

1. In which books of the Bible do we find the “Christmas story”?

Matthew and Luke are the only two places to keep record of the story. Mark and John both begin with the character of John the baptist, skipping right over any special mention of a virgin birth or likewise.

2. What is the name of the angel who appeared to Joseph?

The name of the angel who appears to Joseph is not given. Matthew 1:20 only mentions that “an angel of the Lord” without specifying a name. In Luke 1:26 we are told that Gabriel is the name of the angel who appeared to Mary, but he is not given any appearance to Joseph in this version of the story.

3. How many women are mentioned in the genealogies of Jesus?

Matthew 1 lists 4 women.

- 1) 1:3 Tamar was the woman who seduced her father-in-law because he refused to allow her a chance to have children
- 2) 1:5 Rahab was a Canaanite gentile who was a prostitute within the city of Jericho when it fell
- 3) 1:5 Ruth was a Moabite and gentile, also the great-grandmother of king David
- 4) 1:6 “the wife of Uriah” or Bathsheba is a woman who committed adultery with the King.
- 5) 1:16 Mary, the mother of Jesus

Luke lists no women.

4. What was Mary's relation to Joseph at the time of Jesus' birth?

Matthew claims that she was his wife. After deciding not to divorce her for unfaithfulness during their betrothal he says that he took her into his home – a gesture which would have made the rest of the nearby people believe they had been married.

Luke only mentions Mary being the betrothed of Joseph and gives no more information than this.

5. How did Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem?

Luke does not mention how they traveled, only that they did so. We do know that they were poor – or at least had not brought much of their belongings to Jerusalem – and Joseph was not a farmer, so it is very unlikely that they would have owned a donkey. And if they had, then most likely Joseph would have been expected to ride on it.

6. Why were Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth?

Luke 2:1 tells us that it was due to the Roman census. However, he also tells us that “..each to his own town.” Being from the family of David, it would have been natural for this to be their home but for them to be up in Nazareth due to Joseph's profession. He was a builder and there was significant Roman work going on up in the north of the country at that time where he could have found employment.

7. Why did the innkeeper send Mary and Joseph to the stable for the birth of Jesus?

A double-trick question: there is no innkeeper in the story, neither is there a stable. There is no mention of any such thing in relation to Jesus' birth. All we are told is that the inn was full, so Mary laid Jesus in a manger. It was common for animals to bed down in the courtyard or even the houses of town depending on the time of year. Poorer people and travelers would have been likely to gather around the town square in hopes of hospitality (observe the behavior of the angels who visit Lot and similar tales throughout the scripture and the Middle East) from family or pious people. While there, mangers to feed the livestock would have been spread around in front of houses and the inn. Mary appropriated one of these to place the newborn child.

8. When did the kings from the East come to visit Jesus?

Matthew 2 does not tell us when they came. Moreover, he does not tell us that they were kings. They were “magi” from which we now derive the word “mage”. The word comes from Persian and is a synonym for the word translated in the Old Testament as astrologer or soothsayer. The Hebrew term means, more accurately “intelligent, skillful, artful or cunning” person. We know they arrived at the earliest about 40 days after Jesus' birth, since he was presented at the temple there for his redemption but that the family fled to Egypt immediately following their visit. The traditional number and names given to them in the West are Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar. In Syria they are named Gushnasaph, Hormisdas and Larvandad. Other trios of names are Hormizdah, Perozdh and Yazdegerd or Basanter, Karsudan and Hor among others.

Acts 8:9 describes Simon as a magus – a sorcerer. In Acts 13:6-12 Elymas Barjesus is given the same description as well.

9. What did the angels do when they visited the shepherds?

They spoke with them, praised God and spoke. There is no indication in the narratives given that the angels actually sang their praises – though angelic singing is mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, they are more often described as praising.

10. What did Mary and Joseph do 8 days after the birth of Jesus?

Had him circumcised and named him Jesus.

11. What did Mary and Joseph do 40 days after the birth of Jesus?

Took him to the temple to have him redeemed and also to make the offering of two turtledoves for the cleansing of the mother. There they were greeted by Anna and Simeon – both old people who had retired into the temple to assist in worship.

12. What happened after the visitors from the East arrived, and what impact might it have had on Jesus' later life and development?

At the warning of an angel they took the child and fled from Herod's kingdom into Egypt until after Herod had died. Egypt was the source of both the best education in the region as well as the source of most magical knowledge. Anyone who later learned of Jesus' time spent in Egypt may have been tempted to believe his feats of healing and so on were the result of knowledge he acquired there. Also, many of the greatest Jewish scholars were located in Egypt at that time. By the time he was 12 he was amazing the teachers in Jerusalem with his knowledge – people from Galilee were well known for their simple ways and lack of education. But if Jesus had lived for a while in Egypt it is possible he may have learned from some of the great scholars in that part of the world.