

Christmas Bible Quiz ~ Answers

In contrast to the Easter story, the birth of Christ is told in just two Gospels, Matthew and Luke. It is in Matthew 1:18 to 2:12 (19 verses) and in Luke 1:26-40 and 2:1-20 (35 verses). Also, the 19 verses from Luke 2:21-39 tell of the time shortly after Jesus' birth. Over the years, many traditions (carols, manger scenes, children's stories, etc.) have come into being about Christmas that are misleading and, in some cases, just plain wrong. So some of these answers may surprise you. For each answer, the related scripture verse is cited.

1. When Mary became pregnant, Mary and Joseph were:

- A: married B: engaged C: just friends D: none of the above

Answer: B. This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was *pledged* to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. – Matt 1:18

2. When Mary became pregnant

- A: Joseph married her B: Joseph wanted to dissolve their relationship
C: Mary left Nazareth for a while D: an angel told them to go to Bethlehem
E: both B and C F: both B and D

Answer: E. (B) Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. – Matt 1:19

(C) At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ⁴⁰ where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. – Luke 1:39-40. Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. – Luke 1:56

3. Who directed Mary and Joseph to go to Bethlehem?

- A: Herod B: Caesar C: an angel D: the IRS

Answer: B. In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. – Luke 2:1

The distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem was about 70-80 miles and the trip would have taken 4 to 7 days.

4. Joseph's family was originally from

- A: Jerusalem B: Bethlehem C: Nazareth D: none of the above

Answer: B. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. – Luke 2:4

5. For the journey to Bethlehem Mary and Joseph

- A: walked B: Joseph walked and Mary rode a donkey C: took a bus D: The Bible does not say

Answer: D. They may have taken a pack animal with them to carry some of their supplies for the journey, but we just don't know. The traditional picture of Mary riding on a donkey may or may not be correct.

6. Who told Joseph to name the baby Jesus?

- A: Mary B: the chief priests and scribes C: an angel of the Lord D: Herod the king

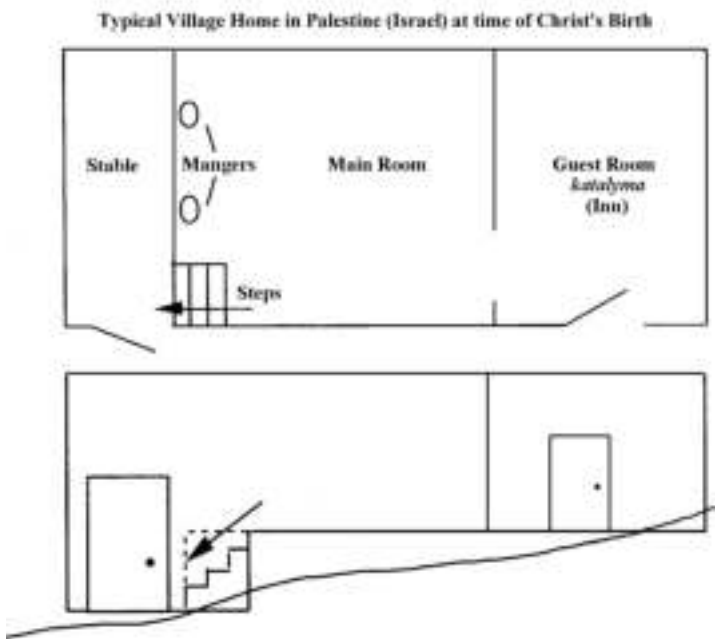
Answer: C. ²⁰ But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins." – Matt 1:20-21

7. What did the innkeeper say to Mary and Joseph?

- A: There's no room in the inn B: I have a stable out back C: both A and B D: none of the above

Answer: D. There is no innkeeper mentioned in the Bible. The wording of Luke 2:7 in most Bibles, "there was no room for them in the inn" is a misleading translation of the original Greek which read (loosely), there was no

space (*topos*) for them in the guest room or upper room (*katalyma*). This is finally corrected in the 2011 NIV. By the way, the word *katalyma* is the same word Jesus used in Luke 22:10-12 when he directs his disciples to prepare the guest room for the Passover meal. Moreover, the Greek word for public or commercial inn (*pandocheion*) in the parable of the Good Samaritan is a totally different word. So it seems quite clear that Mary and Joseph were intending to stay in the upper room or guest room of family or friends and not a public inn.



8. The baby Jesus was most likely born in a
 A: cave B: tent
 C: stable D: house

Answer: D. See discussion on Q 7 above and diagram at left. We know only what Luke records in 2:7 – She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them (NIV, 2011). According to Kenneth Bailey in the book, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, “the child was born, wrapped, and (literally) ‘put to bed’ (*anaklino*) in the living room in the manger that was either built into the floor or made of wood and located in the family living space at the end of the room.”

A stable is never mentioned in any scripture. Luke 2:7 with the word “manger” is the *only* indication in the Bible that Christ might have been born in a stable.

