

THE NATIVITY STORY

JAMIE MCNAB

24.12.16

Tomorrow is Christmas!

It is the biggest festival of the year ... circa 2 billion people ... not quite off one third of humanity ... "keep Christmas".

Although it bears the name "Christ" ... it is mostly a secular worldly festival. In the depth of winter ... around about the shortest-day ... longest darkest night. It is often cold/stormy/snowy. For thousands of years people have cheered themselves up with a great big party in December ... a Winter Festival.

Plenty of parties ... feasts ... alcohol ... merry-making ... exchanging gifts ... in some societies even debauchery (hence the mistletoe).

People have used wreaths ... evergreen trees ... yule logs ... all have their origins in how various countries celebrated the Winter Festival.

The shortest-day is round about December 21/22. So ... many Winter Festivals generally celebrated around that date. In Ancient Rome ... a 7 day festival in honour of Saturn (Saturnalia) ... ran from December 17 to December 23/24 ... then on the 25th ... another special day ... the birth of their sun god ... Mithra(s). He was born allegedly on December 25.

The first recorded reference to December 25 being used to celebrate Jesus' Birth ... Christmas ... was 336 AD. So ... about 300 years after Jesus died.

A lot of people suggest that the church of that time merely "adopted" the existing pagan celebrations ... to make it easier and more popular for pagans to come into the Christian religion.

Just re-name the pagan festivals ... Christianise the commemorations and activities . Boost the numbers! :)

The position today is that most people still enjoy the festive atmosphere ... feasting ... drinking ... merrymaking ...giving and receiving gifts ... lots of families get together for Christmas dinner on December 25 ... an especially exciting day for kids.

Let's not forget the commercial world. This is where their survival usually begins and ends. Christmas is hugely important for retailers/shops. Some manufacturers and shops make 50% of their entire year's sales at Christmas. A lot of advertising is aimed at creating a "spirit of Christmas". People are almost encouraged to go into debt?! Spend ... spend ... spend.

It is probable that just a minority really see this as a religious festival. They get upset that Jesus' birthday is so commercial ... and that the vast majority that keep Christmas ignore the story of Jesus. People are not paying proper attention to Jesus. Remember: "Jesus is the reason for the season".

Here in the UK ... between 5%-7% go to church on Christmas day ... quite a small number. The rest don't care ... even though they spent £thousands ... with a big meal and hours and hours of TV. They don't care about Jesus one way or another.

Many of those who go to church believe Christmas is an important religious festival ... in honour of Jesus' birth ... many understand the pagan origins ... December 25 ... trees ... gifts ... feasting ... wreaths ... decorations etc. don't have anything to do with Jesus birthday. But

they often argue that although of pagan origin ... they are now used to honour Jesus.

Is that okay with Jesus? Can we worship Him using pagan rituals?

Deuteronomy 12:29-32 (NKJV)

29 "When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land,

30 *take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.'*

31 **You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods;** for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

32 **"Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.**

Don't imitate other nations traditions and festivals and copy what they are doing. Don't add to or take away what God has commanded us to observe.

It might feel good to go to church on December 25 ... enjoy singing famous carols ... "Silent Night" ... "O Come All Ye Faithful" ... "O Little Town of Bethlehem". A bit of nostalgia? Some people might feel good to be doing something religious? But God won't accept pagan customs ... when the same people ... who are adopting pagan festivals and seasons ... trample all over God's Sabbath and His Holy Days. It is not acceptable to God. God sets the rules.

I'm aware of one minister who sings, "Happy Birthday to Jesus".

Now ... obviously ... Jesus was born! He emptied Himself of His Eternal Glory ... became human ... "was made flesh". Clearly a very important event ... though we're never instructed to celebrate it ... and scripture doesn't clearly reveal the actual date ... though it is generally believed to be about September or October ... around the Feast of Trumpets or Tabernacles.

We have all seen this time of year ... the "Nativity Scenes" ... cowshed ... sheep and goats ... shepherd ... 3 kings (typically) and donkey ... with a star overhead looking down over the cowshed. Joseph ... Mary and the Baby in the crib. Lots of children participate in school plays based around this. Not very true to scriptures.

