

Christmas (Nativity & Epiphany) Quiz – answers

The questions were:

1. We know Gabriel was the name of the angel who visited Mary. This was his first visit to earth to speak to a human being.
2. Mary was probably in her late teens or early 20's when she became pregnant.
3. Mary getting pregnant before she got married would just have been a bit embarrassing for her and Joseph, and for both their families, but with no serious consequences.
4. Joseph was quite happy with Mary's explanation of her pregnancy.
5. Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem by donkey.
6. The innkeeper told Mary & Joseph that there was no room in his inn.
7. Mary's baby was due any day when they travelled and she gave birth just after they arrived in Bethlehem.
8. We know Mary gave birth in a stable because she laid her baby in a manger.
9. Mary called her baby Jesus which means "God with us".
10. Shepherds were visited by angels who sang of peace on earth to all men (all human beings).
11. There were three wise men (Magi) from the East.
12. The Magi were Kings.
13. The Magi knew to go straight to Bethlehem when they arrived in Israel/Judah from the east.
14. The Magi visited baby Jesus, Mary & Joseph in the stable.
15. The Magi bowed down to the baby simply out of respect as one would do for a king.
16. All the gifts the Magi brought were because they believed that the baby was a king.
17. The Magi decided to go home by a different route because it was quicker.
18. King Herod did not really mind that there was a baby king in Judah.
19. The sacrifice offered at the temple is evidence that carpenters were reasonably well paid.
20. Jesus spent his early years in Nazareth.

Why it is important to know the facts that God has chosen to reveal to us through Scripture:

Kenneth E. Bailey in his book "Jesus through Middle Eastern eyes" (published by SPCK) says: *The traditional events of the Christmas story are well-known to all Christians. The birth of Jesus includes 3 wise men bearing gifts, shepherds in the fields in mid-winter, a baby born in a stable and "no room in the inn". These aspects of the account are firmly fixed in the popular mind. The question becomes "Is there a critical distinction to be made between the text and the traditional understanding of it? Have the centuries added meanings to our understanding of the text that are not there?" The more familiar we are with a Biblical story, the more difficult it is to view it outside of the way it has always been understood. And the longer imprecision in the tradition remains unchallenged, the deeper it becomes embedded in Christian consciousness. The birth of Jesus is such a story.*

Understanding the culture of 2000 years ago is important. **The key to the quiz is that this was an “honour culture”** same as, today, many parts of the Middle East and Asia still are, to a greater or lesser degree.

Read Genesis 18:1-8 and Hebrews 13:2 about honouring visitors.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

