add to the story that are not in the Bible.
- The source of many of these are from dramatic retellings of the Nativity or from cultural misunderstandings.
- The purpose of this lesson is to challenge us to know and understand the Bible better.

Dramatic Additions

- Joseph and Mary barely make it to Bethlehem in time for Christ to be born.
 - They appear to have been there in plenty of time – Luke 2:6
- It was snowing.
 - Snow is quite rare in Israel except at high elevations.
 - The average temperatures in the area are between 50-65 degrees.
 - It is on roughly the same latitude as Savannah, Georgia, or Jacksonville, Florida, or Waco, Texas.
- There were three wise men.
 - There is no number given, just that it is plural – Matthew 2:1
 - The number appears to have been derived from the three gifts they brought (gold, frankincense, and myrrh) – Matthew 2:11
- There was a star and angels at Christ's birth.
 - No mention of angels is made at the birth, but to announce it to the shepherds – Luke 2:8-20
 - The star is only mentioned in conjunction with the wise men, which maybe a little later – Matthew 2:1-12

Cultural Differences

- Joseph and Mary were turned away from inn(s).
 - There is no indication of hostility or inhospitableness in the text.
 - Jews were well known for their hospitality to friends and family.
 - No one seems to take offense at the way Joseph, Mary, or Jesus are treated – see the shepherds' reaction in Luke 2:20
 - The Bible only speaks of a single inn – Luke 2:7
 - The "inn" of the ancient world was more of a walled corral.
 - Estimates vary, but historians believe Bethlehem had a few hundred to perhaps a thousand residents. It was not on a major trade route.

- A case can be made that the word “inn” is a more of a guestroom, as *kataluma* is also used to describe the Upper Room of the Last Supper in Mark 14:14 and Luke 22:11.
- Jesus was born in a stable.
 - The only indication of this is that he was laid in a manger.
 - However, history and archaeology tell us that many homes in this area were built with a first-floor courtyard and a second-floor dwelling.
 - Thus, the manger could be seen as “in the house”.
- There was a little drummer boy.
 - No, no there wasn't.

Chronological Questions

- The wise men were at the birth of Christ.
 - They appear to have come later and seen Christ in a house – Matthew 2:11
 - Herod responds by kill children under 2 years of age – Matthew 2:16
- Jesus was born on December 25.
 - This tradition likely came from the date of the Feast of Annunciation on March 25 (which is tied to Good Friday) plus nine months.
 - I think it is likely that Christ was born around the Feast of Tabernacles in September-October.
- Jesus was born in year 1 B.C., 0 or A.D. 1.
 - The “A.D.” dating system was created by Dionysius Exiguus in 525.
 - Further study shows errors in his work, including that Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. but is in the Nativity story.

