

The Christmas Story

This is just a short program for Christmas based on the reading of the well-known Christmas story.

The intent is to give another insight into the often read story and try to see things in another perspective. It is intended to have someone read the Scripture given in italics and then have someone else read the explanation along with singing of carols.



Caesar Augustus

“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.” From Luke 2

Politics and religion make strange bed fellows. Caesar Augustus is the first name mentioned in the familiar story of Christmas in Luke. However, Caesar Augustus was not Palestinian, nor Jew, nor shepherd, nor wise. He was 1,500 miles away in Rome and is the one that some think started the whole train of events by calling for a census that led to the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem as predicted many years earlier by Isaiah. Would God be able to use someone as wicked as Caesar Augustus?

We all know that under normal circumstances, Christ would have been born in Nazareth. Let’s study a little more about this man that helped make the prophecy of God come true, regardless of his willingness to do so.

About sixty years earlier, the Roman general Pompey, had conquered Palestine. At the time of Christ’s birth, it was under the kingship of Herod the great, but he was only a puppet to Rome. Caesar Augustus was the grandnephew and adopted heir of Julius Caesar, Rome’s first emperor. He had a bloody showdown with his arch rival, Mark Antony. He ruled for forty-four years. Some of those names should be familiar to you!!! He was ruthless in his reign and kept a tight rope on all his subjects. This is given as the apparent reason for his census.

Yes, he was the one who put out the decree for the census. When Caesar Augustus died, he would have been shocked to know that his date of death 14 A.D. was based on what happened some years earlier on a silent night in Bethlehem when a young couple had to make a journey for the census he had ordered. God works in mysterious ways, but the greatest was not the order of Caesar Augustus or any earthly king but by the birth of a baby to a very innocent, and unknown young couple.

The Courtship

“And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.”

From Luke 2.

The courtship of Mary and Joseph. We don't often think about their courtship. The men did not usually think about marriage until they were approximately 25 years old. The girls however, were often picked out to be married when they had just come into puberty. In fact, at one time, Caesar Augustus (good old Caesar Augustus again!!!) was upset because he had too many bachelors and they were not populating the country fast enough for him so he decreed that girls must become betrothed between the ages of 10 and 12.

According to histories found of circumstances during that time and other findings, Mary and Joseph probably knew each other. After all, Nazareth was a small town, and both of them were descendents of David. We don't really know which of David's wives either one descended from. However, at the appropriate time, Joseph would have told his parents he had an interest in marrying Mary, and Mary would probably have told her parents that she thought Joseph was pretty nice. Then, Joseph parents would meet with Mary's parents and they would discuss the matter. Then the fathers would agree to a marriage contract between the children and this would be the formal betrothal that we would know today. It could only be broken by divorce. And if Joseph had died before they were formally married, Mary would have been his lawful widow.

When Mary told him of her pregnancy, he had three choices. He could marry her fast and hope the wagging tongues didn't count the time because it would have taken about three months to get a wedding together. They just couldn't run off and elope!!! He could publicly divorce her as an adulteress and she would have been stoned. Some

authorities say he would also have been stoned because he was also guilty) Or, he could quietly have the contract set aside for a time while she went away secretly had her baby before returning home. In this we have to give Joseph a lot of credit.

Did Joseph and Mary arrive early in Bethlehem or right before Christ was born? We don't know.

There are brothers and sisters mentioned. Were they also the children of Mary and Joseph? Some religions say the brothers and sisters were Joseph's children by a previous marriage, and some say they were the children of another Mary who was the sister of the Virgin Mary because they have always had Mary remain as a Virgin. So the other children would have been cousins, not brothers and sisters. Theologians continue to debate and write, and we know that these things are not explicit in the New Testament, but what is definite is what we believe. We believe that Christ was born to Mary and Joseph, that He is Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, and of His Kingdom, there will be no end. Does anything else matter?

The Angels and the Shepherds

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.’” Luke 2:8-18

Angels singing? Shepherds wondering about? A baby lying in a manger. Now really! Well, what about those angels singing? Why not singing angels? No one has been able to explain away the use of angels by God in the Christmas story. A child believes in angels without any hesitation. We need to have the faith of a child when it comes to the Bible. A child believes in the tooth fairy and Santa Claus until we tell them differently, or someone else does. Why can't adults accept the angels as just something that God did and let it go at that? We accept other miracles. To date researchers have not been able to explain away the angels in the Bible. Isn't that interesting?

The birth of the Baby, was it spring when he was born? Some say that's when the shepherds were in the fields? History tells us that parts of rural Palestine still have the flocks in the fields year round foraging for food. History tells us that shepherds were considered worthless, good for nothings, so low that their testimony was not even accepted in a court. But, before we think too lowly of them, let's remember that Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and even David were at one time “just shepherds.”

The names of the shepherds who witnessed the Nativity will doubtless never be known; but we can certainly respect them. Perhaps it was fortunate that they were common

laymen, like you and like me, for had they been scholars or theologians, they would likely first have held a debate instead of rushing into Bethlehem after the glad announcement. The conservatives insist that they would never leave the sheep, and the liberals label the angelic appearance a mere hallucination. No one has inquired if a shepherd stayed behind to watch the sheep while the others were gone. I don't know about you, but I have no doubt that the sheep were well cared for while the shepherds were gone.

Did the shepherds go to a house or a shed behind an inn. I don't know for sure, but I know they followed the advice given to them by that angel. Do you believe the angels were there on that wonderful night so many years ago who brought the message of hope the world had awaited for centuries? Do you mind being compared with shepherds? After all, they heard the word and followed without hesitation. May we always do the same as the shepherds. May we follow and believe angels without hesitation .

That Star!!! Those “Wise Men”!!!

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born and they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet.” Matthew 2:1-5

We had Jews, Gentiles, rich and poor, local herdsman and angels, and far away travelers at the first Christmas – but no exact details!!! We know it is recorded that Christ was born in the “fullness of time.” What is “the fullness of time?” Was it a full moon? Why weren’t these things important enough for some scholar to record? Was Christ born at 1 B.C. or 1 A.D.? Supposedly the calendar wasn’t formally accepted until the 600’s! Some people have determined when they think it happened by the presence of a certain star, or a certain comet, or a certain place and time when two planets would have been very close and had a special brightness. To date nothing is for sure. How ironic that the date that has divided our reckoning of time into years B.C. and A.D. is itself almost undatable!

And about those “Wise Men.” Were there three? Were they wise or foolish? Were they from the Orient. In the 6th Century, someone gave them three names!!! So, the world assumed there were three. Not only were they given names, but skin colors, and even their age was given! Where did they go? We don’t know. But, one thing we know. We know where we are going and we know with whom we will be going! Praise the Lord and His all-knowing wisdom that only gives us as much as we can handle.