1. Joseph was returning to the village of his origin. In the Middle East, historical memories are long, and the extended family, with its connection to its village of origin, is important. In such a world a man like Joseph could have appeared in Bethlehem, and told people “I am Joseph, the son of Heli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi” and most homes in town would be open to him.
2. Joseph was of the line of David so being of that famous family he would have been welcome anywhere in town.
3. In every culture a woman about to give birth is given special attention. Simple rural communities throughout the world always help one of their own women in childbirth regardless of the circumstances. Refusing to help a descendent of David in his home town (village) would bring a great shame on them all. The community would have known it had a responsibility to provide help for Mary and provide accommodation.
4. Mary had relatives in a nearby village – her cousin Elizabeth & husband Zechariah were “in the hill country of Judea” (St Luke 1:39-40); Bethlehem is in the centre of Judea so just a few miles away. So if there was no shelter in Bethlehem they would have gone to Elizabeth & Zechariah’s home.
5. Joseph had time to make adequate arrangements. St Luke 2:4 says that Joseph & Mary “went up from Galilee to Judea” and verse St Luke 2:6 states “while they were there the days were completed for her to give birth” (the Greek confirms this). The phrase in verse 5 in the King James translation “great with child” is colloquial English from mid-17th century and is translated from a single Greek word “eimi” which means to be expecting a child. So “visibly pregnant”, rather than the idea that delivery was imminent would be a more accurate interpretation.
6. If you read the “Proto-evangelium of James” also called “The Gospel of James”, which is a “false gospel”. In it you see the where some parts of the myths around the Nativity accounts have come from. So what is this “gospel”? It is a novel written between 140AD and 170AD and although attributed to St James (the brother of Jesus and leader of the church in Jerusalem) he’d have been well over 130 years old at that point! One of the early church fathers, Origen of Alexandria, described it as “of dubious recent appearance” and it was not accepted into the canon of Scripture. It is an “Infancy Gospel”. Many were created to satisfy the hunger of early Christians for more detail on the early life of their Saviour, and this is one of a number of such “False gospels” (Thomas and Pseudo-Matthew are 2 more examples). In section 17 it says Mary was on an ass (donkey) & asks Joseph to take her down from it as they near Bethlehem as she was going into labour, and Joseph took her into a cave so she could give birth. However we know St Luke spoke with Mary and so had eye witness testimony of what actually happened – and St Luke wrote his Gospel account around 60AD, so witnesses were still alive to challenge any false statements in it. The false gospel of James was written long after any eye witnesses had died.
7. Who each of the four gospel accounts were written for also helps in understanding why each of the 4 Gospels deals with the origin of Jesus differently. St Matthew 2:13-28 fills in the details of the flight to Egypt because it fits with prophecies in Jewish Scripture which were being fulfilled, as Matthew’s gospel was written for Jews. That also explains the other geographical references here – showing God was guiding the movement such that His son would, on taking human form, be born in Bethlehem, be called out of Egypt but would come from Nazareth in Galilee. Read St John 1:46 and St John 7:41 & 52 for the reaction of Jews to the idea that the Messiah could be from Nazareth or Galilee. **St Matthew** wrote his account

of the gospel from St James' missionary work to Palestinian Jews, and St Matthew (Levi) was of course one of Jesus' Galilean disciples; he wrote to prove that Jesus was the promised king and Messiah as he fulfilled Old Testament prophecies, and to explain God's kingdom. **St Luke** wrote his account of the gospel for the Gentiles (pagans) for whom such prophecies were not relevant. St Luke wrote his gospel (& Acts of the Apostles) for the Greeks out of, and to extend the work of, St Paul as "Apostle to the Gentiles". St Luke accompanied St Paul on several missionary journeys so was an eye witness to St Paul's preaching and teaching. His gospel account was written to show Jesus, "The Son of Man", was fully God and also fully human. **St Mark** acted as Greek interpreter for St Peter's Aramaic preaching, so wrote his account of the gospel based on St Peter's accounts, and so is gentle on St Peter's faults; it was aimed mainly at Roman Gentile Christians – hence no genealogy and no Nativity account as "not relevant to his audience" – and was written to prove that Jesus was the Messiah, the Saviour, but also the servant of God. **St John** wrote his gospel account based on his own missionary work. It was written to declare the truth, to all mature Christians everywhere in the world, that Jesus was The Son of God, and was a powerful argument for the incarnation (God becoming a human being), and so Jesus' "origin" is that he is God and was with God (which is explained by the Trinity – so at the same time he is God and is with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit – John 1:1-2). It is also a conclusive demonstration that Jesus is the very heaven-sent Son of God and the only source of eternal life. In every chapter of St John's gospel Jesus' deity is revealed. St John's account of the gospel records only 7 miracles, each to show Jesus has power over all areas of creation; none of these could be explained by any other reasoning:

Sign/Miracle:

1. Turning water into wine (John 2:1-11).....Wine from 180 gallons of purification water
2. Healing the official's son (4:46-54).....Healing from a distance
3. Healing an invalid at Bethesda (5:1-9).....Man had been crippled for 38 years
4. Feeding the 5000 (6:1-14).....5000 men, with women & children as well
5. Walking on water (6:15-21).....Power over nature, impossible for a man
6. Restoring sight to a man born blind (9:1-41).....Blind from birth
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44).....Dead for 4 days and death overcome

For more detail on this, and for more cultural insights into the gospels read the book by Kenneth E. Bailey – details at end of answers section.

