

The Christmas Quiz 2008

Selected Scripture

Introduction

One of the things that I love about the Christmas season is that it provides the opportunity to deepen our appreciation of the humility and sacrifice of Christ – observed in His incarnation. I fear the Christmas story has become so polished and cleaned up that we would not recognize the real scene if it were enacted in front of us.

The truth is that the original Christmas scene was actually a dirty, desperate scene with two teenagers delivering their first born in a stone cutout in the hillside. The Christmas story is actually a story of a fearful time and, eventually, a brutal scene. The story begins with embarrassment and confusion on Joseph's part and ends with murder.

Today, I thought I would survey some of the scenes during the time of the birth of our Lord and, at the same time, test your knowledge of the true Christmas story. In fact, I have prepared a quiz.

Do not worry, however, as it will be an open book test and you will have a chance to check your answers immediately. It will not be graded – your church membership is not on the line!

Christmas Quiz

Let me ask questions about the Christmas story, and then you answer them according to the biblical record.

Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem:

- a. on a camel
- b. in a wooden cart
- c. in a Volkswagon
- d. with Joseph walking and Mary riding a donkey

Question #1: Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem:

- a. on a camel
- b. in a wooden cart
- c. in a Volkswagen
- d. with Joseph walking and Mary riding a donkey

The answer is: none of the above.

I guess I should have given you this answer as letter "e," but I am an unmerciful professor who loves to trick his students!

The record of scripture merely records in Luke chapter 2, verses 4-5,

Joseph . . . went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem . . .

in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.

It is possible that both Mary and Joseph were too poor to even own a mule. Joseph was a carpenter,

literally similar to a migrant worker. He traveled around Galilee wherever he could find work.



When Joseph and Mary finally arrived in Bethlehem, the innkeeper's actual words to them were:

- a. "Why didn't you make reservations?"
- b. "Please use my stable."
- c. "There is no room for you in the inn."

Question #2: When Joseph and Mary finally arrived in Bethlehem, the innkeeper's actual words to them were:

- a. "Why didn't you make reservations?"
- b. "Please use my stable."
- c. "There is no room for you in the inn."

The answer is: none of the above.

The Bible simply informs us that there is no room for them in the inn. In fact, an innkeeper is never introduced in the scene.

Luke simply records in chapter 2, verse 7,

... there was no room for them in the inn.

We have every reason to believe that with all the travelers heading back to their hometowns to register according to the emperor's decree, every place was packed with people.

Furthermore, we are never told that Joseph even knocked on the door of the inn. He was probably told by other people in the courtyard that the place was overflowing and there was no room.

Have you ever thought about the fact that the innkeeper always gets the worst job in the Christmas play?

I read of one church that put on a children's Christmas play, and a child with Down's syndrome was to play the role of the innkeeper. The moment finally arrived when little exhausted Mary and Joseph arrived and knocked on the door. The innkeeper came to the door, right on cue. Joseph explained their pitiful situation and ended with, "Can we have a room?"

The innkeeper was simply supposed to say, "We're full – use the stable." However, he was so

engrossed in the scene that after pausing a moment, he said, "We're full, but you can have my room."

This kid got the picture. What a great answer!

This inn in Bethlehem remains to this day a powerful metaphor. How many hearts have written across them today a message for God that says, "Sorry, no vacancy," or "I'm filled right now – there's no room!"?

Is there really any room for Jesus Christ in your life – or are you crowding Him out?

