

# Wings

*"Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;  
they shall mount up with wings like eagles."  
Isaiah 40:31*



December 22, 2013

## Christmas Mythology

So much of what we think we know about the Christmas story is, in fact, mythology that has grown up around the original account. What does the Bible *really* tell us about Jesus' birth?

*"So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk. 2:6-7).*

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Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus, an historical event based on impeccable evidence. But surprisingly, a good portion of today's Christmas story is pure myth, having no basis in the original accounts. For example:

*Jesus was born on December 25.* The Bible doesn't tell us when Jesus was born. In fact, the evidence suggests a more likely date sometime in the spring, when the shepherds would be living in the fields with their flocks (Lk. 2:8). The December date grew out of later Christianity's desire to compete with the pagan celebrations of the winter solstice.

*Jesus was born in a stable because there was no room in the inn.* The common English translation of Luke 2:7 leaves the impression that the local Motel 6 was full, so Joseph and Mary

had to find shelter in a nearby barn. Not exactly. "Inn" is a weak translation for "guest room" (see the same word in Mk. 14:14; Lk. 22:11)—in this case, probably a spare room in a relative's home. The manger would have been an attached shelter where the host family's stock was kept at night. Joseph's little family was not homeless, just squeezed in a little tighter than usual.

*Three kings visited the baby Jesus in the manger.* This one is so off-the-charts wrong on multiple levels. First, the original language identifies these visitors as "magi" (Matt. 2:1), which refers to magicians or sorcerers, not kings (see the same word used in Ac. 13:6,8). They were likely Persian astrologers to whom God had revealed a sign of the Messiah's birth. Next, we have no idea how many of these magi were in the group. The number "three" may come from the three gifts they brought, but that tells us nothing about the size of the party. Finally, the magi did not arrive in Bethlehem until many months after Jesus was born. That's why, when Herod heard of their search, he had all the

infant boys in Bethlehem killed, "from two years old and under" (Matt. 2:16). And the magi visited Jesus "in the house" (Matt. 2:11), not in the manger.

*Christmas is one of Christianity's two major holy days.* Sorry, but not in God's book. Setting aside one day a year as a holy day to honor Jesus' birth is a human invention, without a shred of Biblical support. In fact, we are warned *not* to adopt a calendar of man-made holy days (Gal. 4:9-11). It's laudable that people want to remember the birth of Jesus, but why limit it to one day a year? We should rejoice *every day* that God's son came to live among us.

It is not my intention here to be a Scrooge and depress the spirit of the season; I'm grateful for any occasion that turns people's attention to our Savior, even if only once a year. And there is nothing wrong with enjoying all the cultural traditions that accompany the season—the tree, the decorations, exchanging gifts, etc. But if we really want to honor Jesus, we would do better to focus on what He taught, rather than where He came from.

— David King