

The Meaning of Christmas

A) I'm so excited that it's Christmas. It's great to have the time off!

B) I love all the bright lights and the happy music.

C) Me too! It's so fun to get gifts and give gifts. I like to guess what's in the package.

B) It's pretty fun to be in Texas for this holiday. But you know, it feels like it's Christmas around the whole world. On TV you can see people of so many ethnic backgrounds celebrating the holiday.

A) Well that's because Christmas is for everybody, no matter what country we are from or what language we speak.

C) So where did this celebration come from anyway?

A) Would you like to hear the story behind it all?

C) I sure would.

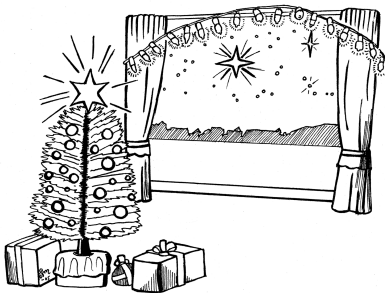
B) Me too!

A) Well how about you two name something you've seen over the last couple of weeks and I will tell the story around whatever you name. You are going to hear the fascinating story about the birth of a very intriguing individual named Jesus.

Stars and Prophecies

B) Okay, how about we begin with the beautiful lights strung all around the houses. I've been driving around the neighborhoods and some of them are just incredible. Oh yeah, and the star that's almost always on the top of a Christmas tree. What about that?

A) Well, for centuries astronomers have studied stars and so have those who try to predict the future. About two thousand years ago, a group of philosophers in the middle of Asia, called wise men, were studying the stars. Traditions and prophecies told about a great person who would be born to turn away from everything bad and would help people find freedom from suffering. In those prophecies there was something about a star



The wise men studied ancient prophecies from where Jerusalem is. These predicted the unique birth of a ruler whose compassionate character would shine like a star. They could tell they were right at the date these prophecies would come true.

C) So what happened next?

A) One night they were startled to see a new star in the skies. It was not a planet. It was not stationary like normal stars. It seemed to move from where they were towards Israel. They wondered, Could this be a sign that the predicted Rescuer had been born? They prepared some costly gifts, got on camels, and followed the star.

When they arrived in Jerusalem, the wise men asked, “Where is the newborn King? We saw His star in the East and we’ve come to worship Him.” Everybody was surprised to see these wealthy wise men show up and ask such things. Nobody seemed to know the answer. In fahe present ruler, King Herod, was really troubled at the thought of a rival to his throne.

Finally a religious leader pulled out the prophecy from the scriptures and told them this special birth would take place in the small village of Bethlehem. King Herod spoke up, “Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, so I can come and worship Him also.” He was actually planning to murder the baby.

B) That’s terrible! Sounds like politics in some countries I know about!

A) That night they saw the star again. They traveled to Bethlehem and found the newborn baby. They found out His name was Jesus

C) Does that name have a meaning?

A) It sure does. It means “the one who rescues.”

B) So that’s why we see so many stars and lights at Christmas time.

Gifts at Christmas

C) Okay, now I get to ask the next question. What about the fact that people around the world give gifts right before the international New Year. Is it connected to this story?

A) It sure is. Remember I said those wise men brought gifts with them. In fact they had three special gifts. They gave gold, frankincense and myrrh.

C) That’s awesome. I love getting and giving gifts. It’s such a great way to show love and appreciation. My parents love it because they feel appreciated. I like it because it shows me my friends care. Sometimes even my boss gives me something at Christmas to let me know he still wants me around!



A) At the time of Jesus' birth, gifts such as gold, frankincense, and myrrh were only given to a king. These wise men were truly convinced that this little baby was someone very special. They showed their respect and honor in the best way they could. It is part of the reason people give gifts at Christmas time.

In the meantime, King Herod was preparing a sword instead of a gift. But first, do you have some other questions?

Surprise in a Stable

B) Yeah, what about Santa Clause. Where does he fit into the story? What about all those flying reindeer?

A) That's a good question. Those are traditional stories that really have nothing to do with this the original story behind Christmas, which we know really happened.

B) I thought so, but the pretend, the make-believe can be confusing. How come you are so sure still story happened?

A) There are two ancient documents that tell about Jesus' birth called The Gospel According to Matthew and The Gospel According to Luke. Thousands of scholars consider them highly trustworthy since we have hundreds of copies that date back to near the time this story happened.

B) Okay, so never mind about Santa Clause. Let's get back to Jesus. I've also seen the statues in people's yards with the mother, father, baby Jesus, and lots of animals around. What's with the animals? It looks like a barn!

A) So, the mother of Jesus was named Mary. Before the wise men had come, she and her husband made the very long trip to Bethlehem. It was painful because she was pregnant and riding on the back of a donkey and was about to deliver. King Herod had demanded that everyone return to the place of his ancestors' birth for a census.

When they arrived, they searched everywhere for a place to stay. So many people were visiting there wasn't any room anywhere. Mary began to have labor pains and Joseph desperately pleaded for a room. No one took pity on them. You know how people often are, they want to make a profit more than they want to help. Per

Finally, one man allowed them to use his animal stable. Mary lay down on the straw exhausted. There was no midwife, no doctor or family to help her. It was just smelly animals all around her. She gave birth to a son, and wrapped him in a few strips of cloth, and soothed him to sleep in a feeding trough!

