

the Nativity

LUKE. THE BIRTH OF JESUS

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.... Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and 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 heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!' When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



MATTHEW: THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.' When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

FEATURES OF THE NATIVITY STORY NOT IN THE BIBLE

1. No donkey.
2. Didn't arrive on the night of the birth.
3. There was no barn or stable. The manger suggests a barn, but in olden days, mangers were part of a house because animals were kept on the lower floor for protection and warmth.
4. There was no inn since the word "inn" actually translates as "guest room." No inn means no inn keeper either.
5. "Furthermore, it is likely that Mary and Joseph actually stayed in a house with relatives, not behind some kind of Bible-times hotel." This is especially true since Joseph was of royal lineage, and no one would let a pregnant woman go unattended. Christmas from this point of view, means comfort of family. About inclusion. Not cold and dark isolation with strangers.
6. Jesus did not cry as in "Away in a manger."
7. Angels did not sing to the shepherds nor were angels at Jesus' birth.
8. They were not 3 kings. They were magi or wise men and it doesn't say how many there were. Just because there were 3 gifts, doesn't mean there were three men.
9. The magi visited Jesus at his home when he was older, not on Christmas.
10. The magi did not ride camels and we don't know where they came from.
11. "Was Jesus born on December 25, or in December at all? ... The Bible does not specify a date or month. One problem with December is that it would be unusual for shepherds to be "abiding in the field" at this cold time of year when fields were unproductive. The normal practice was to keep the flocks in the fields from Spring to Autumn. Also, winter would likely be an especially difficult time for pregnant Mary to travel the long distance from Nazareth to Bethlehem (70 miles). A more probable time would be late September, the time of the annual Feast of Tabernacles, when such travel was commonly accepted. Thus, it is rather commonly believed (though not certain) that Jesus' birth was around the last of September."

Sources: "Away in a Manger, but Not in a Barn." Gary A. Byers. Bible Study Magazine, pages 44-46 as found on line at BibleStudyMagazine.com/Renew. "What are some of the most common misconceptions about Jesus Christ's birth?" at: <http://www.christiananswers.net/christmas/mythsaboutchristmas.html>