

## Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-21

### Christmas Quiz

#### Introduction - We Get Mixed-Up

Good morning. As I look around shops and Christmas displays and have talked with people I know we have people from many different countries and cultures. I wonder how many Christmas traditions there are represented here today? In your country or culture is there anything that you do especially at Christmas? **(accept answers)**

When I was in Indonesia I had some American friends near where we lived and sometimes I heard them comment, "It just doesn't seem like Christmas with it being this warm." I answered them, "Well actually, as an Australian, it feels perfectly like Christmas with it being so warm and having afternoon thunder-storms."

Do your Christmas traditions have to do with food? **(take poll)** Are you used to sitting around a lovely hot roast at lunch time? Or do you eat Turkey sandwiches on the beach like Alison and I did when we lived in Sydney?

What about presents? Do you open your presents on Christmas eve, Christmas Day? or Boxing Day? (If this is your first Christmas in Australia, do you even know what Boxing Day is?) Do you have stockings? Are you allowed to choose one of your presents to put in your stocking?

With all our Christmas traditions it may be easy to get things mixed up. A friend of mine in Sydney loves telling the story of a mate of his on his first Christmas after getting married. The young man my friend knows was talking to his wife about Christmas and it's various characters to compare what they both grew up with. They could agree that they both knew about Santa, Rudolph, Baby Jesus, Shepherds etc., but the young man completely stumped his wife when he mentioned, 'Dick the Christmas Pony.' Who's Dick? his wife asked, "There's no 'Dick the Christmas Pony'." But the young man was convinced. Yes, there is! We sing a song about it and all. You know, 'Dick the Horse with Bells and Holly'."

His wife was stunned, "'Dick the Horse with Bells and Holly?' It's 'DECK'! As in 'Decorate'! 'Deck the HALLS with boughs of Holly'!"

At that point in time the young man had to rethink 25 years of Christmases and mentally remove "Dick the Christmas Pony."

Yes, at Christmas it's easy to get mixed-up. So today, what I'd like to do is to have a little quiz to see what we do and don't know about the first Christmas. The Bible's the best place for information about the first Christmas so that's where we'll get our answers. There's prizes for right answers, so don't be shy!

## What We Don't Know About Christmas

First, how many wise men were there? **(accept answers)** We don't know? Was there just one? **(accept answers)** No, we know there was more than one but we don't know how many. (Matthew 2:1)

Second, how did Mary get to Bethlehem? **(accept answers)** That's right, we don't know. Maybe on a donkey, maybe not.

Third, when was Jesus born? **(accept answers)** We don't know that either. Was Jesus born in December? **(accept answers)** No, Jesus wasn't born in December. How do we know? **(accept answers)** Shepherds were out in their fields watching their flocks, and you don't do that in the middle of Winter.

Fourth, did Jesus cry when he was born? **(accept answers)** We don't know ... but he probably did. Which Christmas carol says that he didn't cry? **(accept answers)** Away In A Manger. Jesus was a human baby and I've had human babies in my house and they cry ... so I think Jesus cried!

Fifth, How old was Jesus when the Magi, the wise men, came to him? **(accept answers)** We're not sure, but, (next question) was it the same night as the shepherds? **(accept answers)** No, because it was probably about two years later. (Matthew 2:16)

Wow! There's a lot we don't know about Christmas. Maybe some of our Christmas traditions get in the way of us knowing the true story of the first Christmas.

Let's see if we can name five Christmas characters (individuals or groups) that aren't connected with the first Christmas? **(accept answers)** Santa, Rudolph (Reindeers), elves, Frosty, and yes, Dick the Christmas Pony.

What about songs, let's see if we can come up with five well-known Christmas songs that aren't connected with the first Christmas. **(accept answers)** "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas", "Jingle Bells", "Santa Clause is Coming to Town" (and anything else about Santa), "O Christmas Tree", "Jingle Bell Rock", etc.

Alright, there's lots of things that are now connected with Christmas but they don't really help us understand the meaning of the first Christmas. Trying to hold all these stories in our head can cause us to be mixed-up, especially if we think they're all equally important. These things aren't necessarily bad, but if we think that these stories tell us what Christians believe about Christmas then we're mistaken.

## What We Do Know About Christmas

Alright then, what do we know about the first Christmas? There's a whole lot we know about the first Christmas but I'm just going to ask questions which can be answered from the parts of the Bible that we've had read to us today.

