



The True Meaning of the Christmas Tree

Just a week before Christmas I had a visitor. This is how it happened...

I just finished the household chores for the night and was preparing to go to bed, when I heard a noise in the front of the house. I opened the door to the front room and to my surprise, **Santa** himself stepped out from behind the Christmas tree. He placed his finger over his mouth so I would not cry out.

"What are you doing?" I started to ask. The words choked up in my throat, and I saw he had tears in his eyes. His usual jolly manner was gone. Gone was the eager, boisterous soul we all know.

He then answered me with a simple statement.

"TEACH THE CHILDREN!" I was puzzled; what did he mean?

He anticipated my question, and with one quick movement brought forth a miniature toy bag from behind the tree. As I stood bewildered, **Santa** said, "Teach the children! Teach them the old meaning of Christmas. The meaning that now-a-days Christmas has forgotten." **Santa** then reached in his bag and pulled out a **FIR TREE** and placed it before the mantle.

"Teach the children that the pure green color of the stately fir tree remains green all year round, depicting the everlasting hope of mankind, all the needles point heavenward, making it a symbol of man's thoughts turning toward heaven."

He again reached into his bag and pulled out a brilliant **STAR**.

*"Teach the children that the star was the heavenly sign of promises long ago. **God** promised a Savior for the world, and the star was the sign of fulfillment of His promise."*

He then reached into his bag and pulled out a **CANDLE**.

"Teach the children that the candle symbolizes that Christ is the light of the world, and when we see this great light we are reminded of He who displaces the darkness."

Once again he reached into his bag and removed a **WREATH** and placed it on the tree.

"Teach the children that the wreath symbolizes the real nature of love. Real love never ceases. Love is one continuous round of affection."

He then pulled from his bag an ornament of **HIMSELF**.

*"Teach the children that I, **Santa Clause** symbolize the Generosity and good will we feel during the month of December."* He then brought out a **HOLLY LEAF**.

"Teach the children that the holly plant represents immortality. It represents the crown of thorns worn by our Savior. The red holly represents the blood shed by Him."

Next he pulled from his bag a **GIFT** and said,

*"Teach the children that **God** so loved the world that he gave His One and Only Son"*

*"Thanks be to **God** for his unspeakable gift. Teach the children that the wise men bowed before the holy babe and presented him with gold, frankincense and myrrh. We should always give gifts in the same spirit of the wise men."*

Santa then reached in his bag and pulled out a **CANDY CANE** and hung it on the tree.

"Teach the children that the candy cane represents the shepherds' crook. The crook on the staff helps to bring back strayed sheep to the flock. The candy cane is the symbol that we are our brother's keeper."

He reached in again and pulled out an **ANGEL**.

"Teach the children that it was the angels that heralded in the glorious news of the Savior's birth."

The angels sang 'Glory Suddenly I heard a soft twinkling sound, and from his bag he pulled out a **BELL**.

"Teach the children that as the lost sheep are found by the sound of the bell, it should ring mankind to the fold. The bell symbolizes guidance and return."

Santa looked back and was pleased. He looked back at me and I saw that the twinkle was back in his eyes. He said, "Remember, teach the children the true meaning of Christmas and do not put me in the center, for I am but a humble servant of the One that is, and I bow down to worship Him, our Lord, our **God**."

'And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name **JESUS**.'

Luke 1:31



Welcome to Panoplia.

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He Hears Your Cry

Then she went off and sat down about a bowshot away, for she thought, *"I cannot watch the boy die."* And as she sat there, she began to sob. **God** heard the boy crying, and the angel of **God** called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, *"What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; **God** has heard the boy crying as he lies there. Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation."* Then **God** opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink. **Genesis 8:16-19.**

As I read these verses recently I asked myself why did **God** hear the cry of *Ishmael* and not that of *Hagar*? In terms of human capacity to cry Hagar's crying certainly will be louder than that of the boy *Ishmael* yet the scriptures declares that **HE** heard the cry of the boy not that of the mother. Generally we know each time people cry out to **God** **HE** always answer, like when the blood of Abel cried out to **God**, when the children of Israel cried out to **God** while in slavery in Egypt **God** heard and responded. However here there were two people crying, son and mother but **HE** heard and responded to the son and was not moved by the mother's cry.

