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The New Christmas Test
How Much Do You Know About Christmas?

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Ten years ago we presented a short True/ False quiz for our readers to examine their own knowledge of what the Bible actually says about Christmas. We discussed how so much about our modern celebration of that holiday has no basis in the Bible, and nothing to do with Jesus or His birth. Santa Claus, Christmas trees, wreaths, exchanging presents, etc., are fun and help us enjoy the season. The truth is that most of those traditions were borrowed from pre-Christian pagan celebrations, such as Yule Tide and Saturnalia, and really have nothing to do with the birth of Christ.

In this article we will present another such test of your knowledge about the real Christmas as taught in the Bible. In this case, we will present statements and you are to fill in the blanks based on the passage mentioned. Try to answer them from you memory if you can, then look up the passages. After you take the quiz, you can look below for the correct responses for you to grade yourself. If you are ready to start, keep on going.

1. In Luke 1:26, the name of the angel who informed Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah was _____.
2. In Luke 2:1, the name of the Roman Emperor who called for the world census to be taken was _____.
3. In Luke 2:4, to obey the Imperial edict, Mary and Joseph had to travel to the city of David called _____.

4. In Luke 2:7, when Joseph and Mary came to Bethlehem they found no room in the _____.
5. In Luke 2:6, when Jesus was born Mary laid him in a _____.
6. In Luke 2:8-12 an angel of the Lord made the announcement of Jesus' birth to a group of _____ working in the fields.
7. According to Matthew 1:1-16, two of Jesus' human ancestors, who were women and not Jews (and one of them was a prostitute), were _____ and _____.
8. In Matthew 1:20, an angel of the Lord appeared to _____ in a dream and told him to name his son Jesus.
9. Matthew 1:23 says Jesus' virgin birth was to fulfill a prophecy that He would be called Immanuel, which means "_____."
10. Matthew 2:1-12 reports that a group of prominent men from the east saw a star which they followed to Bethlehem. They were known as _____.

So now that you have taken the test, let's check your answers. My guess is that most of you know the answers to most of the questions. Nonetheless, we will examine each one and tell the full story of the birth of Jesus. Some of what we reveal may surprise you, since so much of what is traditionally thought to have

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happened at Jesus' birth has no Biblical support.

1. In Luke 1:26, the name of the angel who informed Mary that she would give birth to the Messiah was Gabriel.

So just who is the angel Gabriel? An angel is a messenger of God. In fact, that is what the word means in Hebrew (*malak*) and Greek (*angelos*). Gabriel's name literally means "the Strongman of God." He is an angel who appeared only four different times in Scripture. He came to Daniel twice in Daniel 8:15-27 and 9:20-27. In the New Testament, he announced the conception of John the Baptist to his father, Zechariah, in Luke 1:8-20. In that case, the angel identified himself to the skeptical Zechariah saying, "*I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.*" Soon after that, in Luke 1:26-38, Gabriel spoke to Mary telling her that she would be the mother of the Messiah.

Many people assume that Gabriel was an archangel. But the truth is, nowhere in the Bible is he identified that way. The only angel referred to as an "archangel" is Michael, in Jude 1:9. Paul says an unnamed archangel will announce the second coming of Christ according to 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

2. In Luke 2:1, the name of the Roman Emperor who called for the world census to be taken was Caesar Augustus.

Augustus, whose real name was Octavian, was the nephew and adopted son of Julius Caesar. He was born in 63 B.C., and when Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C. he, along with two other men, Marc Antony and Lepidus, became the defacto rulers of the Roman

Empire. In 31 B.C., Octavian gained total power at the battle of Actium when he defeated Marc Antony and his ally Cleopatra. Soon after, the Roman Senate, awarded him the title of Augustus ("Reverend") and he became the first Roman Emperor. He ruled the whole empire, including the area of Palestine where Joseph and Mary lived, as well as Bethlehem where they went to be counted in the census. Augustus died in A.D. 14.

3. In Luke 2:4, to obey the imperial edict, Mary and Joseph had to travel to the city of David called Bethlehem.

"Oh Little Town of Bethlehem" is about five miles southwest of Jerusalem. The name means "House of Bread." The Old Testament book of Ruth took place around Bethlehem. It was also the place where David was born, lived, and was anointed king by Samuel (1 Sam.16:1-13) - thus it was called the "City of David."

More important was the fact that the prophet Micah stated that the Messiah was to be born there:

But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will come forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His times of coming forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity. (Micah 5:2)

Of course, the New Testament gospels report Bethlehem as the birthplace of Jesus when Joseph and Mary went there for Caesar Augustus' census.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea... (Matthew 2:1)

Now Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order

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to register along with Mary, who was betrothed to him, and was pregnant. While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:4-7)

Has the Scripture not said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was? (John 7:42)

4. In Luke 2:7, when Joseph and Mary came to Bethlehem they found no room in the inn.

Everyone knows that when the holy couple came to Bethlehem, there was no room in the inn. But that is all the Bible says about it.