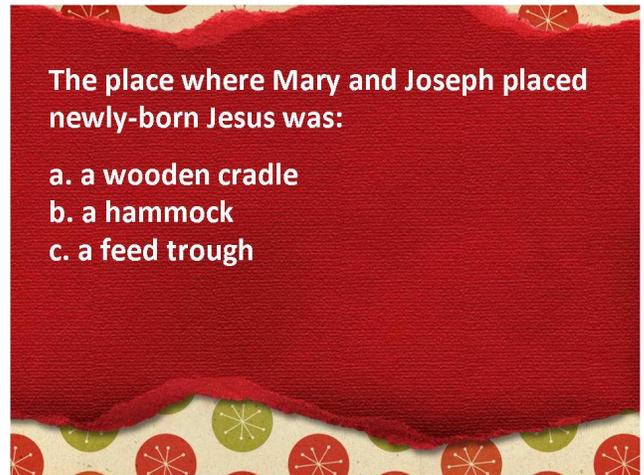
Mary delivers the baby in this stable. However, we have to be careful in this because we are never told she and Joseph were in a stable.

The only thing that implies this occurred in a stable is the fact that when Christ was born, Mary laid Him in a manger. It may have been out in the open, where the travelers had tied their animals.

Many scholars believe this was a hollowed-out cave in a Bethlehem hillside, as was common in these days. Luke informs us that Mary,

... laid Him in a manger ... (Luke 2:7)

Let us ask another question for your Christmas quiz.



The place where Mary and Joseph placed newly-born Jesus was:

- a. a wooden cradle
- b. a hammock
- c. a feed trough

Question #3: The place where Mary and Joseph placed newly-born Jesus was:

- a. a wooden cradle
- b. a hammock
- c. a feed trough

The answer is: "c" – a feed trough.

This happens to be the literal translation of the word "phaten" (φατην) or "manger". This also supports the idea that the place is a hollowed-out area in a rocky hillside. The owner simply carved a trough into one of the sides of the cavern; he literally

cut into the stone to make a place where hay could be put for the animals to eat.

This is not quite the cozy picture that we have of warmth and adoration from the animals.

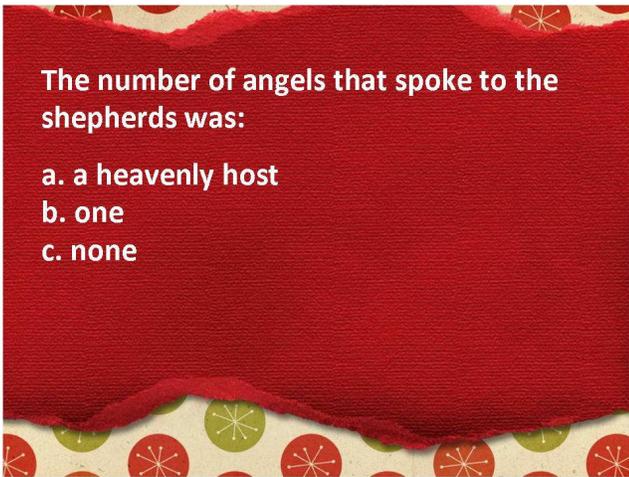
You might say, “But I saw the pictures of the manger scene. I saw the animals. In fact, they all had halos. It’s soft and warm. There’s a campfire.”

My friend, the last thing anyone would do is start a fire in a stable. The pictures you saw were not actual photographs – they were paintings by skilled painters on the payroll of the church.

Most of the paintings I have seen dehumanize Jesus Christ and clean up the scene. This destroys the humility of our Savior – the rightful heir to David’s throne and the equal sovereign of heaven – being born in a cavern at the hands of a carpenter. This was a smelly, dank, dark, confusing, painful, lonely scene.

However, how their hearts will be filled with courage and hope as their first visitors arrive.

Angels filled the heavens and delivered a message to the shepherds. Let us ask another question concerning this scene.



Question #4: The number of angels that spoke to the shepherds was:

- a. a heavenly host
- b. one
- c. none

The answer is: “c” – one.

