

Five Myths about Christmas

Common Misconceptions Corrected

Reflections The Person and Work of Christ 15 December 2015

1. Jesus was born in a stable. Was Jesus born in a stable, a barn, or a cave? Scripture does not mention any of these three places in connection with Christ's birth; it mentions only a manger. The text tells us simply that they laid Jesus in a manger, because there was no room for Him in the guest room. He was certainly born in a place outside the ordinary living quarters or guest room; tradition holds that it may have been a cave used for shelter.

2. Three kings visited Jesus shortly after His birth. Gaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar — three kings from the East — are said to have travelled a long way to see the infant Jesus, following a great, bright star, and bringing with them gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, in homage to Him. Despite the trio of crowned figures found in every nativity set and picture, both the timeline and the kingship itself are mistaken. Scripture says that magi came from the East, following a great star, seeking the King of the Jews; magi were wise men, not kings. Furthermore, Scripture says that these men arrived when Jesus was a young child, not an infant, and that they found Him at home with His mother, not in a manger within a stable.

3. Christmas is all about Santa Claus. "Santa Claus" is a fictitious name — at best, one might call it an affectionate nickname for Saint Nicholas, a Bishop who lived in the fourth century in a place called Myra, in Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). Tradition holds that he died on the sixth of December, some three and a half centuries after the birth of Jesus. He was a man of considerable inherited wealth, and gave away all of it to the poor. There are good Christian lessons to be learnt from his life, but he himself had nothing to do with the origins of Christmas.

4. Abbreviating Christmas as "Xmas" is acceptable. Christmas ceases to be what it is without Christ; therefore, do not take "Christ" out of Christmas. Even if it is not, strictly, a sacrilege, one ought to treat it, at the very least, as an impropriety — removing Christ's holy Name from this great festival, and replacing it with a bare X: a secular X, an impersonal X, concerned only with present-giving and festivity.

5. Christmas is the most important Christian festival. Christmas is, indeed, the first of the two great festivals of the Christian year. But Christmas is not the most important Christian celebration, notwithstanding the ribbons, the balloons, the festivity, the Christmas trees, the presents, the greetings, and the cakes. The truly foremost

Christian celebration falls upon Easter Sunday.

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