

21T20c Christmas Myths- 3 kings

Hello my friends. Thank you for joining me today @ the PUNLA Coffee Table for the Christmas Myth of the three Kings.

I love the Christmas season with all the traditions and gatherings of family and friends. It is truly a beautiful time of year. I love to see all the lights and decorations. But often we forget there is a reason for the season. That reason is Jesus. The birth of Jesus to be exact. For Christians we have lots of traditions about Christmas; the Nativity, the Star, the Wisemen but did you know that many parts of our traditional Nativity story are not actually in the Bible. These are the Christmas Myths.

What do you remember about the Christmas story? Do you remember the 3 kings or 3 wisemen? Growing up, our church like many others had a Christmas show. The full Christmas story played out by children. Mary and Joseph and of course baby Jesus in a dirty old manger. Lots of animals in the stable, then shepherds and 3 rich guys. Oh, I mean 3 kings or sometimes they called them wisemen. Everyone in the stable to visit baby Jesus.

As a kid, I was always confused if they were kings or wisemen or both. And if they were kings, why were they together by themselves. This just never made sense to me.

Last time we read the Christmas story from the gospel of Luke 2:1-7 birth of Jesus. Luke 2:8-20 is the story of the shepherds, Luke 2:21 is the circumcision of Jesus at 8 days old according to Jewish tradition. But no wisemen Did I miss something. Luke chapter 2 goes on with no mention of the three wisemen or kings.

The gospel of Matthew also has a short account of Jesus birth, Matthew 1:18-25 but no mention of shepherds, an Inn or even the trip to Bethlehem. Matthew Chapter 2 begins *¹Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ²saying, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him.”*

This is more like it, wisemen. In fact, many translations use the word magi instead of wisemen. I could not find any support for the concept these were kings. Magi more closely means magicians, astrologer or wisemen. Whoever they were they were educated men who recognized something in the night sky that told them to go pay their respects to a future king of the Jews?

After they stopped in Jerusalem to speak with Herod, then they went to find Jesus. I've heard a lot of people ask if they were so smart why did they stop to see Herod before going to visit Jesus. Think about this. These are foreign dignitaries, of course when you enter a country you should gain permission from the ruler before wandering around. This is probably what the Magi were doing paying respect to Herod since he was the ruler. But they probably already knew where to go.

Matthew goes on to say. *Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. (Matthew 2:7-12 NKJV)*

Did you catch the subtle way Matthew tells this story. Herod sent them to Bethlehem but did they go to Bethlehem? I don't think we can be certain. But did you catch verse 11. *"¹¹And when they had come into the house"* wait a second, they aren't visiting Jesus in some stable or barn or even at an Inn. They are at a house where Jesus is. There are a couple of clues in the Bible.

First, let's take a quick look at Luke's version of the story in Luke Chapter 2. Verses 1-20 tell the story of the birth of Jesus, Verse 21 is the Circumcision of Jesus, Verses 22-38 Jesus presented at the Temple this would have been 40 days after his birth according to Levitical Law for purification after childbirth. Then Verse 39-40, *So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him. (Luke 2:39-40 NKJV)*

So according to Luke Jesus, Mary and Joseph returned to Nazareth after he was presented at the Temple, no flight to Egypt in this account. If we assume both accounts are accurate, then Jesus was living in Nazareth when the Magi visited him. Now of course, Mary and Joseph could have been visiting family in Bethlehem when the Magi came. But, Either way, the Magi must have visited a young Jesus.

Matthew actually refers to the child Jesus, this is translated from the Greek word (paidion) meaning young child. This is more like a toddler. In the gospel of Luke when Jesus is born the word baby is used from the Greek word (brephos) meaning a newborn child. So it does not appear the Magi were at the birth of Jesus but came sometime later. In fact, the Bible gives us another clue in Matthew 2, Herod inquires from the Magi when the star appeared which was at the birth of Jesus. And Later in verses 16-18 Herod kills all the baby boys 2 years and younger in Bethlehem. This seems to indicate that Jesus was probably around two years old when the Magi came.