First, who / what told Mary that she would have a baby? **(accept answers)** The angel Gabriel. And how was Mary supposed to become pregnant when she was a virgin? **(accept answers)** By the power of God / Holy Spirit. So, Jesus was said to have come from where / who? **(accept answers)** Yes, God - God the Father.

Second, why was Jesus named Jesus? **(accept answers)** He would save people from their sins. (Matthew 1:21) Jesus also had another name, what was it? **(accept answers)** Emmanuel. And what does it mean? **(accept answers)** God with us.

Third, when Jesus was born, why did the Angels say to the shepherds that this was good news of great Joy for all people? **(accept answers)** Because Jesus was the Saviour and the Messiah (Messiah and Christ mean the same thing and means one who is "anointed" or "set-apart" for something special).

Fourth, this is a bit of a tricky one, Jesus is also said to be a what? (I'll give you a hint, he rules over others) **(accept answers)** Jesus is a king. Jesus is the descendent of which famous Jewish king? **(accept answers)** David. How long will Jesus' kingdom last? **(accept answers)** Forever.

So let's see what we have so far. Jesus's birth was announced by an angel. And Mary was pregnant by God's power because Jesus is from God.

Jesus is called "Jesus" because he would save people from their sins. Jesus was also called "Emmanuel" as he was 'God with us.'

Jesus birth was declared to be good news because he was the Saviour and the Messiah - One specially chosen.

And Jesus is also a king and his Kingdom will never end.

Are we still mixed-up? There may be lots of traditions, characters and stories which have a connection with Christmas time, but the story of the first Christmas and what it means seems to be amazing enough. Maybe if we understand that Jesus is far more than just a little baby lying in a manger (an animal feeding box) we won't be so mixed-up.

## What Will You Do With What You Know?

So, we've seen that there's some things about Christmas that we don't know, like dates and number of wise men, etc. However, there's also a lot that we do know about Christmas. We especially know that Jesus is the central character, not only of the first Christmas story, but of the whole Bible. And Christians believe that Jesus is the central character of all of history because he is 'Emmanuel - God with us.'

And so I have one more important question for us. Does the Bible ask people to do anything with the Christmas story and it's central character, Jesus? Is this just a nice story, or is there something more to Jesus and Christmas?

To answer this, perhaps one of the young people can read a couple of Bible verses for me? **(accept volunteer)** The verses are John 20:30-31. What does it say? **(have verse read)**

John 20:30-31, "Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

The word, "believe", in the Bible, doesn't just mean to accept something in your head as true, but to trust that person. The Bible does ask people to do something with the Christmas story and not just with the story of Jesus' birth but with the whole story of Jesus' life. The Bible challenges people to trust the One who is described as the Son of God and who is able to give people life. Real life!

Yes, it's pretty easy to get mixed-up isn't it. In life we don't just get mixed up about Christmas stories, traditions and characters. We get mixed-up because people hurt us, or because we hurt other people or hurt ourselves. We get mixed-up when we don't have a job any more or because it just won't rain! We get mixed up when our friend moves away ... perhaps we didn't even get a chance to say a proper "goodbye". We get mixed-up because sometimes life just doesn't seem to make sense. We get mixed-up because we're sure there must be a bigger picture out there ... if only we knew how to see it.

The Bible says that Jesus came to deal with the fact that we're mixed-up. Jesus came to show people the big picture in life and show us what God is really like. However, the Bible also says that we have to trust Jesus with our lives ... even though we're mixed-up. Jesus is described as the Saviour and he wants us to come to him ... mixed up and all.

## **Conclusion - You Don't Have To Be Mixed-Up**

So this Christmas, what traditions will you celebrate? Will you have any new traditions that you'll join in with as you are perhaps in a new place and making new friends?

As we celebrate different Christmas traditions and hear different stories, maybe they will all be mixed-up in our heads. But Christmas stories don't have to be mixed-up. If we remember that Jesus is at the heart of the first Christmas we can enjoy the other stories and just place them lower-down in importance.

And just as stories don't have to be mixed-up, neither do we. This Christmas maybe you'd like to think afresh about Jesus, the one who is Emmanuel - God with us, and trust that he can save us from our sins that we find ourselves mixed-up in and undo the knots that we find ourselves tied-up in.

Feel free to speak to me or one of the other members of our church if you would like to know more or to share what you think of Christmas and its meaning.