9. What animals were present at Jesus birth?

- A: cows, sheep and camels B: cows, chickens and donkeys
 C: lions, tigers, and bears D: the Bible does not say

Answer: D, the Bible does not say, although as is likely that the child was born in a peasant home with a manger (feeding trough) at the end of the living room, sheep, goats, and chickens might have been present.

10. What is a manger anyway?

- A: a small shed B: a feeding trough C: a place to keep hay D: a Greek term for a nursery

Answer: B

11. When did baby Jesus cry?

- A: when he saw the wise men B: whenever babies usually cry
 C: when the cattle started lowing D: no crying he makes

Answer: B. We read many places in the Bible that while on earth, Jesus was truly human in all regards.

12. How many angels spoke to the shepherd?

- A: a multitude B: one C: two—Gabriel and Michael D: who knows

Answer: B. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But *the* angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. – Luke 2:9-10 The angel is always referred to in the singular form.

13. What sign were the shepherds to look for?

- A: a star over a stable B: a barn outlined with Christmas lights
 C: a baby in a manger D: both A and C

Ans: C. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. – Luke 2:12

14. Just what is a “heavenly host?”

A: an angelic choir B: the welcoming angel in heaven C: an army of angels D: none of the above

Answer: C. ¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” – Luke 2:13-14

15. What song did the angels sing?

A: “O Little Town of Bethlehem” B: Handel’s Messiah
C: “Glory to God in the Highest” D: none of the above

Answer: D, although it might be argued that they were singing C (Glory to God in the highest) in Luke 2:14.

16. Who saw the star over Bethlehem?

A: Mary and Joseph B: the wise men C: shepherds D: both B and C E: none of the above

Answer: B, although one might argue that E is more correct because neither of the verses in Matthew that mention the star say anything about Bethlehem.

¹ After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” – Matt 2:1-2

⁹ After they had heard the king [Herod], they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. – Matt 2:9-10

Verse 9 can be confusing. The King James and many Bibles have it as follows, “the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.” If they saw a star in the east, it suggests they were coming from the west, which is clearly not possible as the only thing in the west is the Mediterranean Sea. Later Bible translations describe this more correctly as “a rising star” or “when it rose” or “in its rising.”

17. How many wise men (or magi) came to see Jesus?

A: One B: Three C: Twelve D: The Bible doesn’t say

Answer: D. All we know is that there were more than one because “magi” is plural and in Matthew they are referred to as we, they, and them. So, there were two or more—three, 10, 20—we just don’t know. The number three probably comes from the fact that three gifts were mentioned in Matthew 2:11.

18. What in the world are magi?

A: Persian tribal kings B: men of a sacerdotal caste C: magicians D: astrologers

Answer: D seems the most correct although all answers may be correct to some extent. From the 4th Century BC, magi was the plural term for a practitioner of magic, to include astrology, alchemy and other forms of esoteric knowledge which was – in the main – the ability to read the stars, and manipulate the fate that the stars foretold. Some translations actually refer to them as “astrologers” or “wise men who learned things from stars.” It’s hard to reconcile this with the teachings of Jesus and the entire Bible, but we often don’t understand God’s ways and plans. To get around the negative connotation of the word “magi,” some Bible translations refer to them as “wise men,” but this is a poor translation of the Greek even though less offensive to some readers. I personally believe that “astrologers” is correct and vividly demonstrates that Jesus is to be a savior to all who believe and is to be worshiped by all people, not just Jews or, later, Christians.

19. When the wise men (magi) bought their gifts to Jesus, they found him in:

A: a stable B: a church C: a house D: an inn

Answer: C. On coming to the *house*, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. – Matt 2:11

20. For about 250 years after Christ's birth, Christmas was celebrated on:

A: January 6 B: March 21 C: May 20 D: It was not celebrated at all

Answer: D. For the first three centuries, Christmas wasn't in December—or on the calendar at all. If observed at all, the celebration of Christ's birth was usually lumped with Epiphany (January 6), one of the church's earliest established feasts. Some church leaders even opposed the idea of a birth celebration. Origen (c.185-c.254) preached that it would be wrong to honor Christ in the same way Pharaoh and Herod were honored. Birthdays were for pagan rulers and pagan gods.

Not all of Origen's contemporaries agreed that Christ's birthday shouldn't be celebrated, and some began to speculate on the date (actual records were apparently long lost). Clement of Alexandria (c.150-c.215) favored May 20 but noted that others had argued for April 18, April 19, and May 28. Hippolytus (c.170-c.236) championed January 2. November 17, November 20, and March 25 all had backers as well. A Latin treatise written around 243 pegged it at March 21, because that was believed to be the date on which God created the sun. Polycarp (c.69-c.155) had followed the same line of reasoning to conclude that Christ's birth and baptism most likely occurred on Wednesday, because the sun was created on the fourth day.

