

The Case For Christmas

Happy Mas? Our more Secularised society wants to take **CHRIST** out of **CHRISTMAS**. They want to turn the Christmas story into a fairy tale or fable. So what is the historical evidence for the birth of the Messiah?

The Christmas Story Based in Prophecy:

Daniel 9: 20-27 : Daniel's received prophecy reveals when the Messiah would be born - The Jewish apocalyptic style of this prophecy is similar to Revelation, where the perfect number, 7, is used to depict a period of time, which is 490 years. The Messiah would therefore begin his ministry around AD30, just as Jesus did. It also foretells the 'Anointed One' (or Messiah) who will come to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, bring everlasting righteousness. After times of trouble, the Anointed One will be put to death. Importantly, it also says that the people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary i.e. the temple. That happened in AD70, so the Messiah had to have arrived by AD70, or not at all! He will put an end to sacrifice and offering.

Jeremiah 23: 5 : The Messiah would be from the lineage of King David

Micah 5: 2,4 : Tells us that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, in the land of Judah

Isaiah 7:14 : That the Messiah would be born of a virgin.....and..... He would be Immanuel. Many think that Jesus should have been called Immanuel, instead of Jesus, but actually, if you think about it, what God was revealing was that the promised Messiah would not be another prophet, or great leader, but he would literally be God with us; God in human form, living among us. That was a huge concept, and a unique promise.

Hosea 11:1 : He would be called out of Egypt. Joseph was warned in a dream not to return to Nazareth, so they escaped to Egypt until it was safe to return.

When John the Baptist started to prophesy about the Messiah, he was the first prophet that had appeared in Israel for over 400 years. God had stopped speaking through prophets, because the people refused to listen. This also signalled that something special was going to happen.

Christmas Story Based in History and Archaeology

It wasn't "*Once Upon A Time*" in "*a land far far away*....."

Both Matthew and Luke establish the genealogy of Jesus back to David, and though the lists of names are different, it is thought that one is through the line of Mary, and the other through Joseph, and are obviously not a complete list as that would be too long and unnecessary.

We were clearly told that the birth of Jesus was firmly established in history:

Luke 2: 1-2 : Caesar Augustus

: Quirinius was Governor of Syria - archaeologists have found a coin showing that there was a Governor of Syria called Quirinius at the time of the birth of Jesus. One objection is that one Quirinius ruled before, but not during, the time that Jesus was born. However, the coin that was found proves that either the same Quirinius, or another with the same name, ruled at the time of Jesus' birth.

: Herod was on the throne as King of Judea. Often referred to as Herod the Great, he lived between 73BC and 4BC. Before that causes confusion, the original Dionysian BC/AD calendar was wrong, so Jesus was actually born several years before the AD calendar states, while Herod was king!

: Census. This was the first census taken by a Caesar across the whole Roman Empire, not just a local census. Archaeologists found evidence of a typical Roman census that said that; as it was time for the census, everyone was instructed to return to the town where they were born to register.

If anyone in the first century AD wanted to question the birth, the evidence was all there. It hasn't been contested that Jesus was born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph, exactly when the Bible said it happened.

Christmas Story based in the Nativity?

When was Jesus born?

We aren't exactly sure, though the most popular time of year with historians is sometime in the Spring, because the shepherds were out in the fields with the sheep, and lambs. Other suggestions have been October, but nobody is exactly sure. In modern biographies, every aspect of a person's life is examined from birth. In antiquity, historians only considered the time that the subject of the biography was carrying out the important work being written about. That is why there is little narrative on the birth, and especially the childhood of Jesus, whereas the Gospels concentrated on Jesus' ministry.

Where was there no room?

At the Inn? That is what we have thought for centuries. However, when modern translators have gone back to the original writing, it seems the early versions of the New Testament mistranslated the word; it wasn't an Inn at all, which would have been in contravention of Jewish custom. As Joseph was returning to his home town, he would have gone to the house of a family member, who would always find room for their family somewhere. The word that was originally translated as INN was actually the word for GUESTROOM. A typical home at the time would be on 2 or 3 levels. The family would live on the first floor, with their bedrooms on either that floor or the top floor, and it would also have a flat roof, where they would sometimes sleep also. With a heavily pregnant wife, they couldn't ask them to climb those stairs, so they made use of the ground floor, where the animals would be brought in at night. That area would be like a stable, but would be a simple area where the donkey, ox etc. would be kept overnight. And there, either in the floor or in a manger, would be the hay and straw for the animals, which is where Mary gave birth, and Jesus was laid.

How Many Kings From the Orient Were There?

The answer is, quite simply, none. The Bible says they were no kings, but Magi, or wise men, but the number is unknown, and all we know is that they were from East of Judea. The assumption has been that there were three, because of the famous three gifts, but the Bible doesn't tell us. Early traditions, writings and paintings, varied between 2 and 12 people!

What did they Follow?

As they were astrologers, we have always believed it was a star. There is something called a repeating supernova, which is a star that burns bright, dims, and then appears bright in the sky again in a different place. However, ancient astrologers, like many in the ancient world, believed that many of the heavenly bodies were actually that: heavenly bodies. What is most likely is that, because the Bible tells us that they followed a heavenly body, which led them to the exact location that Jesus was born, that it was not a star as such, but more likely an angel, or the spirit of God. Just as the Israelites followed the cloudy pillar by day, and fire by night, the wise men followed one of God's messengers to the exact location, hovering over the home.

Christmas Story based in Reality

Jesus was born when the Bible said he was and where he was. He was truly God with us; Immanuel

Jesus didn't stay a baby; he was the Messiah, just as the prophets said. A mathematician, Professor Peter Stoner, looked at the probability of one person meeting just 8 of 61 specific Old Testament prophecies. The odds were 1 in 10^{21} . To put that in context, he said: "First, blanket the entire Earth land mass with silver dollars 120 feet high. Second, specially mark one of those dollars and randomly bury it. Third, ask a person to travel the earth and select the marked dollar, while blindfolded, from the trillions of other dollars." The American Scientific Association, stated that: "The mathematical analysis....is based upon principles of probability which are thoroughly sound, and Professor Stoner has applied these principles in a proper and convincing way. (*We will look at these in more detail at a later session*). It could only have been Jesus.

Isn't that Good News? REMEMBER: God is for life, not just for Christmas!

Jesus is the BEST gift ever! SOME GIFTS ARE MORE THAN JUST A GIFT