We can ask ourselves was it because the mother was a sinner and the child was a saint? I don't think so. **God** judges the heart and I sincerely believe that *Hagar* was crying out of hopelessness not really trusting **God** while *Ishmael* was genuinely crying out with a child like faith trusting **God**. The Scriptures says God is not a respecter of person but **HE** genuinely looks out for the heart that truly trusts in **HIM**. Are you crying out to **God** based on the hopelessness of the situation because you believe like *Hagar* that the boy was going to die? What is that dream that **God** has given you and circumstances are like this situation, bread and water ran out, the scorching sun was biting hard and no hope in sight? *No money, No Help, No Place of Refuge*, and you just waiting for the end? Look at *Ishmael*, he cried out simply to **God** with a childlike faith and **God** heard Him.

You could have concluded earlier that maybe **God** did not answer *Hagar* because of her sin of complicity in the complications in *Abraham's family*, I don't think so, in fact they were sent packing as a result of *Ishmael's* mocking *Isaac* the day *Isaac* was been weaned and that when the eagle eyed *Sarah* saw *Ishmael* and complained to *Abraham*. It's about trust. In **Psalm 37:3** we read, *"Trust in the LORD and do good."* We are to trust **HIM** first and **HIS** reaching out to us is not premised on our doing good first. Don't get me wrong we must constantly work at being like **HIM** in doing good but when we need **HIM** we must cry out trusting for **HIS** Help to come through. **HE** is always our very present help in whatever we go through.

I heard a story about a little boy who wanted a cat. He told his mother, *"I'm going outside to ask **God** to send me a kitten."* *"That's ridiculous,"* the mother said. *"Do you think **God** is going to make a kitten fall from the sky? Be realistic!"* Moments later, a cat fell out of the sky into the smiling boy's hands. A few blocks away, a man was scratching his head. A cat had been stuck in a tree. He had pulled down the branch it was on, but just before he could reach the cat, his hand slipped and the branch sprung upward. The cat was flung several blocks away – and a little boy received his *"impossible"* miracle!

Dear reader Cry out to Him today with a child like faith trusting Him and **HE** will answer you and fulfill your **God** given dream beyond *Ishmael*.

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He who the King Delights In

“That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. It was found recorded there that **Mordecai** had exposed *Bigthana* and *Teresh*, two of the king’s officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate *King Xerxes*. “What honor and recognition has **Mordecai** received for this?” the king asked. “Nothing has been done for him,” his attendants answered. The king said, “Who is in the court?” Now **Haman** had just entered the outer court of the palace to speak to the king about impaling **Mordecai** on the pole he had set up for him. His attendants answered, “**Haman** is standing in the court. “Bring him in,” the king ordered. When **Haman** entered, the king asked him, “What should be done for the man the king delights to honor?” Now **Haman** thought to himself, “Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?” So he answered the king, “For the man the king delights to honor, have them bring a royal robe the king has worn and a horse the king has ridden, one with a royal crest placed on its head. Then let the robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king’s most noble princes. Let them robe the man the king delights to honor, and lead him on the horse through the city streets, proclaiming before him, ‘This is what is done for the man the king delights to honor!’” *Esther 6:1-7*



What really happens to the man / woman the king delights to honor? . From the story of **Mordecai** above we see how **God** gradually started fulfilling the destiny of **Mordecai**. **Mordecai** had been destined for greatness but the path to fulfilling that destiny is not always easy. To you that the kings delight to honor you are surrounded by the likes of **Haman** who does not see anything good in what you do rather they are constantly seeking to destroy your body soul and spirit. You possibly have been convinced to stand for righteousness and never to compromise. You know what the scriptures say about you yet your experiences like **Mordecai** at this stage of your life is nothing delightful.

This is to remind you that whomever the king delights to honor usually does not have everything rosy on his or her path. There will be challenges on your path, like the good deed **Mordecai** did appeared forgotten. *Joseph* helping the butler in the prison was quickly forgotten and somebody who knew about *David*’s promise to show kindness to the house of *Jonathan* would have concluded that *David* had forgotten his promise too. However there is a King who never forgets those whom **HE** delights to honor. He appeared to have forgotten *Lazarus*

but he never did! The delay was for a greater honor. He will cause the king that matters to remember you and honor you.

The scriptures also tells us how **God** delights in the **Lord Jesus Christ** and therefore **HE** anointed **Him** above all his fellows, the path to the cross is not an easy one but it is always a fulfilling and rewarding one. Know today that as prophecies concerning **Christ** were all fulfilled **God** that delights in you would also bring those things He has said concerning you to pass. What are you passing through today that does not line up with your dreams, don’t give up. Those that the king delights in are also betrayed, mocked and even persecuted but like we see in the life of **Mordecai** never cease to do good, *Joseph* never stopped doing good even when he eventually got to the palace, keep doing the good that **God** has purposed for your life and He that delights in you will surely honor you.