One angel spoke and delivered this message, as recorded in Luke 2:10-11,

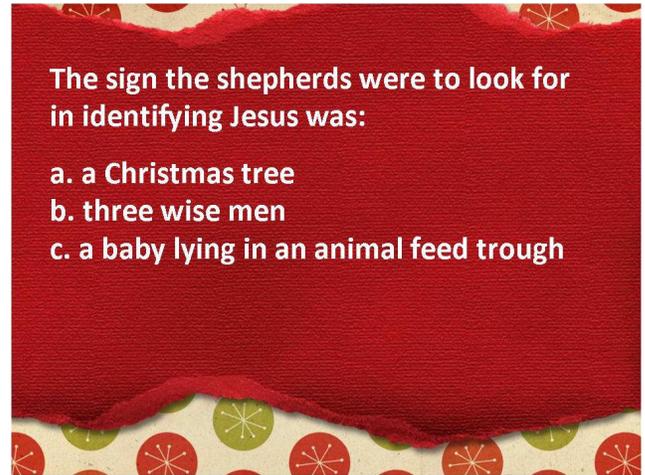
. . . the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;

“for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

Only one angel spoke. He was then joined by a host of angels who began singing. Their lyrics were, according to Luke 2:14,

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

This angel gave the shepherds a clue to identify the Savior, in Luke 2:12, which leads to another question.



Question #5: The sign the shepherds were to look for in identifying Jesus was:

- a. a Christmas tree
- b. three wise men
- c. a baby lying in an animal feed trough

The answer is: “c” – a baby lying in a manger – or an animal feed trough.

The truth is that it was so unusual for a newborn baby to be out in a barn surrounded by the flies and the filth of manure – and even more so, to have been placed in the feed trough – that the shepherds were given this as their sign. Surely there were other infants in Bethlehem, but Jesus was the only one in such poverty-stricken conditions.

Both Mary and Joseph were so exhausted from their trip and then the delivery of their child that after wrapping Him in strips of cloth, as was their custom, they laid Him in the feed trough – no doubt softened with some hay or perhaps Joseph’s cloak.

“Listen shepherds – listen world – your Messiah; the King of Heaven has been born, and He is lying in a feed trough.”

Matthew’s gospel records that other visitors were on the way, led by the brilliance of God’s glory – which is translated “star”.

The “star in the east” was seen by:

- a. the shepherds
- b. three kings from the Orient
- c. astrologers living in Persia

Question #6: The “star in the east” was seen

by:

- a. the shepherds
- b. three kings from the Orient
- c. astrologers living in Persia

The answer is: “c” – astrologers living in Persia.

Understand that these were the Magi. This word gives us our word “magic” or “magician”.

However, these Magi were more than this. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus informs us that the Magi were responsible for training the future kings of Persia. These were professors of the arts and sciences, languages and mathematics. No one could ascend the throne as king without mastering the disciplines and receiving the blessings of the Magi.

The most distinguished Magi to have lived in Persia was a believing Jew named Daniel. He would live out his faith before several kings in this kingdom and nearly pay for it with his life when he was thrown to the lions. He held to the law, which informed him in Numbers chapter 24 that a star would rise from Jacob.

This was no ordinary star. The word used for “star” or “aster” can be translated “brightness”.

- This was the light that guided the people of Israel as they journeyed through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21).
- This was the light that made the face of Moses glow after he had met with God (Exodus 34:30).
- This was the brilliant light that knocked Saul off his horse on the Damascus road in Acts 9.
- This was the vision of John the apostle as he saw the light of Christ’s face shining like the sun in Revelation 1:16.

This star was the Shekinah glory of God. How can its disappearance when the Magi arrived in Jerusalem be explained otherwise? How can its sudden reappearance when the Magi left Herod’s place be explained otherwise? How can the fact that it stood over the very place where the Child was be explained otherwise?

The Magi, believing descendants of Daniel’s faith and professors from the ancient kingdom of Persia, had arrived to worship the Savior, led by a literal light of God.

This leads to the next question of when the Magi arrived.

The wise men came to visit Jesus:

- a. while Jesus was lying in the manger
- b. just after the shepherds returned to the fields
- c. in the house where Joseph and Mary were staying

Question #7: The wise men came to visit Jesus:

- a. while Jesus was lying in the manger
- b. just after the shepherds returned to the fields
- c. in the house where Joseph and Mary were staying

The answer is: “c” – in the house where Joseph and Mary were staying.