The eventual choice of December 25, made perhaps as early as 273, reflects a convergence of Origen's concern about pagan gods and the church's identification of God's son with the celestial sun. December 25 already hosted two other related festivals: *natalis solis invicti* (the Roman "birth of the unconquered sun"), and the birthday of Mithras, the Iranian "Sun of Righteousness" whose worship was popular with Roman soldiers. The winter solstice, another celebration of the sun, fell just a few days earlier (Dec 20 or 21). Seeing that pagans were already exalting deities with some parallels to the true deity, church leaders decided to commandeer the date and introduce a new festival.

Western Christians first officially celebrated Christmas on December 25 in 336, after Emperor Constantine had declared Christianity the empire's favored religion. Eastern churches, however, held on to January 6 as the date for Christ's birth and his baptism. Most easterners eventually adopted December 25, celebrating Christ's birth on the earlier date and his baptism on the latter (Jan 6), but the Armenian church still celebrates his birth on January 6. Incidentally, some groups in the Western church celebrate Epiphany on January 6, but as the arrival date of the Magi rather than as the date of Christ's baptism. However, Jan. 6 seems way too early for the arrival of the Magi. More likely they arrived 6 to 18 months after Christ's birth, which is consistent with Herod's order to kill all male babies under 2 years old (Matthew 2:16).

Another wrinkle was added in the sixteenth century when Pope Gregory devised a new calendar, which was unevenly adopted. The Eastern Orthodox and some Protestants retained the Julian calendar, which meant they celebrated Christmas 13 days later (Jan. 7) than their Gregorian counterparts. Most—but not all—of the Christian world now agrees on the Gregorian calendar and the December 25 date.

More about the origins of Christmas and St. Nicholas

The pagan origins of the Christmas date, as well as pagan origins for many Christmas customs (gift-giving and merrymaking come from Roman Saturnalia; greenery, lights, and charity from the Roman New Year; Yule logs and various foods from Teutonic feasts), have always fueled arguments against the holiday. "It's just paganism wrapped with a Christian bow," naysayers argue. But while kowtowing to worldliness must always be a concern for Christians, the church has generally viewed efforts to reshape culture—including holidays—positively. As a theologian asserted in 320, "We hold this day holy, not like the pagans because of the birth of the sun, but because of him who made it."

And then there's the issue of Santa Claus who many Christians say should not be associated with Christmas at all. But consider the origin of Santa Claus (this from the stnicholascenter.org). The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara. At the time the area was Greek and is now on the southern coast of Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to the those in need, his love for children, and his concern

for sailors and ships.

Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who ruthlessly persecuted Christians, Bishop Nicholas suffered for his faith, was exiled and imprisoned. The prisons were so full of bishops, priests, and deacons, there was no room for the real criminals—murderers, thieves and robbers. After his release, Nicholas attended the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. He died December 6, AD 343 in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church, where a unique relic, called manna, formed in his grave. This liquid substance, said to have healing powers, fostered the growth of devotion to Nicholas. The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration, St. Nicholas Day, December 6th (December 19 on the Julian Calendar), a feast day still recognized and celebrated in most European countries. Traditional celebrations included gifts left in children's shoes (from which American Christmas stockings developed). Good children receive treats—candies, cookies, apples and nuts—while naughty children receive lumps of coal.

Saint Nicholas was recognized as a saint long before the Roman Catholic Church began regularizing canonization procedures in the late 10th century (at that time local bishops canonized saints; in the late 1100s canonization in the Roman Catholic Church became the responsibility of the Pope). In fact, Saint Nicholas' sainthood pre-dates considerably the 1054 schism between the Eastern and Western churches. Though many people seem to think the Roman Catholic Church is definitive when it comes to determining saints' status, Orthodox, Anglicans and others have their own standards for recognizing and commemorating saints.

Before formal canonization procedures, people venerated those who had been exemplars of the faith in their local areas. As a saint's reputation grew beyond a local area, the saint received more widespread observance. Thus, popular acclamation, or people's unanimous consent, moved the saint into the wider practice of the church, without a formal process. No biblical figures, including Jesus' disciples, later apostles, nor the early saints of the church, were canonized through a formal process.

Unfortunately over the centuries the depiction of St. Nicholas (and Santa Claus) changed considerably. Today, Santa Claus is generally depicted as a portly, joyous, white-bearded man, sometimes with spectacles, wearing a red coat with white collar and cuffs, white-cuffed red trousers, and black leather belt and boots (images of him rarely have a beard with no moustache). This image became popular in the United States and Canada in the 19th century due to the significant influence of Clement Clarke Moore's 1823 poem "A Visit From St. Nicholas" and of caricaturist and political cartoonist Thomas Nast. This image has been maintained and reinforced through song, radio, television, children's books and films, and people rarely remember or even know about the real St. Nicholas.

© David H. Ahl, 2012 ~ www.BibleStudyMen.com