So now the answers. If you do not have a Bible at home use www.biblegateway.com to find out more information. Use the "search" box and type in the reference – for example Luke 1:19 or Matthew 1:18-25 (omit "St" before the names as searching online needs this layout) - and in the box next to it where you can choose the translation used - click on the arrow and choose "New Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition (NRSVCE)" as this is the version used in "Year of the Word: The God Who Speaks", then click "Search" and it will bring up the verse or verses for you to read. I have omitted "St" before the references below for the reason mentioned above. When you read the passages it will confirm 16 of the answers as either true or false. The other 4 need deducing.

1. Luke 1:18-19 – and also read Daniel 8:15-19 and Daniel 9:21.
2. We know historically that girls were "betrothed" as they transitioned into adulthood. The modern ceremony of "Bat Mitzvah" is the girl's equivalent of the boys "Bar Mitzvah" – and both take place at age 12-13years. So the answer is **FALSE** – she was in her early teens.
3. Matthew 1:18-19. There are 3 stages to a Jewish marriage. Stage one – the 2 families agree to a union, stage two – the public announcement (the betrothal) after which it cannot be broken off as it is a legally binding agreement. The honour culture and Scripture made it clear that there was to be no sexual relations before marriage – virginity was essential (read

Deuteronomy 22:13-24). Mary could have been stoned to death for sexual relations outside of marriage especially if it was adulterous. Read John 8:1-11 - the woman caught in adultery that the Pharisees brought before Jesus – Jesus said “whoever is without sin can throw the first stone” – to stone her to death. By this time (2000 years ago) divorce had become an acceptable alternative but was still associated with severe social stigma. A public divorce would be humiliating and would bring shame and disgrace on both families. A divorce before witnesses was a more humane option, as it was done in private; however the social stigma on Mary (& her family) would be just as bad and she would never be able to marry as no man would want her as that would bring her disgrace on his family – that is the impact in an honour culture. You still hear of this in honour cultures now-a-days.

4. Matthew 1:18-19 – and see previous answer.
5. Luke 2:4-5. A donkey was a common form of travel but even kings in Old Testament rode on donkeys. See Cultural Context point 6 on page 2 for where the idea could have come from.
6. Luke 2:7 and Luke 10:34-35. In the parable of the “Good Samaritan” it says the Samaritan took the man to an inn. The Greek word St Luke chose is “pandocheion” – meaning a “commercial inn”. However the word that St Luke chooses for Luke 2:7 is “katalyma”, which means “guest room, not a “commercial inn”. You can check out the translation for yourself – one of the options in Bible Gateway is to select “Mounce Interlinear” as the translation and it adds the Greek underneath the English. We know more about “guest rooms” from the Old Testament – 1 Kings 17:13 and 2 Kings 4:10. Guest rooms were built on the roof, or at the end of the house. Remember the strong “honour culture” is the key. The “guest room” was already full with other family members in Bethlehem for the census, so Mary & Joseph will have stayed in the main part of the house with the family.
7. Luke 2:4-6. The first English translation (the King James Bible) says “great with child” – “visibly pregnant” would be the way it would be phrased now-a-days – and that can be from 6 months or earlier. There is also a link with the “false gospel of James” (see Cultural Context point 6 on page 2)
8. In Kenneth E. Bailey’s book there is a diagram of the layout of a typical house of that time – they were one large room with an area slightly lower down for the animals. The entrance was a single door in the lower area through which the animals were brought in at night to keep them safe and also to provide warmth for the family. There were several steps up from the lower area to the only room. He states that these type of houses still existed in Bethlehem up until the middle of the 20th century. They still exist now in parts of Spain (a former work colleague of mine has slept in one in 2016). I have also seen such houses myself in an outdoor museum of houses from Europe in The Middle Ages in Switzerland. It also makes sense of St Matthew 5:14-15 as you cannot light “a whole house” if there is more than one room. Feeding troughs (mangers) would have been along the upper edge of the raised area, which is the edge of the family area.
9. Matthew 1:23. This is a trick question. Jesus is the Greek of the Hebrew/Aramaic name Joshua which is Yah-Shua which means The LORD (Yahweh) saves (Shua) – Matthew 1:21. Jesus saves us from our sins so that we can have “God with us” (= Immanuel).
10. Luke 2:4. This is important because of the way the world sees peace. A pop song you hear in shops in the weeks before Christmas is Greg Lake’s 1975 hit “I believe in Father Christmas”. In that song he says “they said there would be peace on earth” and then he says “they told me a fairy story until I believed in the Israelite” (Jesus). His conclusion – there isn’t peace on earth so it is all a fairy story. Look carefully at the words the angels sing and also at the words we sing/say in the Gloria at Mass on Sundays. Not “all men” but only those “of goodwill” or “on whom God’s favour rests” (you can check this extra word is present by using the “Mounce Interlinear” translation as mentioned above). “Good will to all men” is the original King James translation which was adapted in places so as not to offend King James. Although through the birth of the Messiah (Greek for Messiah is “Christ”) God is