Matthew records in chapter 2, verse 11, that . . .

After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary . . .

The text implies that Joseph might not have even been there at the time – perhaps he was at work.

The wise men came into the house and saw the Child. This word is not “brephos” (βρεφος) for “baby,” used earlier when the shepherds were told to go and find the baby; the word now used is the word “paidion” (παιδιον), which is the Greek word for “little child”.

King Herod’s later command to kill . . .

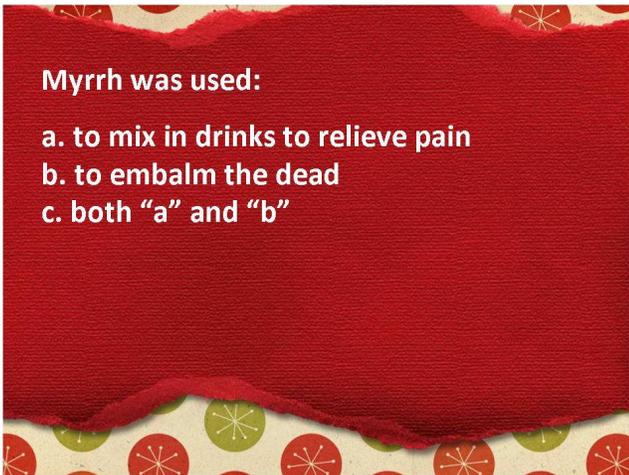
. . . all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under . . . (Matthew 2:16)

. . . gives an indication of the timing of the Magi's arrival and their disappearance back to their kingdom. In order to be sure the usurper of his throne was eliminated, Herod ordered all the male children in Bethlehem ages two and under killed.

By the way, the church developed the myth of three wise men. We are not told in scripture how many there were. We are only told that they brought three significant gifts of:

- gold – which represented royalty;
- frankincense – which was used by the priest in his daily intercession;
- myrrh – which was a rather odd gift to give a child and we will look further at this.

Jesus was probably only interested in the boxes at this point in His life anyway!



Question #8: Myrrh was used:

- a. to mix in drinks to relieve pain**
- b. to embalm the dead**
- c. both "a" and "b"**

The answer is: "c" – both "a" and "b".

Myrrh would be mixed in drinks to deaden pain. It was also used to create the sticky substance that would be used in the wrapping of the shroud.

This gift symbolically foretold the suffering and death of the Messiah.

You may remember that when Jesus was hanging on the cross, He was offered a drink mixed with myrrh to deaden the pain, and He refused it (Mark 15:23) – evidently to keep His mind clear.

Jesus had important things to say like, "It is finished" (John 19:30); which meant, "Paid in full!"

In other words, the debt of sin is paid in full by His suffering on our behalf.

Later our Lord would be offered sour wine, which He accepted, and within moments would die.

There can be little doubt that this gift of myrrh was a symbolic reminder that Jesus Christ was born to die.

A man in our church wrote a poem that was eventually sent to me. I think it sums this up well. Let me read from it.

The Borrower

*Owner of the whole creation, fashioned worlds
with but a word*

*Yet He borrows now a manger for His entrance
to His world*

*For a little while He borrows, then returns it
back again.*

*Rides above the earth as Sovereign, on the
wings of tempest wind*

*Yet He borrows now a donkey to reveal
Himself as King*

*For a little while He borrows, then returns it
back again.*

*Ever Living One, eternal, sinless, holy, pure as
light*

*Yet He borrows now a cross to die as Lamb in
darkest night*

*For a little while He borrows, then returns it
back again.*

*Cries in sorrow interceding, stripped of
clothing, sold, betrayed*

*Dead, He borrows now a tomb in which His
broken body lays*

*For a little while He borrows, then returns it
back again.*

*Taking on our flesh and nature, Son of God
and Son of Man*

*Mighty Jesus, Lord of Heaven, Second Adam,
Great I AM*

*Still a man, yes, man forever, takes our form
eternally*

*Rids our souls of sin and fits us evermore with
Him to be*

*And of all the things He borrowed, He returned
them, one by one*

*All except my sins, Great Savior, these are
gone, my soul is won.ⁱ*

Modern Christmas Quiz

Now, let me shift gears and ask some questions that pertain to more recent history.