Sometimes it will appear as if the enemy is prospering when you see the **Haman**’s advancing in their evil manipulations of the system, but be reminded like *David* said in the Psalms the wicked would appear prosperous for a season but they are soon gone. Their games usually catch up with them pretty soon while **God** creates a legacy through the lives of the people that **God** delights in. It may appear that your joy is short-lived

like **Mordecai** returned to guarding the gates after the honor of riding on the kings horse, sometimes your contributions are not recognized you feel like the wise but poor man who saved a city from destruction but was not recognized just like *Joseph* felt with the treatment *Potiphar* gave him not believing his story and as pointed out earlier the butler forgetting him. **Mordecai** later replaced **Haman** as the Kings adviser and *Joseph* you know became the Prime Minister. *Lazarus* literally became a tourist attraction as people came to see him that was raised from the dead. Keep delighting yourself in **God** as the King delights in you and **HE** will soon Honor you with fulfillment and Legacy that is befitting **His Glory** in your life. The darkest hour is usually before dawn, in our text above **Haman** has just perfected setting up the gallows that will hang **Mordecai** when the tides began to change and from that point on there began an outward manifestation of the promotion, honor and blessings that **God** before the foundations of the world had purposed for **him**. So also in your life there is a new season of turn around of the manifestations of unceasing favor and upliftment in your life because **God** delights in you. He that watches over you nether neither sleeps nor slumbers and what He has purposed to do **NO** man can stop **Him**.





CHRISTMAS I.Q. QUIZ



How well do you know the Christmas story? Most of you have read it many, many times. However, because we've all seen so many Christmas plays, sometimes we mix the drama with what is actually in the Bible. Take the quiz. See how well you do. Then, challenge your family and friends.

- What does the Bible say that the Innkeeper said to Mary and Joseph? (Luke 2:7)
 - "There is no room in the inn."
 - "I have a stable you can use."
 - "Come back later; I should have a vacancy"
 - Both A and B
 - None of the above
- A manger is a...
 - Stable for domestic animals
 - Wooden hay storage bin
 - Watering trough
 - Barn
- Which animals does the Bible say were present at Jesus' birth?
 - Cows, sheep, goats
 - Cows, donkeys, sheep
 - Only sheep and cows
 - Miscellaneous barnyard animals
 - None of the above
- According to the Bible, who saw the star in the east?
 - Shepherds
 - Mary and Joseph
 - Three Kings
 - Both A and C
 - None of the above
- According to the Bible, how did Mary and Joseph get to Bethlehem?
 - Camel
 - Donkey
 - Walked
 - Joseph walked, Mary rode a donkey
 - Horse-drawn chariot
 - The Bible doesn't say
- How many angels spoke to the shepherds? (Luke 2:10)
 - One
 - Three
 - A multitude
 - None of the above
- What did the angels say/sing? (Luke 2:14)
 - "Glory to God in the highest, etc."
 - "Alleluia"
 - "Joy the world, the Lord is come"
 - "Unto us a child is born, Unto us a son is given"
- What is a heavenly host?
 - The angel at the gate of heaven
 - The angel who serves refreshments in heaven
 - An angel choir
 - An angel army
- What is Frankincense?
 - A precious metal
 - A precious fabric
 - A precious perfume
 - None of the above
- In Matthew, what does "wise men" or "Magi" refer to?
 - Men of the educated class
 - Eastern Kings
 - Astronomers
 - Harvard Graduates
- What is Myrrh?
 - Middle Eastern Money
 - A drink
 - The sound a happy cat makes
 - A spice used for burying people
 - None of the above





12. How many wise men does the Bible say came to see Jesus? _____

13. Where did the “magi” find Jesus? (Matthew 2:11)

- A. In a manger
- B. In a stable
- C. In Nazareth
- D. In a house

14. When the “magi” found Jesus he was... (Matthew 2:11)

- A. A babe wrapped in swaddling clothes
- B. A young child
- C. A boy in the temple
- D. A grown man

15. The “star in the east” that the wise men followed... (Matthew 2:9)

- A. Stayed in the same place their entire journey
- B. Disappeared and reappeared
- C. Moved ahead of them and stopped over the place where Jesus was
- D. Stayed above the manger the night Jesus was born
- E. None of the above

16. The “magi” stopped in Jerusalem... (Matthew 2:2)

- A. To inform Herod about Jesus
- B. To find out where the king was
- C. To ask about the star
- D. None of the above

17. When Joseph found Mary was pregnant, what happened?

- A. They had a huge wedding
- B. Joseph wanted to break the engagement
- C. Mary left town for three months
- D. B and C



BONUS QUESTIONS:

1. True or False *There was snow in Israel the night Jesus was born.*

2. In Israel, at the time of Jesus’ birth, a manger was usually made from what type of material?

- A. Plywood
- B. Oak
- C. Cedar
- D. Stone

3. How did the magi from the east (most likely Persians), know to follow a star that would lead them the location of the “King of the Jews”?