Let's review the story mentioned in scripture. It is only mentioned in 2 of the Gospels ... Luke and Matthew. The Gospels of Mark and John ... no comment.

Let's start just prior to Jesus birth.

Luke 1:26-45, 56 (NKJV)

26 **Now in the sixth month (of Elizabeth's pregnancy) the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth,**
27 **to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.**

28 And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!"

29 But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was.

30 Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

31 And **behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus.**

32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David.

33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end."

34 Then Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I do not know a man?"

35 And the angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.

36 Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren.

37 For with God nothing will be impossible."

38 Then Mary said, "Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

39 Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah,

40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

41 And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

42 Then she spoke out with a loud voice and said, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

43 But why is this granted to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?

44 For indeed, as soon as the voice of your greeting sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy.

45 Blessed is she who believed, for there will be a fulfilment of those things which were told her from the Lord."

56 And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her house.

Matthew 1:18-25 (NKJV)

18 **Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. (Betrothal was a legal contract)**

19 Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly.

20 But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

21 And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

22 So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying:

23 "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."

24 **Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife,**

25 **and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.** *(Roman Catholics believe that Mary was a "perpetual virgin" ... but Matthew 13 ... and other verses ... lists Jesus as having 4 brothers and at least 3 sisters)*

Luke 2:1-5 (NKJV)

1 **And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.**

2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.

3 **So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.**

4 **Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,**

5 **to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.**

Mary went too ... probably because it was also around the Feast time. There are no scriptures that specifically mention a date for Jesus birth ... but some believe that Jesus was born on The Feast of Trumpets ... and some The Feast of Tabernacles. No specific date is mentioned ... but it DEFINITELY WAS NOT DECEMBER 25.

Luke 2:6-7 (NKJV)

6 So it was, that **while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.**

7 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.

They are not just arriving ... not a last minute panic ... midnight ... freezing cold December ... completely unprepared/incompetent ...and they end up in a dirty stable. No. It says, "while they were there". They had been in Bethlehem for a few days at least. Comfortable and ready. They were decent ... sensible people ... chosen by God. Relaxed ... meeting with their relatives.

Verse 7: "No room" = no space ... it is not talking of a specific room in a house (living room ... bedroom). Greek: Topos = space. No space!!

"I often stand on the Tube ... no room to sit down. No space to sit down. At a banquet ... someone might say, "move some things on the table ... we need to make some room for the turkey". No room means no space.

Verse 7: "Inn" = Greek: Kataluma = guest room in a house.

Kataluma is used only 2 other occasions ... both describing the same event. Cp: Luke 22:10-13. Kataluma = guest chamber or guest room.

Luke 22:10-13 (NKJV)

10 And He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him into the house which he enters.

11 Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is **the guest room** (*Kataluma*) where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?" '

12 Then he will show you a large, furnished upper room; there make ready."

13 So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover.

So back to Luke Chapter 2.

At Jesus' birth it is probable that the guest room ... in the house ... just wasn't big enough for Mary ... midwife ... female relatives. So ... probably the ladies used the main family quarters? So when Jesus was born ... they wrapped Jesus up and put Him in a cozy little manger.

This was a sensible decent birth ... to sensible caring parents ... not two beggars having an emergency birth in a barn! Surrounded by donkey manure!

CJB: "She wrapped Him in a cloth, and laid Him down in a feeding trough, because there was *no space for them in the living quarters*".

CEB: "She gave birth to her firstborn child, a son, wrapped Him snugly, and laid Him in a manger, because there was *no place for them in the guest room*"

The traditional image is just wrong!

Luke 2:8-20 (NKJV)

8 Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. *(This pokes a big hole in December 25 being the date of Jesus birth. It is extremely unlikely that shepherds would be living in fields ... at night. It's not going to happen)*

9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

10 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 Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. *(Messiah the Lord)*

12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger."

13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:

14 "Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

15 So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." *(And ... note ... no mention of any wise men? They just weren't there)*

16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

17 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. *(They spread the word)*

18 And all those who heard it marvelled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.

20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.

Luke 2:21-22 (NKJV)

21 And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

22 Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord.

