

1 **Christmas:**

**So much of what we know
just isn't so**

2 **So much of what we know...**

"It isn't so much that liberals are ignorant. It's just that they know so many things that aren't so."

-- Ronald Reagan

3 **The Wonder of the Temple Dedication**4 **Luke 2:21-38**

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. 22 And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; 23 (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) 24 And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons.

5 **Luke 2:21-28**

25 ¶ And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. 26 And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. 27 And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, 28 Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said,

6 **Luke 2:29-35**

29 Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: 30 For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, 31 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; 32 A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. 33 And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him. 34 And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; 35 (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

7 **Luke 2:26-38**

36 And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; 37 And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38 And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.

8 **So many wonders...**

- Verse 27 – Simeon came “by the Spirit” – God brought him there with precise timing
 - First praises God
 - Then gives very precise words to Mary
 - Child set for “fall and rising again of many”
 - “A sign which shall be spoken against”
 - “A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also”

- Anna is the "second witness" required by the Law to testify to the truth

9 **A fall and rising again**

- You must recognize you are a sinner before you can become a saint
- Death before resurrection
- Death to sin, then raised to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6)
- From abject poverty (we are nothing without Christ) to being "joint-heirs with Christ"

10 **Mary's heart was pierced**

- Pharisees constantly alluded to Jesus' questionable birth.
 - John 8:19 – "Where is thy father?"
 - This is no picnic for Joseph either....
 - John 8:38-42
 - "Abraham is our father."
 - "We be not born of fornication...."
 - John 8:46-49 – "Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan?"
 - Accusing him of being a half-breed born of a Samaritan father and Jewish mother; reveals their prejudice.

11 **An offering of doves**

- Mary and Joseph offered two turtle doves or two pigeons in the purification rites at the Temple when Jesus was 40 days old.
 - The Law of Moses required a woman to bring a lamb and a pigeon or turtledove for an offering when her days of purification were ended (Leviticus 12:5-7). But the Law also stipulated that if someone could not afford to bring a lamb, they could bring a pair of turtledoves or pigeons (Leviticus 5:7).
- The fact that Mary brought a pair of birds shows they were still poor – having not yet received the gifts from the magi.

12 **The Wonder of the Star and the Magi**

13 **Matthew 2:1-18**

- Magi saw star and came from the East to Jerusalem looking for the new king.
 - Came for the purpose of worshipping Him.
 - Star disappeared as they drew near to Jerusalem so they inquired of Herod's scholars where Christ should be born (2:4).
 - Star reappeared and led them to a HOUSE (not a manger – 2:9-11) where the "young child" (not a baby) was.
 - Magi warned in a dream and returned "another way" instead of returning to Herod.

14 **Who were the magi?**

- Parthians – Gentile kings from Parthian kingdom to East of Palestine.
 - Often called the "king-makers."
 - During Middle Ages, legend arose that there were three kings – Caspar, Balthazar, and Melchior.
 - Most magi adopted the worship of the Persian leader Zoroaster who practiced a monotheistic worship of Ahura Masda.
 - Specialists in Astronomy

15 **Who were the magi? (2)**

- These magi were different, however. If they had worshiped Ahura Masda, they would not have come to worship Jesus.
- They were looking for a sign of the King of Kings – a star out of Jacob (Numbers 24:17).
 - Descendants of magi over whom Daniel had become chief magi (Daniel 2:48).

16 **Daniel 2:48**

Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon.

17 **Daniel's influence on the magi**

- Their chief (2:48)
- Plot against Daniel came from satraps (governors) not from magi (6:4-9).
- Many Jews remained behind in Babylon at the end of the exile and were influenced by Daniel's Messianic prophecies.
 - Perhaps he taught them Numbers 24:17 about the "Star out of Jacob" being associated with a new "Scepter" rising in Israel.

18 **Numbers 24:17-19**

I shall see him, but not now:

I shall behold him, but not nigh:

There shall come a Star out of Jacob,

And a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel,

And shall smite the corners of Moab,

And destroy all the children of Sheth.

And Edom shall be a possession,

Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies;

And Israel shall do valiantly.

Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion,

And shall destroy him that remaineth of the city.

19 **Gifts of the magi**

- Gold – The kingly reign of Christ
- Frankincense – The priesthood of Christ
 - Used in the worship at the Temple
- Myrrh – The sacrificial death of Christ
 - Used to anoint the dead (John 19:39)
 - *And there came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. (John 19:39, KJV 1900)*
 -

20 **World expected a Jewish king**

- Ancient historians wrote about rumors that someone from Judaea would eventually rule the world
 - Suetonius – A Roman historian – expected a Jewish ruler over the world
 - Tacitus – Roman historian – wrote that a Jewish ruler would have a universal empire
 - Josephus – Jewish historian said that one from Judaea would rule the inhabitable earth

21 **A star led the wise men**

- Theories about the star:

- Planet Jupiter
- Conjunction of Jupiter, Saturn, and their moons making a fish in the sky near 2 B.C.
- Low hanging meteor
- Comet

22 Problems with these theories

- Stars and planets are not visible during the day.
- A meteor would not last long enough.
- Stars and planets appear to travel east to west due to the rotation of the earth. Comets travel in a single direction. But this *star* changes directions to lead wise men from Jerusalem to Bethlehem (a 5-mile journey north to south).
- The *star* came to stand over the *house* where the child was. No star, comet, meteor, conjunction of planets can stand over an individual house.

23 A star by which to navigate

- Remained in western sky long enough for magi to make travel preparations and travel.
- Star disappears when magi near Jerusalem.
 - Magi consult Herod's scholars = Bethlehem
- Star reappears (Matthew 2:9) and now travels from North to Southeast.
- Rests over an individual house.
 - Try picking a star that is over just your house!