And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:7)

5. In Luke 2:7, when Jesus was born Mary laid him in a trough.

That being said, however, Luke tells us nothing about where they actually stayed while they were there. Traditionally, most people believe Jesus was born in a stable with animals all around. Nativity scenes always have Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus in a barn with cows, donkeys, and sheep. However, Luke nowhere mentions a stable or animals. All we know is that the place where Jesus was born had a feeding trough (manger) in which they laid the baby Jesus (Luke 2:7,16). Mangers were usually hewn out of stone and found in various places, including caves, streets, and houses. There may have been animals around when Jesus was born, but from the Biblical text we cannot say for sure.

6. In Luke 2:8-12, an angel of the Lord made the announcement of Je-

sus' birth to a group of shepherds working in the fields.

Nativity scenes always have a few shepherds kneeling or standing near Mary and Jesus. That is because an angel came to them while they were tending their flocks in fields somewhere near Bethlehem. The angel announced to them the birth of the Messiah. Luke then says a multitude of the heavenly hosts (more angels) appeared praising God. They may have been singing, but nowhere in the text does it say so. By the way, Luke's gospel does not say that the shepherds in the fields saw the star of Bethlehem. They went to see Jesus only when the angel told them of His birth and commanded them to go (Luke 2:8-20).

8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock at night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood near them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 And so 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; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly army of angels praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among people with whom He is pleased." (Luke 2:8-14)

7. According to Matthew 1:1-16, two of Jesus' human ancestors, who were women and not Jews (and one of them was a prostitute) were Rahab and Ruth.

Salmon fathered Boaz by Rahab, Boaz fathered Obed by Ruth, and

Obed fathered Jesse. Jesse fathered David the king ... Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah. (Matthew 1:5-6, 16)

Rahab was a prostitute in Jericho who helped two Hebrew spies hide out when they went into the city to analyze its military strength for Joshua. When the king of Jericho found out they were in the city she helped them escape in exchange for her and her family being spared when the Hebrews conquered Jericho. (Josh. 2) She is mentioned in Hebrews 11:30-31 as a woman of faith.

Rahab is identified as the mother of Boaz who married the Moabite woman Ruth after her first husband, Mahlon, died (Ruth 1:4-5). Thus Ruth, a non-Jewish Moabite, was the grandmother of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:18-21). So, Rahab and Ruth, David's great-grandmothers, were not Jewish. Nonetheless, they were important links in the chain to the birth of the Messiah Jesus.

8. In Matthew 1:20-21, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to name his son Jesus.

The courage and honor of Joseph is well known. When he learned that Mary, to whom he was betrothed, was pregnant, he could have had her put to death. Instead, he decided to divorce her quietly and not cause her public shame. However, soon after his decision, an angel of the Lord (name not given - maybe Gabriel) spoke to him in a dream.

Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a Son; and you shall name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins. (Matthew 1:20-21)

9. Matthew 1:23 says Jesus' virgin birth was to fulfill a prophecy that He would be called Immanuel, which means "God with us."

Matthew explains in verses 22 and 23 that when the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph concerning the events surrounding Jesus' birth, they were to fulfill an ancient Old Testament messianic prophecy. Matthew quotes Isaiah 7:14.

Now all this took place so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet would be fulfilled: "BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN WILL CONCEIVE AND GIVE BIRTH TO A SON, AND THEY SHALL NAME HIM IMMANUEL," which translated means, "GOD WITH US." (Matthew 1:22-23)

We do not know the day or the year in which Jesus was born. One clue for the year, however, may be that King Herod, who tried to kill the infant Jesus in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-21), died in 4 B.C. That is a well-established fact of history, so Jesus must have been born a year or more before then, perhaps in 6 or 5 B.C. The calendar which begins its dating at the time of Christ (A.D. - Anno Domini) was designed in A.D. 525 and was widely accepted in the west by A.D. 800. It was, however, inaccurate by several years in its dating of the conception and birth of Jesus as A.D. 1.

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10. Matthew 2:1-12 reports that a group of prominent men from the east saw a star which they followed to Bethlehem. They were known as Magi.

Another group of individuals that are usually found in Nativity scenes are three wisemen and their camels. Despite the title of a popular Christmas carol, the men who saw the star of Bethlehem were not kings. They were star gazers known as Magi. The Magi were a class of astrologers, priests, and wise men who probably lived in ancient Persia (modern Iran) or Babylon (modern Iraq). Matthew's gospel (2:1-12) says they arrived in Jerusalem to inquire about a new king being born. They had seen his star "in the East" (they were in the east when they saw it) and came to worship him.

Matthew makes no mention of the Magi's names, nor does he say how many came. He does say they brought three gifts (gold, frankincense, and myrrh) which may explain why the tradition arose of there being three of them (Matt. 2:11).

Matthew also does not say they rode on camels. He only reports that they had seen the star and, one way or another, traveled to Jerusalem to find Jesus. However, when they arrived they noticed that the star had moved beyond Jerusalem to be over Bethlehem. They then traveled to that town and located the house where Mary, Joseph, and the infant Jesus then lived. Though nativity scenes usually include them at the manger, the Magi actually went to Bethlehem much later, perhaps a year or more after Jesus' birth. They were never at the manger when Jesus was born.

So how did you do with the quiz? My guess is that most of you passed with flying colors. But perhaps the explanations above have given you some new insights about Jesus' birth that you had not known before. In any case, have a Merry Christmas!