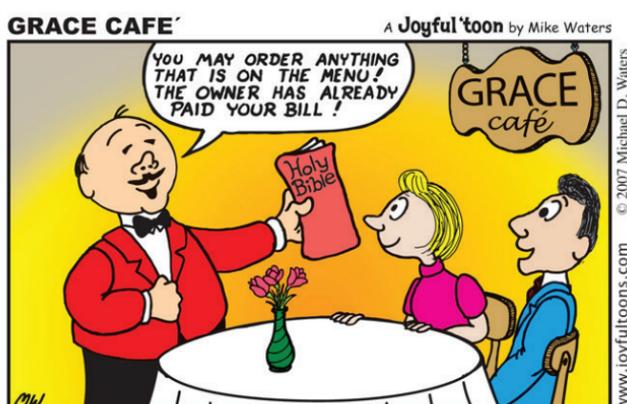
(Daniel 5:8, 11, 15; Number 24:17)

4. What were swaddling clothes? (John 19:40)

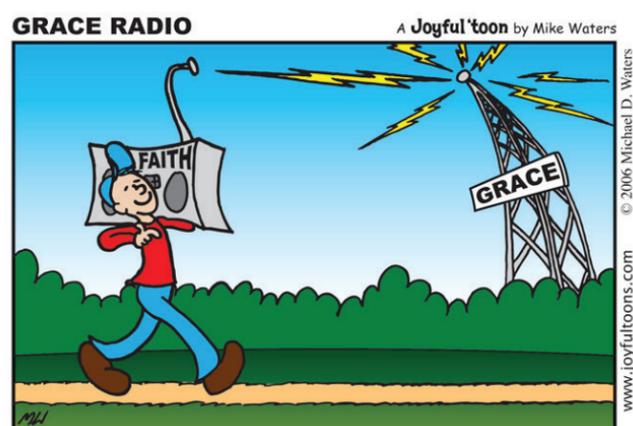
- A. Baby-sized cotton bed sheets
- B. Blankets made from the mother’s clothes
- C. Linen cloth strips used to bury the dead.
- D. Large wool blankets tied together

5. In the song “Hark the Herald, Angels Sing”, what does the phrase “risen with healing in His wings” refer to?

(Malachi 4:2)



For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.
– 2 CORINTHIANS 1:20 NIV



For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – EPHESIANS 2:8 NIV





THE ANSWERS:

(read the scriptures beside the questions first)

1. E. In the **Bible**, the innkeeper didn't "say" anything.
(See **Luke 2:7**)
2. C. Watering trough. Rarely were hay and feed in a manger - feed was usually left on the ground.
3. E. The **Bible** doesn't say. We just "assume" that since **Jesus** was placed in a "manger" (and therefore most likely in a place where animals were sheltered), that there were various barnyard animals present. However, since the shepherds were keeping watch over their flocks in the fields that night, all the other animals could have been out of the "stable" as well.
4. E. This is a "trick" question. The "magi" saw the star. However, the **Bible** doesn't say how many there were and they were not "kings", but astronomers, or literally translated, "star gazers" (see answer 10).
5. F. Although modern "pictures" in a **Bible** will show **Mary** on a donkey with **Joseph** beside her, the **Bible** doesn't say! A donkey was an expensive animal. If **Mary** and **Joseph** were so poor that they only offer two doves (**Luke 2:24**) as a sacrifice, they would not have been able to afford a donkey.
6. A. **Luke 2:10** "The angel of the Lord said unto them..."
7. A. **Luke 2:14**
8. D. The word "host" means "army" - literally thousands. Now, since there was a "multitude" of the heavenly army" (hosts), there could easily have been from 10,000 - 100,000 angels there that night! No wonder the shepherds were "sore afraid"!
9. C. Frankincense was used in the temple worship of the **Lord**. It represents his deity because he is truly **God** born in human flesh.
10. C. The word "Magi" literally means "star-gazers".
11. D. Myrrh was used in the normal burial practices used by the *Jews* at the time of **Jesus**. **Jesus** was buried with a 75 pound mixture of myrrh and aloes.
(**John 19:39**)
12. ___ The **Bible** doesn't give the number. Many people assume that there were three because of the three gifts. However, in ancient times, these men usually traveled in caravans of ten to twelve, along with a full entourage needed for meals, provisions and protection.
13. D. **Matthew 2:11** (see next answer)
14. B. **Matthew 2:11** When the Shepherds found **Jesus**, he was a "babe" in a manger. The Greek word used in **Luke 2** is for a "newborn baby". However, by the time the *Magi* appeared in *Bethlehem*, **Jesus** had been moved from the manger to a house (verse 11) and the Greek word used in *Matthew* is for "toddler" or "young child". He was probably somewhere between 10-18 months old.
15. C. **Matthew 2:9** Most people miss this question, because there are so many pictures and dramas in which the star remains stationary over the stable or the manger. The **Bible** does not say the star appeared over the manger and the **Bible** does not mention the star in connection with the manger or the shepherds. **Matthew 2:9** makes it clear that the star moved "in front" of the magi and guided them till it "stood over where the young child was". These men lived in "the east". Which means they were already in the "east" when they saw the star "in the east". (Read **Matthew 2:1-2**) So, the star had to first move over them and then to the west toward *Bethlehem* before they could begin to follow the star! This explains why it took them so long from the time the star appeared (at his birth) to reach "the young child".