offering his favour to all people it still needs to be accepted to experience God's everlasting peace. The peace that Jesus promises to his followers is "not peace as the world gives" (John 14:27) – see also what Jesus says when he sends out the 72 disciples into the towns and villages – Luke 10:5-6. The world see "peace" as "the absence of conflict and of animosity between people" but God's peace is the presence of joyful tranquillity and rich inter-personal communication. The **peace of God** (Romans 5:1 and in many other places in the Bible) is quite different from the "peace on earth" that people often want/expect at Christmas. But for peace in this world the change needs to start within our own hearts and minds (= **peace with ourselves** – St Paul in his letter to the Philippians (Philippians 4:6-7) reminds us that God's peace "transcends all understanding" and it will "guard the hearts and minds" of Christians (disciples). Only then can we begin to show true, self-sacrificial love to our neighbour, remembering that everyone in the world is our neighbour (= **peace with others** – Romans 12:18 and Ephesians 4:31-32). It is only something we can do if God, though The Holy Spirit, is at work in us; it will ultimately fail if we try to do it in our own strength. This song is therefore the promise of God's grace & mercy to all men who believe & trust in His Son, Jesus to be their Saviour and Lord (which is the definition of a Christian) and so those are the people on whom "God's favour rests" and who will experience the heavenly peace of God. None of us deserves to go to heaven (where we will experience that peace eternally) as the entry criteria is 100% sinless so we all fail (Romans 6:23). Those who accept God's offer are those who have realised that they do not deserve to go to heaven, and realise that they need to trust completely in God in order to go to heaven. Peace can only rule in our lives if God rules our lives and be the most glorious person in our lives. If God gets the glory (not us) then we get the peace. The key is believing God's promises to us in Scripture.

11. Matthew 2:1. No number stated. In the Syriac church tradition they have 12 Magi. Read more on Wikipedia and in Encyclopaedia Britannica.
12. Matthew 2:1 Magi traditionally means "wise man"; no mention of them being kings. Read Psalm 72: 9-11, 15-17 and read Isaiah 60:1-6 as these may have contributed to the myth. The origin of their names comes from a manuscript composed in Alexandria and written in Greek in the 5th century (around 500 AD), and another document in Latin from the 8th Century called "Collectanea et Flores" which adds more details.
13. Matthew 2:1-2. They went to the palace – in Jerusalem – as that was where a king would be. Herod asked his wise men where Scripture said the Messiah would be born, and they knew. SO the Magi knew from the chief priests and teachers of the law, that King Herod summoned for their advice, that the baby king was the God's Messiah (read Matthew 2:3-6). However, despite knowing this information the chief priests and teachers of the law did nothing to seek out the long awaited Messiah themselves. We can hear the "good news" but then fail to act on it properly. As in question 10 one needs to respond.
14. Matthew 2:11 – note the word "house". Again check it in the "Mounce Interlinear" translation ("oikia" – you can search for that word to see other times it is used).
15. Matthew 2:11. The Greek word used is "proskyneō" which is used for worshipping God, for example in Revelation – which we know as "Apocalypse" - 19:10.
16. Matthew 2:11. The three gifts had a spiritual meaning: gold as a symbol of kingship on earth, frankincense (an incense – see Exodus 30:34-38 and Isaiah 43:23) as a symbol of deity, and myrrh (an embalming oil) as a symbol of death. This interpretation dates back to Origen in "*Contra Celsum*": "gold, as to a king; myrrh, as to one who was mortal; and incense, as to a God." The response of the Magi to "worship" fits with this interpretation – and why one needs to read verses in their context, and in the context of all of Scripture. Just imagine giving a "welcome new baby" gift to a friend of yours who'd just had a baby and you give a coffin – how would that be perceived.
17. Matthew 2:12