Question #9: Christmas was not officially celebrated until the fourth century. True or False?

The answer is: True.

The actual date of December 25th came from Roman pagan festivals celebrated during this season.

One festival celebrated the Roman's belief that the sun in the sky had not been conquered and spring would soon come again. This celebration was called Saturnalia and was nothing less than a drunken orgy. However, it also involved the giving of gifts to one another and the decorating of evergreen trees.

On December 25th, the Romans celebrated the birth of the Mithras, the Persian god of light. As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, Emperor Constantine took A.D. 336, the date the Romans used to celebrate the birth of their god of light, for the day Christians would celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the true light of the world.

Constantine declared the official celebration of Jesus Christ's birth to occur in the midst of the pagan celebration on December 25th. All the icons of these festivals rolled into the Christian tradition.

I think it is so interesting that we happen to be living in an era when Christmas is just like it was in the fourth century. It can either be pagan or Christian – it all hinges upon what we do with our traditions.

Let me ask another question that you should now know the answer to.



Question #10: Christmas trees, mistletoe, ivy, and holly were pagan icons. True or False?

The answer is: True.

The Puritans would have nothing to do with these icons and they never established Christmas in America. In fact, in 1644, they made it illegal to cook plum pudding and mince pie on Christmas day. They thought anyone cooking plum pudding was probably celebrating Christmas, so they passed a law against baking mince pie and making plum pudding on Christmas day.

What do you think everyone did? They cooked their pudding and pies on Christmas Eve!

Frankly, our culture is riddled with pagan icons. Even the days of our week are named after Roman gods.

The question is not, "Do you use the words 'Maunday' or 'Freyaday,'" but "How do you live on Monday and Friday?"

The question is not "Do you celebrate Christmas and give gifts," but "Why do you celebrate Christmas?"

The apostle Paul cleared the deck in Romans 14 when he wrote,

One person regards one day above another, another regards every day alike. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind.

[So that] he who observes the day, observes it for the Lord . . . for he gives thanks to God . . .

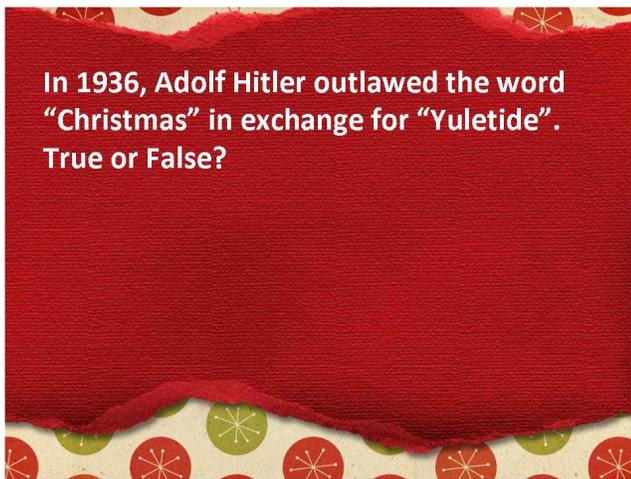
(Romans 14:5-6)

I personally believe Christmas happens to be a wonderful opportunity to observe a day that can uniquely exalt the birth of our Savior – to give thanks to God for His wonderful plan of salvation, which included the birth of our Redeemer.

I would agree with the action of Martin Luther. He attached globed candles to his evergreen to declare his belief, through a pagan icon, that Jesus Christ was truly the light of the world.

In case you have not noticed, the world really does not like the idea of Christmas revealing the truth of Christ.

