

December 25, 2016

Christmas – Nativity Questions

by [Bryan Hodge](#)

This time of year many think about the birth of Jesus. We'll take this writing to address a few questions.

1. Was Jesus born on December 25th? It seems unlikely. Shepherds did not have their sheep in the fields in the winter months, especially at night (cf. Luke 2:8-9). Adam Clark commented, "on this very ground the nativity in December should be given up" (Vol. 5, p. 370).

"No one is certain why December 25 was chosen. There is nothing in the New Testament to indicate that this is the date of the Nativity. It is believed that the efforts of early Christians in Rome to change pagan customs into Christian rites led, in the 4th century A.D., to the adoption of December 25th... This date was probably chosen because, according to the calendar then in use, December 25 was the winter solstice... the sun-worshipping pagans had celebrated this day..." (The New Book of Knowledge. Vol. 3, p. 290). God has not specified the date of Jesus birth. He has not told us to keep such a day.

We are, however, to remember Jesus' death by observing the Lord's Supper each first day of the week (Acts 20:7 cf. 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 1 Cor. 11:23-26). We should be content to worship in an authorized manner .

2. What is the significance of the virgin birth? The Bible affirms the virgin birth (Luke 1:26-35; Matt. 1:18-23, cf. Isa. 7:14).

The Messiah was to have a two-fold nature. (1) He was to be of the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15; Isa. 7:14; cf. Gal. 4:4). He's called "man" (1 Tim. 2:5). (2) He was to be called Emmanuel (Isa. 7:14) "Which being interpreted is 'God with us'" [(Matt. 1:23). [Note: The reference to Emmanuel does not mean this would be what he was primarily called. A similar situation is found in Solomon who was to be called Jedidiah, meaning 'beloved of the Lord' (2 Sam. 12:24-25)]. His goings forth were "from old, from everlasting" (Mic. 5:2). God became flesh (John 1:1, 14; 1 Tim. 3:16 KJV). A body had been prepared for atonement (Heb. 10:5-7 cf. Psalm 40:6-8 LXX).

3. What was the star of Bethlehem ? I've heard, through the years, many theories. Some have suggested a unique alignment of planets (Note: The Hebrews did not distinguish between stars and planets). Others have postulated that it was a comet.

I have difficulties with such explanations. J.W. McGarvey has written, "When the magi left Jerusalem the star 'went before them, and came and stood over where the young child was.' This could not be true of a real star, because a real star cannot move on before men, and stand over a particular house so as to distinguish it from other houses. A child, looking at a star near the horizon, may imagine that it hangs over a certain house; but when (he) walks up to the house (he) finds that the star is as far off as before and is hanging over another house" (Matthew and Mark, p. 26). The star seems to have appeared and disappeared to the magi (Matt. 2:1-2, 9-10). Herod and his men seem not to have noticed this unusual star. Moreover, if the star was visible and obviously hanging over one house, then why didn't his men simply go there upon the news of the magi (Matt. 2:1-10)? This seems to have been a supernatural occurrence visible only to the wise men, or at least close enough to guide them. It may have been somewhat similar to the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire (Ex 13:21-22; 14:19,24; 33:9-10; Num 12:5,10; 14:14; Deut 31:15; Neh 9:13,19; Ps 78:14; 99:7; 105:39).

4. Were the shepherds and the wise men present near the same time? I do not believe that they were. The shepherds went to Jesus the night he was born, and found him lying in a manger wrapped in swaddling clothes (Luke 2:7-17). The wise men found Jesus in a house (Matt. 2:11). It seems possible that Joseph and Mary had relocated to Judea from Nazareth (Notice Joseph seems to have wanted to return from Egypt into Judea . It took God's instructions to get him to settle in Galilee Matt. 2:19-23).

5. How many wise men were there? The Bible doesn't say. Some have inferred that there were three from the mentioning of three gifts (Matt. 2:11). However, such is an unwarranted assumption, and is not implied.

What was the significance of these three gifts? Much speculation has occurred. Many believe that the gold may have been used to support the family in their flight to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-15). Such is speculation, though possible.

6. Were Joseph and Mary poor? They absolutely were. This is evident from the record (Lk. 2:22-24 cf. Lev. 12:1-8).

However, notice what qualities they did have. (1) She was pure (Lk. 1:34). (2) She was worshipful of God (Lk. 1:46-ff). (3) He was just (Matt. 2:19). (4) He listened to God (Mt. 1:20-25; 2:13-15; 2:19-23). (5) They followed the law of God (Lk. 2:21-24; Luke 2:41) and man (Lk. 2:1-5). (6) They proved to be good parents (Lk. 2:52). (7) Joseph worked for a living (Mt. 13:53).

Perhaps, we emphasize the wrong qualities. When God sent His son into the world, He chose qualities for the guardians of His son which many overlook. These are qualities we should each strive to possess.

7. Who is Santa Claus? “Santa Claus” is an Americanized term for “Saint Nicholas.” He was a real man who lived in Myra , Asia Minor (Turkey), during the 4th century A.D. The story goes that he learned of a poor man, who had three daughters unable to marry due to lack of dowry. Nicholas on three successive evenings supposedly slipped bags of gold through their window (one of which fell into a stocking which had been hung up to dry). Giving is honorable (Acts 20:35).