

Christmas Eve – "Fact Checking Christmas"

We are living in a time where it is hard to know that what you're seeing or hearing is real. So much deception these days, especially with the advancement of A.I. What can you believe anymore? We've all been duped into thinking something was real that was absolutely fake.

- I saw a video of a deer jumping through someone's kitchen window. I thought, 'Wow... they're finally coming for us.' Then someone commented, 'This is AI.' And suddenly I realized: The deer wasn't real, the kitchen wasn't real, and my ability to discern truth before coffee is also not real.

Now let me ask you, have you ever watched a video where you thought, this can't be real, but continued to believe that it was?

How many of you believed it until someone younger explained it to you?

We're living in an age where it's hard to know what is real. Everything needs to be fact checked. The Christmas story as well certainly has some things that have become attached to it that you may think is real, but is it?

Here's a picture of the Nativity that I had A.I. create for me. Pretty nice picture. But is this how it really was?

Though Christmas is filled with lots of great truths for us, it also has lots of traditions and things passed down that were never really a part of the Christmas narrative at all. These are images and thoughts that are embedded in our brain as what happened, but when you dive in a little deeper the reality is quite different. Some of these are minor innocent things for us, but some of the realities of Christmas reveal a deeper meaning for us.

And it's definitely not my intent to deconstruct Christmas at all for us tonight, but rather to look at the real story and the real truth behind Christmas.

First of all, we see in typical nativity scenes the wise men there hanging out with the shepherds at the birth of Jesus.

Now there certainly were wise men that were on the scene, but they came much later. It tells us in **Matthew 2:7–12**, "*Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared.* ⁸ 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."*⁹ *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.*¹⁰ *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.*¹¹ *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.*¹² *Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way."*

We read that the wise men came to the house when Jesus was a young Child. It's believed that at least a year, maybe 2, has passed since the birth of Jesus. He's not a newborn anymore but a toddler. Traditionally we're told there were three wise men, or as we sing in the well-known Christmas song, 'We Three Kings'.

They weren't kings, they were magi – astrologers from the east, possibly from Babylon where Daniel passed down prophecies of the coming Messiah. We're not sure how many there were, the Bible doesn't say. There could have been a whole entourage of them.

But we know they came. They came with gifts – gold, frankincense and myrrh – gifts fitting of the true King who had arrived in the world.

- Gold speaks of His kingship. Gold was closely associated with royalty in this day and continues to be in our day. Jesus came not just to be a king of a nation; He was and is the King of kings (Isaiah 9:6-7).
- Frankincense speaks of incense. It reminds us of what the priests would burn regularly in the temple, and it would be a sweet fragrance to God. It reminds us of Jesus' ministry He would fulfill as our great High Priest. He has given us access to the throne of God where we can come boldly (Hebrews 4:14-16).
- Myrrh is a burial spice used for embalming which speaks of the sacrificial death Jesus came to this world to provide. **Mark 10:45**, *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

Another thing that stands out with the story of the nativity is the shepherds. They were really the first responders to the birth of Jesus. But that would have been a shock to many. Shepherds were seen as outcasts of society of this day. Because

of their job, they were ceremonially unclean and unable to participate in religious activities in the temple, which would have made them clean.

Yet, God sends His angels to announce the birth of Jesus to these shepherds:

Luke 2:10–12, *"Then the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.'"*

- Notice the peculiar sign that is given to these shepherds: *You will find a babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.*
- Interestingly, lambs that were to be sacrificed in the temple were from this area, and they were to be unblemished. It's quite possible that these shepherds were used to watch over the flocks of the temple lambs. Tradition says when a lamb was born unblemished, they would wrap it in swaddling cloths and place it in a manger to protect it.
- Perhaps this angel was not just giving a crazy sign of how they'll know they come upon this Saviour, but it was revealing to these shepherds that He is the perfect unblemished one, the sinless Son of God who will be the final sacrifice needed for us.

Now because there is a manger in the nativity (which is an animal feeding trough, typically made of stone) many believe Jesus was born out in a barn or stable.

This seems to make sense since there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7).

This again has painted an image for us of a grumpy inn keeper refusing to give this desperate couple any room. This gets depicted often in Church Christmas plays. But is this how it went down?

You see, the word that Luke used for *inn* in this Christmas narrative is a different word that is typically used for an inn. In the story of the Good Samaritan, Luke used the word *pandocheion* to speak of the man being taken to an inn (Luke 10:34). Kind of like what we would think of a motel.

But that's not the word Luke uses in Luke 2:7. In the Christmas narrative Luke used the word *katalyma* (ka-ta-lee-ma). This means a guest room.

Most likely, Joseph and Mary came to the house of a family member, but the guest room was already occupied. And on the ground floor of a home was usually a room where animals could be kept. This most likely is where Joseph

and Mary stayed and where Jesus was born. That's why a manger was there and was an easily accessible thing to place Jesus in.

Now what's interesting is the only other place that Luke uses the word *katalyma*, is in **Luke 22:11**, *"Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, 'Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'" "*

- This is what we typically call the upper room. It was the guest room in someone's home. And it's here that Jesus arranged to have the last supper with His disciples where He incorporated the new covenant.

I love the connection we draw from these two accounts. At His birth there was no room in the guest room, and He was placed in a stone feeding trough. And at the end of His ministry, when He was about to lay His life down for us on the cross and once again be laid on a stone slab in a tomb, He was making room for us. He prepared the upper room, a guest room where He would take that Passover meal and use it to speak of His sacrifice for us to bring us into a new relationship with Him.

Bethlehem reveals that there was no room for Him, the upper room says that Jesus is making room for us! He's providing all we need to have life in Him now and forevermore.

And it all points ahead to the truth that Jesus says in **John 14:2–3**, *"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also."*

This Christmas season may you be reminded of the truths of Christmas. Though there may be a few things that may need to be corrected, there are many insights to be gained that are anything but fake.