Hardly anyone noticed the birth, yet today, in many nations around the world, this story is acted out in plays and the story is told over and over.

C) But why? I still don't get it. If this baby was really important, why would He be born in something like a barn with animals?

An Angel with a Startling Message

A) You have to understand who this Jesus was. The history in the scriptures tells us when Mary was engaged to marry Joseph, something very unusual happened. An angel appeared to Mary. She was very frightened. The angel reassured her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

C) Oh yeah, I’ve seen a lot of Christmas cards with angels on them. That’s got to be connected.

A) Sure. But can you imagine actually seeing a real one. When Mary heard an angel tell her she would have a baby she said, “How can this be since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “Nothing is impossible with God. The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you.”

B) It sounds pretty strange, kind of unbelievable.

A) Yes. Mary thought so too. However, she remembered the prophecies in the ancient scriptures that promised the Rescuer would be born miraculously to a virgin. She probably wondered, Has God really chosen me? Is God really finally going to do something about all our suffering? So she said, “Let it happen to me just like you said.” Then the angel left her.

B) I can’t imagine how Mary must have felt? She must have been excited to know she had been chosen to be the mother of the Rescuer. I know I would be. But I’d also be really afraid about what people would say. How could anybody believe her when she said she was pregnant through God’s power?

A) Exactly. When Joseph heard, he was very upset. He had trusted that Mary was a pure and loyal lady. He was disappointed and shamed to hear she was pregnant. But he was a kind man. He didn’t want to disgrace her publicly. He planned to break the engagement privately.

That night, an angel appeared to him in a dream saying, “Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. This baby is truly conceived by the Holy Spirit. She will have a son. Name Him Jesus, because this name means the One who saves people from their sins.”

Joseph wasn’t ashamed or upset anymore. He understood that this baby was God becoming a man just as prophesied. He took Mary as his wife. This is the reason that at Christmas time you see pictures of angels and a mother holding a baby along with many animals.

A Time for Singing

C) Alright. I’ve got one more. What about all the songs? The radio’s full of Christmas songs! Does that have anything to do with the story?



A) Yes! Some of the poorest people in the country of Israel were shepherds. They often slept outside to protect their sheep. On the night of Jesus’ birth, a group of shepherds suddenly came running through the streets from outside the town where they’d been watching the sheep. They shouted to everyone they met along the road, “An important baby has been born tonight! We were startled by a bright light and suddenly saw an angel appear. He said to us, ‘Do not be

afraid. I bring you really exciting news for all people, everywhere. Today a Rescuer has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord.

In the sky they suddenly saw a whole group of angels and the angels started singing. Today, no one knows the tune, but some of the words were recorded. “Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, goodwill to men.” There is something in the birth of this child that makes people want to write new songs and sing. That is why we hear so many special songs at Christmas time.

The shepherds found baby Jesus lying in that barn-like place with animals. They bowed down and worshipped Him.

B) So why was He born in such a place?

A) The story says that God wanted us to know we are not alone as we suffer in this world. Jesus was God becoming a human like us so that He could experience our poverty, our struggles and we would know that God understands. He gave up the peacefulness and beauty of heaven to experience the hardship of humans. If He had been born in a palace, the poor would not think they could approach Him.

An Angry King and a Close Escape

B) So what about that King Herod who wanted to murder Jesus?

A) An angel appeared to the wise men and told them not to go back to King Herod. Then the angel woke Joseph and urged him to flee with Mary and Jesus to the country of Egypt since Herod would try to kill the baby.

When King Herod realized the wise men had tricked him, his fear grew to intense anger and he ordered soldiers to search for and kill all the baby boys, age two years and younger. Herod’s selfishness and greed caused intense suffering, just as those same qualities cause misery and distress every day.

B) Yeah, it really makes me mad when greedy people ruin a country. The refugee situation is so rough in many places. I’m amazed that Jesus even experienced life like them. He really did become like us. So what happened to Jesus after that?

A) Jesus was safely hidden in the country of Egypt. Time passed and Herod died. An angel once again appeared to Joseph telling him to return to Israel where Jesus would grow up to rescue people from the worst things they face. In a few years, Jesus’ wise preaching and miracles of healing attracted thousands. People were very grateful because Jesus had power to cast out evil spirits. He fed the poor and was a friend to foreigners from any nationality. In time, jealous and corrupt leaders crucified Him on a cross. But He did not stay dead.

C) What? What do you mean?

A) The ancient documents say that Jesus rose from the dead. More than five hundred people actually saw Him. They went out and told people about His power over death and to trust Him to help with all of their problems.

B) Well that's a lot to think about. I'll have to check out the story more.

A) Yes you should. In the meantime, what good thoughts can you take away from hearing this story today?

C) Well, I want to be like Jesus, helping lots of people.

B) Yes, I don't want to be like King Herod. Jealousy and greed cause to many problems. Giving gifts and giving of your time and love is where it's at!

C) I guess that's what Christmas is about. It's the gift of compassion. If we all lived like that it would be Christmas every day of the year!

A) That's a great idea. I think we'll all know now more what it really means when we say, "Merry Christmas!"

B and C) Merry Christmas!

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