Let us ask another question for your Christmas quiz.



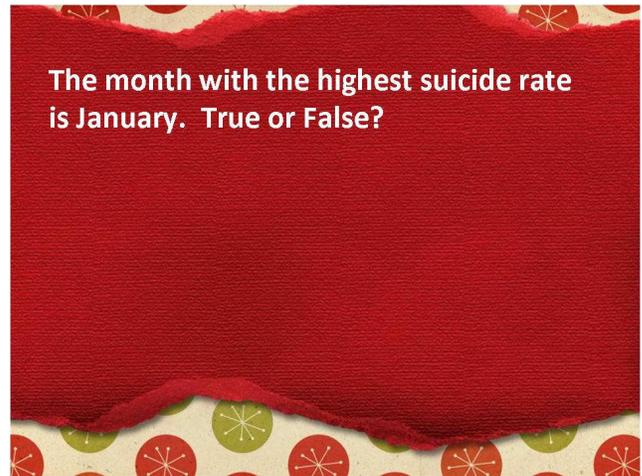
Question #11: In 1936, Adolf Hitler outlawed the word “Christmas” in exchange for “Yuletide”. True or False?

The answer is: True.

Hitler also outlawed Christmas hymns, by the way.

This actually sounds all too strangely familiar in our own generation today.

Is it any wonder in our western, modernized world that the answer to the next question would be what we might expect?



Question #12: The month with the highest suicide rate is January. True or False?

The answer is: False.

The month with the highest suicide rate is what? December.

One author wrote, The Christmas season is marked by deeper emotional strain, greater anxiety, and more acts of violence than any other time of the year. The stress of the holiday, the depressing weight of loneliness, and the meaninglessness of mindless revelry make the holiday intolerable for many people.

It is interesting that when the angels came to the shepherds, Luke records in chapter 2 that the words to their song were:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace . . .

There is no peace on Earth.

The sound of the angels singing echoed on the Bethlehem hillsides. Yet soon, the wailing of bereaved mothers would pierce the air in Bethlehem as Herod’s soldiers slaughtered their little boys.

Things have not really changed.

In fact, a press release just this past week told the story of an Anglican church leader who came back to England from Bethlehem and banned the singing of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” in his church. Why? “Because,” he said, “it is hypocrisy. There is no peace in Bethlehem.” And he recounted the unrest, the checkpoints, the guards, and the open hatred in this region between Christians, Muslims, and Palestinians.ⁱⁱ

This man came back and said, effectively, “We’re not going to sing “O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie”.

He has missed the point of Bethlehem then, what Bethlehem will one day be under the reign of Christ,

and ultimately, when Earth is newly made at the end of world history.

However, he is right in one sense – Earth has not lived in peace. There is not even peace in Bethlehem.

Was peace a vain promise of the angelic host on the day our Lord was born?

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased. (Luke 2:14)

No. If you note carefully the entire text of Luke 2:14, you will discover that the angels did not promise peace on Earth – with a period there – but, as the rest of their song promises, there will be . . .

. . . on earth peace among men with whom [God] is pleased.

In other words, there is peace in the hearts of those who are in fellowship with God through Jesus

Christ. To those who accept the Savior who came and died and rose again, there is peace.

Paul wrote in Romans 5:1,

Therefore . . . we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

Those who have accepted the sacrifice of sovereignty of Christ are pleasing to God. In fact, the primary foundation for pleasing God is accepting into your life the Son of God.

To those who believe that the baby Jesus was more than a baby – who believe He is the Lamb of God who came to die on the cross for the sins of the world, and rise again on the third day, and ascend to the Father, and then offer, through His sacrifice, the full and final payment for your sins – the penalty of sin is forever removed. And you, my friend, can have this peace the angels promised – peace with God through your Lord Jesus Christ.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 12/21/2008 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Ron Berrus, “The Borrower”.

ⁱⁱ “Vicar bans ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’,” <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article5330939.ece>, December 12, 2008.