Another point Matthew makes is that the Magi had seen the Christmas star. Now I've heard a lot of talk about the Christmas star. Why didn't the Jews see it, maybe it was just a sign in the nighttime sky, maybe planets or a comet. All of this is wild speculation. Every English translation I looked at used the word star. The word translated as star in verse 9 is from the Greek word (astēr) meaning star. Does not seem like a controversy

here. But what kind of star moves the way the Bible describes it, or comes to rest over where Jesus is. No matter how I looked at the translations or the Greek words, it always seemed like its telling of a bright light that moved showing them the exact house to enter to find Jesus. This is obviously supernatural, and I can't find support for this being anything less than the Bible says it is. Truly amazing.

Did you notice anything else in the story, no mention of three magi? Three gifts yes but the group was probably much larger. First, there is no way these three guys traveled by themselves if they were so important. Second, just because only three gifts are mentioned does not mean they each gave one. It is possible that there were several magi. The Bible seems to infer more than one but two is still more than one. In the end, we have no idea how many Magi came and what gifts they brought other than the three mentioned in the Bible. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Church tradition even gives the three Magi names but this obviously not in the Bible story.

Another interesting side story, these gifts were worth a great deal of money. Joseph and Mary were very poor. Then suddenly God tells them to flee to Egypt. The Magi's gifts effectively funded this trip. God provided in a supernatural way. It makes me smile to think of how God uses the lives of real men to make His story come together in truly miraculous ways.

Last who were the Magi. Well we don't know. I've heard a lot of speculations and the most probable I've heard was these Magi probably came from either Babylon or Susa (the Persian Capital). The reason this seems most probable is wisemen in these cities would have had knowledge of the Hebrew scriptures from Daniel and Modecia as told in the book of Daniel and Ester. Many Jews never returned to Israel and instead remained in the cities of Persia and Babylon. Still these men traveled a long way. Susa was 900 miles from Jerusalem and Babylon was nearly 1700 miles from Jerusalem. So, if the Magi came from one of these cities, then they traveled for many weeks if not months to see Jesus. Just so you can understand typical travel time in Bible times was approximately 100 miles a week depending on the terrain.

Now I hope I did not offend anyone today. but no matter how nice or sweet the myth is, it is still not true. No one likes being told their fond childhood memories are based on myths. Well, I'm sorry but if it's not in the Bible version of the Christmas story it is a myth.

You are probably asking why do I care? Well, my simple answer is it is not true if it is not in the Bible. But I think the bigger issue is, new Christians often learn these traditions and whole heartedly believe them. It becomes an integral part of their belief in Christ. But, then they find out it is not true and it can cause them to question everything they believe in.

A sweet-nice story is great but not if it causes someone to stumble in their relationship with Jesus. If this, is you, stay with me it gets better?

Truth is still truth and there is only one version of the truth.

So let me summarize what we talked about today. We discussed a few Christmas Nativity Myths. So, no Wisemen at the birth of baby Jesus. And we cannot know how many or what number of gifts they brought. We can't be sure where they came from or when they visited Jesus. We don't even know for certain where they visited Jesus. It might have been Bethlehem or may be Nazereth. We cannot be certain because the Bible does not specifically tell us. And I guess we don't need to know.

All we can do is read this beautiful story as it is written and try not to add our own extra stuff.

None of this diminishes the beauty or significance of the birth of Jesus. The birth of Jesus and His early life still satisfies all the prophecies about the messiah without any of these little extras. These sweet little embellishments and miss-translations over the centuries are typical of family traditions. But, I contend truth is still better than fiction. I actually like the concept of the star appearing at His birth and a few highly educated people recognizing the significance. Enough to travel a great distance to see Him and give Him gifts. Even though this is not really part of the true Christmas story, it is still part of the greatest story ever told because it's true.

I hope you enjoyed these Christmas Myths as we looked at the greatest story ever told and the amazing truths which are far better than the myths.

Let's Pray

Father God.

I pray these things in your name Lord Jesus, Amen

As always if you liked the message click like, you can leave comments here or our website or email me. And please subscribe, if you want to be notified when we post new videos, click the notification bell.

See you next time @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. God bless.