24 What was this star?

- God Himself
 - *Bright and morning star* (Rev. 22:16)
 - *Star out of Jacob* ([Numbers 24:17](#))
- The Shekinah cloud of glory
 - Big enough to lead a nation through the wilderness (Exodus 24:17)
 - Visible day and night (Exodus 13:21)
 - Capable of positioning over an individual house (just as it did over the Tabernacle)

25 A Closer Look at the star out of Jacob in Numbers 24

26 A little background

- Israel had defeated the Amorites
- The king of Moab, Balak, is afraid that Israel might next destroy the Moabites.
 - False fear because God forbid the destruction of the Moabites in Deuteronomy 2:9
- Balak hires a prophet, Balaam, from Pethor to curse Israel.
 - God forbids Balaam to go; uses donkey to make his point
 - God only lets Balaam pronounce blessings on Israel

27 Where was Balaam?

- *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness* (2 Timothy 3:16).
 - This includes the book of Numbers!
 - Nu. 23:28 *So Balak took Balaam to the top of Peor which overlooks the wasteland.*
- What did Balaam see as he was moved by God to prophesy about the start out of Jacob?

28 **Numbers 24:1-2**

And when Balaam saw that it pleased the LORD to bless Israel, he went not, as at other times, to seek for enchantments, but he set his face toward the wilderness. And Balaam lifted up his eyes, and he saw Israel abiding in his tents according to their tribes; and the spirit of God came upon him.

29 **Numbers 24:17**

I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: There shall come a Star out of Jacob, And a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, And shall smite the corners of Moab, And destroy all the children of Sheth.

- The magi in Luke 2 were likely descendants of the magi that served under Daniel and would have been familiar with this prophecy.

30 31 **From the book of Numbers**

- While that is indeed an awesome picture, does the Bible tell us exactly what the encampment Balaam saw looked like?
 - Yes!!! Where?
 - Numbers chapter 2!!!!!!
 - That's right, the "boring" book of Numbers!
 - Let's take a look.

•

32 **Numbers 2:1-7**

Num 2:1-2 -- Now the LORD spoke to Moses and to Aaron, saying, "The sons of Israel shall camp, each by his own standard, with the banners of their fathers' households; they shall camp around the tent of meeting at a distance. Now those who camp on the east side toward the sunrise shall be of the standard of the camp of Judah,... Those who camp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar,...then comes the tribe of Zebulun, the total of the numbered men of the camp of Judah: 186,400

•

33 **And more details....**34 35 **How did they camp?**

- Do you see it yet? Do you see the awesome truth in those numbers? Isn't it exciting?
- Still not sure?
 - How about if we insert the tabernacle in the middle and then group the tribes around the tabernacle, just like it said in Numbers 2: 1-2?
- The Significance of Judah
 - Had to come through Judah to get to the only gate to the Tabernacle.
 - Jesus is the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah" (Hosea 5:14; Revelation 5:5)

36 37 38 **A child king**

- Matthew 2:9 – Jesus is a young child.
 - When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went

before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

- Word indicates a toddler, not a baby – typically 15-20 months old.
- This is why Herod chooses to kill all babies 2 years old and younger “according to the time” which he had been told by the wise men.

39 **Guard the Wonder**

40 **Where the modern nativity story fails**

- There was no star over the manger.
- There were no magi at the manger.
- No donkeys, cattle, etc. in the manger.
- Manger not made of wood, but of stone.

41 **Where the modern nativity story fails**

- Magi not guided by conjunction of planets, but by the Shekinah glory of God until it stands over one individual house.
- Magi see Jesus as a toddler—not a baby—and in a house, not a manger.

42 **The nativity story detour**

- Why do Christians get such a fundamental bit of our faith history so wrong?
 - Midnight, December 24, 1223 -- Francis of Assisi tried to recreate the scene of Christ's birth to help people understand the nativity
 - Built manger of wood which was plentiful to him.
 - Brought wise men into the story to “condense” the story and get all the elements into the scene.
 - Put ox and donkey in scene based on wrong interpretation of Isaiah 1:3 – “*the ox knoweth his owner and the ass his master's crib.*”

43 **A warning from history**

- Because of Francis of Assisi's devout and pious life, his manger scene became the model copied by others.
- Today, well-meaning Bible-believing churches continue to replicate his errors.
 - But we have a responsibility to verify everything with the Word of God.
- God's Word – not tradition – must always remain our final authority for faith and practice!
 - Even the “early church fathers” got the birth of Christ wrong

44 **Isaiah 9:6**

- *He shall be called Wonderful...*
 - One mathematician using population statistics has looked at the mathematical odds of one person fulfilling just 8 of the 300 Messianic prophecies including:
 - Born in Bethlehem
 - Entered Jerusalem on a donkey
 - Crucified with thieves
 - Odds were 1:100,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 (1 in 100 decillion)

45 **The greatest Wonder of all**

- This baby was born to die.
- He was born to die for you and me.
- He did it because He loved us and wanted to deliver us from a certain and deserved destination of

the Lake of Fire.

- It truly is Amazing Grace!

46 **Give God the glory!**

- God sovereignly attended to every detail of Christ's life so He fulfilled 300 prophecies made more than 500 years before His birth.
- We only looked at a few:
 - Born in a ceremonially clean and typically perfect manger.
 - Guided descendants of Daniel's magi with a star that "had a mind of its own" to the Christ child.

47 **What will be your Christmas gift?**

- Give Him your praises to His glory.
- Give your family your time to talk about Him in awe and in reverent tones.
- Give your family the experience of unselfish non-commercial giving:
 - Give to missions to tell others about Him.
 - Give to your church to continue its mission of equipping saints.
- Give Christ yourself – your time and heart.