Luke 2:39-40 (NKJV)

39 **So when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth.**

40 And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.

Immediately? No. What happened to Herod ... the wise men ... the slaughter of the innocents ... star? What happened to Jesus going into Egypt? Where's the rest of the story? Luke jumps right over these events.

We will pick up the rest of the story in Matthew 2.

Matthew 2:1 (NKJV)

1 **Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men* from the East came to Jerusalem,**

(*Magi ... wise counsellors ... high officials ... experts in science/astronomy. Notice there is no number. Nowhere does it say 3. Some traditions say there were 12 ... plus the rest ... military men ... supporters ... helpers ... camels. A big event in Jerusalem ... VIPs arriving ... looking for the New King.).

This event is after Jesus was born ... definitely not for His birth.

Matthew 2:2-10 (NKJV)

2 saying, "**Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?** For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;
For out of you shall come a Ruler
Who will shepherd My people Israel.' "

7 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. *(Star ...a particular constellation ... a comet ... an angel?)*

10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

Matthew 2:11 (NKJV)

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.

NB: The house ... not a cowshed or even an "inn". This was some time after Jesus' birth ... Jesus may have been a few months old?

They gave gifts ... in honour of a King (not to each other :) ... not because Jesus was a child. These gifts could be helping Jesus and His family being well off for the future.

Matthew 2:12 (NKJV)

12 **Then, being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.** *(They had sought wisdom from God ... and received a response from God)*

Matthew 2:13-15 (NKJV)

13 **Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child (not baby) and His mother, flee to Egypt,** and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him."

14 **When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt,**

15 **and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."**

Egypt was about 60 miles away. There was a large Jewish community there with traders ... schools ... synagogues. They could be there among their own people.

Matthew 2:16-23 (NKJV)

16 **Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its**

districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men.

17 Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying:

18 "A voice was heard in Ramah,
Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children,
Refusing to be comforted,
Because they are no more."

19 Now when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

20 saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead."

21 Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

22 But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee.

23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene."

So ... summarising somewhat. The Nativity Scenes/plays/stories ... in the media ... in most churches ... quite different to the real story of Jesus birth.

Not really about how society needs to look out for homeless people (like Joseph and Mary) ... which just wasn't the case. Other people say it is about celebrating childhood with expensive gifts ... or sing "Happy Birthday Jesus".

The main point for us isn't so much about celebrating the day Jesus was born (with reindeer ... snowmen ... mistletoe ... fir trees ... turkey

and roast potatoes) ... but being grateful for the fact the Jesus came to earth as a man ... to be a sacrifice for us ... our Passover Lamb ... our Redeemer ... as the angel said, "Our Saviour".

Moving away from the Christmas story itself. The real reason why Jesus came.

John 1:1-3, 14 (NKJV)

1 **In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

2 **He was in the beginning with God.**

3 **All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.**

14 **And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us,** and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Yes. Jesus was born ... made flesh ... and dwelled among us. A great sacrifice.

John 1:14 (YLT)

14 **And the Word became flesh, and did tabernacle among us,** and we beheld his glory, glory as of an only begotten of a father, full of grace and truth. *(Maybe a hint that Jesus was born at the Feast of Tabernacles? There are reasons to think that Jesus was born round about this time. We don't know for sure)*

Philippians 2:5-11 (NKJV)

5 **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,**

6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,

7 **but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.** *(Talking of the fact that Jesus was God. But He gave it up. He Emptied Himself*

for us. Jesus had existed with God The Father for all eternity. The God Being who became Jesus ... emptied Himself of His Godhead ... for you and me)

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,
11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Will the billions keeping Christmas tomorrow ... be confessing that Jesus Christ is Lord ... to their glory of God The Father? Not likely!!

2 Corinthians 5:17-21 (NKJV)

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation,

19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.

20 Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

The Great Exchange! Jesus who existed in glory ... humbled Himself to death. He took our sins ... that we can take His righteousness. He took our death penalty. Jesus came ... the Great Exchange.

So our focus isn't on a baby in a crib for a few weeks ... but about His sacrifice ... for us ... and how that should influence our behaviour ... conduct ... LIFE.

So Christmas day tomorrow will not do any of that in the slightest. It has nothing to do with God ... the Bible ... in any shape or form.