16. B. *Read Matthew 2:2.*

17. D. *Joseph wanted to "put her away" secretly and Mary left town to see her cousin Elizabeth. (Matthew 1:19 and Luke 1:39, 56).*

Bonus Questions Answers:

1. **True!** It's a trick question. There is always snow on *Mt. Hermon*, even in summer. Even though **Jesus** was actually born sometime in the fall (*September - October*), and most probably during the *Feast of the Tabernacles*, there probably wouldn't have been snow in *Bethlehem*. But there would have been snow on *Mt. Hermon*.
2. **D.** Interestingly enough, most mangers in **New Testament** times were made of stone. If you visit *Israel* today, you can see multiple stone mangers used by *Solomon* to water his horses at *Megiddo*.
3. Although there is no **Biblical** record of exactly who these men were or their exact point of origin, I personally believe that they were descendants of the "wise men" of *Babylon*. I believe that **God**, in His great providence, used *Daniel* (*while he was in captivity in Babylon*), to teach these men about future events - including the birth of the Savior of the world. Read **Daniel 5:11** and note: **Daniel was put in charge of these men!!!**
4. **C.** Swaddling clothes were strips of cloth (*quite often linen*), commonly used in the *Middle East* to wrap newborn babies to keep their limbs straight. They were also commonly used to bury people. **John 19:40** records that *Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea* "... took the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes (strips) with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury." People who traveled long distances (*such as Joseph and Mary traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem*) would quite often wrap some of these strips around their waist or pack them in their supplies to use in case someone died during the long journey. So, quite possibly, the swaddling clothes in which **Baby Jesus** was wrapped, could have been those same linen strips that *Joseph* was keeping for a burial!!!
5. Read **Malachi 4:2** Because of this prophesy, it was a very common belief during **New Testament** times that when the *Messiah* appeared, he would have "healing in his wings". So, what were his "wings"?

Every orthodox Jew wore a prayer shawl called a *tallit*. On the fringes of the prayer shawl ("tallit" or "tallith"), attached at the bottom hem, are "tassels" - which are strings tied into knots (called "tzitzit" in Hebrew). These represent the 613 laws of the **Old Testament**.

Why did they wear these garments with tassels? Because they were commanded to. **Deuteronomy 22:12** says, "Make fringes (Hebrew: *tzitzit*) upon the four quarters/corners (Hebrew: *kanaph* - "wings") of the cloak you wear (tallith)." (See also **Numbers 15:38-40**). The translation of the word *kanaph*, the corner of the prayer shawl that holds the *tzitzit*, is "Wings". When the true messiah comes, according to **Malachi 4:2**, he would have "healing" in his "wings".

In the **New Testament** (**Luke 8:44**), when the woman who had the issue of blood for 12 years reached out to touch the "hem of his garment", she was reaching out to touch the "tzitzit" in the "kanaph" (the "Wings").

She believed **Jesus** was the fulfillment of the **Old Testament** prophesy. So, when she touched the hem - the "wings" (the *tzitzit* in the *kanaph*) - healing went out from **Jesus** and she was healed. That's why **Jesus** said, "your faith has made you whole". She believed the prophesy was about **Jesus** - that there was healing in his "wings"!!! [Note: Others believed and wanted to touch his "wings". See **Mark 6:56**]

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EMPOWERING YOU TO FULFILL YOUR **God** GIVEN DESTINY



*'How **God** anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for **God** was with Him.'*
ACTS 10v 38

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