18. Matthew 2:16 Note the age of the boys
19. Luke 2:21-24. Then read Leviticus 12:8 to see what the offering should be, but what you offer if you cannot afford it. Kenneth Bailey points out that there are a number of ceremonies combined in this section of Luke's gospel. For the child there is the 8th day circumcision ceremony (Genesis 17:4-14; Leviticus 12:1-3 & Luke 1:59-60). Then there is the woman's purification ceremony at 8 days and again another 33 days later – 40 days in total (rules for a son – it is 80 days for daughters) but they did not need to bring the child to the mother's purification ceremony. There is another ceremony here, too, for the firstborn child, although again the child did not need to be present: read Exodus 13:1-2, 12-15; Numbers 3:11-13; Numbers 18:14-16; Leviticus 27:26-28 – this is at one month (4 weeks) after the birth but for this ceremony you do NOT need to bring the child. This ceremony is redeeming the firstborn as all firstborn of all creatures belong to God – so are being “bought back” (redeemed) – the law says 5 shekels of silver was the cost. We belong to God and Jesus redeemed us (bought us back). But there is one other ceremony in here, too, which is deduced by the fact that they brought the child to the temple in Jerusalem. Read LEVITICUS 27:1-8 and then 1 Samuel 1:11, 21-28 – Hannah makes a special offering of her child to God for His service. Mary did the same, as indicated by the phrase “present him to the Lord” – consecrating him to God. It is then that Simeon & Anna are involved in the account. Note verse 32 – that Jesus would bring salvation to the Pagans (Gentiles) as well as to the Jews. This was something the Jews had long forgotten - read Genesis 12:1-3. We are, of course, the “Pagans/Gentiles” that Scripture refers to.
20. Matthew 2:13-15, and 19-23. Also read Hosea 11:1. So Jesus spent his early years in EGYPT, not in Nazareth. Reading Luke 2:38-40 may suggest they went straight to Nazareth but this is not a history book but an account of what is relevant to us as Christians. See “Cultural context” point 7 at the start.

So all 20 answers are false – that has been a surprise for everyone who has done this quiz over the last few years. In that time only one person has ever got all the answers correct.

I hope this has given you a desire (a thirst or hunger) to hear more of “The God who speaks” by reading a little bit of his word – the Bible – every day. When we are talking to non-believers we need to know the facts so that we are able to “give the reason for the hope we have in us” - 1 Peter 3:15 – and that needs to be evidence based not just based on hearsay and myths – which is why non-believers can produce a book of “fairy stories” and include the Nativity account as a fairy story or sing pop songs that it is all a fairy story. People need to know that Jesus really existed, that he was more than a good, wise teacher, and that the gospels are true. So we need to know what God has revealed to us. It is important to remember that God gives us all we need to know, not all we want to know, in order to do what He commands us to do – which is to “go and make disciples of all nations”.

Further reading:

- ◆ Kenneth E. Bailey - “Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural studies in the Gospels” (Publisher: SPCK)
- ◆ Carl Laferton – “Christmas uncut: what really happened and why it really matters” (Publisher: The Good Book Company)