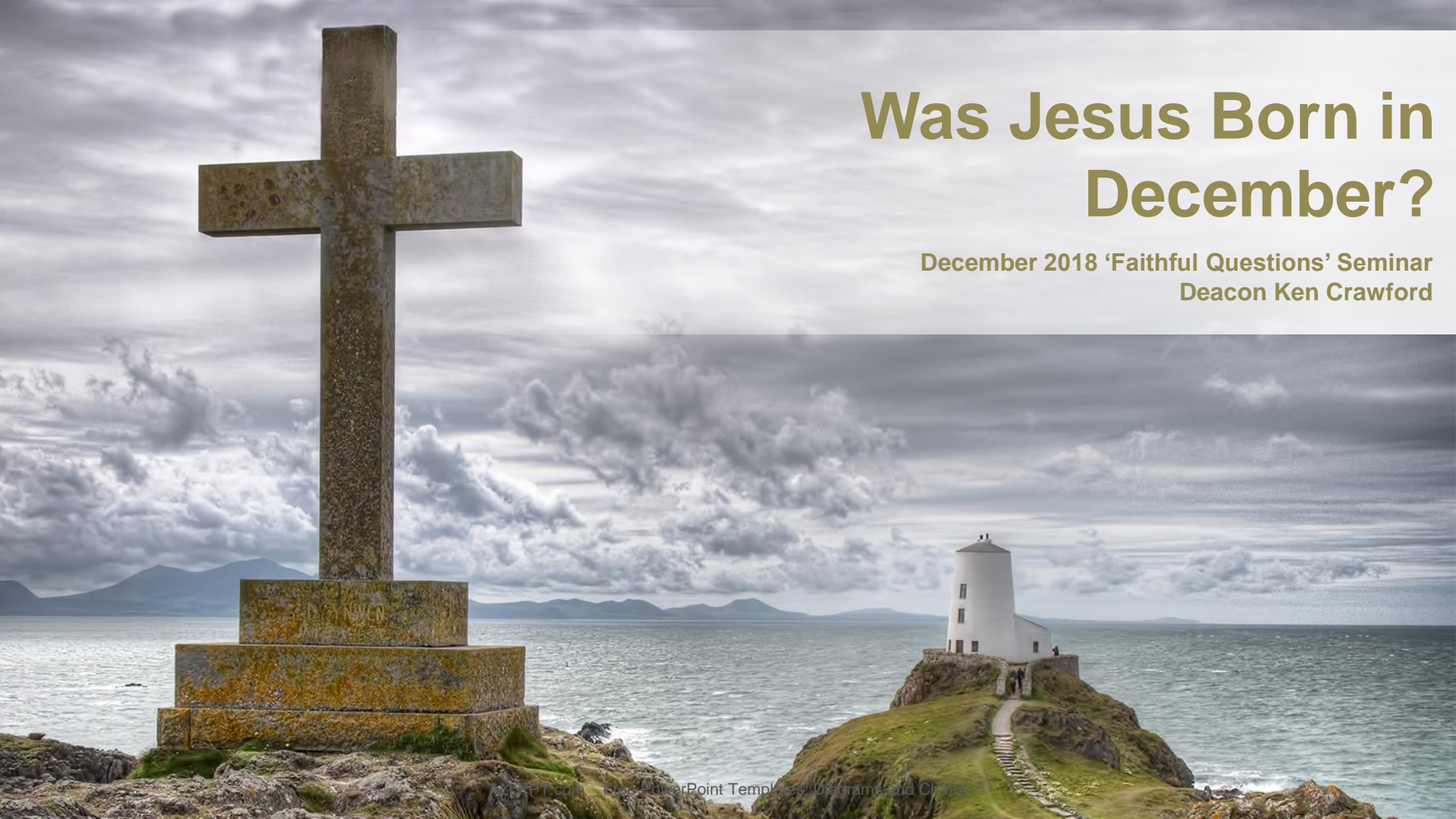


Was Jesus Born in December?

December 2018 'Faithful Questions' Seminar
Deacon Ken Crawford





NO!

(Well, probably not. We don't know for sure.)

Session overview

- Date of Jesus' birth
 - Time of year
 - What year
- Did Jesus exist?
- Born in a barn?
- Magi
 - Kings?
 - How many?
 - When did they come?
 - What about that star?
- How Matthew and Luke infancy narratives dovetail together
- Why do we give gifts?
- Stockings
- Santa and St. Nick
- 12 days of Christmas
- Christmas trees
- Christmas lights
- Poinsettias
- Mistletoe



Jesus' birth – What time of year

- Bible

- In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole world should be enrolled. ... Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, ... While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. (Luke 2:1-7)

- Biblical clues

- Time of enrollment -> no evidence/documentation
- Internal age tradition (great prophets die on day they were born or conceived). Jesus died ~March 25 -> Mary conceived March 25th -> Add 9 months: 12/25!
- Shepherds watching flocks: Mostly do that in the spring (see Luke 2:8-20)



Jesus' birth – What time of year

- Biblical clues continued
 - Zachariah in temple -> John conceived -> 6 months -> Jesus conceived -> 9 months -> Christmas
 - There was a priest named Zechariah of the priestly division of Abijah ... Once when he was serving as priest in his division's turn before God, according to the practice of the priestly service, he was chosen by lot to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to burn incense. ... (An) angel said to him, "... Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. ... when his days of ministry were completed, he went home. After this time his wife Elizabeth conceived, and she went into seclusion for five months. ... In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent ... (to) Mary. ... the angel said to her, "... you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus." (Luke 1:5-31)
 - Zachariah served 2nd half of 4th month of Jewish calendar: ~June + 15 months: ~Sept!
 - OR! Zachariah served early October -> Early January



Jesus' birth – What time of year

- Biblical clues Continued
 - Astrological events that could have been Magi's "star"
 - Conjunction of Saturn & Jupiter: October, 7 BC
 - Conjunction of Venus & Jupiter: June, 2 BC



Jesus' birth – What time of year

- So why December 25th?
 - Short answer: It's a bit unclear
 - Symbolism of the darkest time of year at winter solstice may have helped “internal age” theory gain an advantage
 - Church most definitely makes use of that symbolism
 - “Pagan theory” of co-opting a pagan holiday should be met with skepticism
 - ‘Birth of the Unconquered Sun’ instituted by the Roman Emperor Aurelian on 25 December 274
 - Strong evidence 12/25 was practiced by Christians decades if not hundreds of years before that
 - Important point: It doesn't really matter when it was, just that we celebrate it.



Jesus' birth – What year

- Bible
 - Reign of King Herod
 - Died in 4 BC (by one way of thinking)
 - Magi visit 1 to 2 years after birth (and Herod still alive): Born 5-7 BC
 - May have died in 1 BC -> Born 2-4 BC
 - Jesus as an adult (~30 years old – see Luke 3:23): In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar,* when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas (Luke 3:1-2)
 - 15th year of Tiberius Caesar: AD 28 -> Born 2-3 BC
- Astrological events that could have been Magi's “star”
 - Conjunction of Saturn & Jupiter: October, 7 BC
 - Conjunction of Venus & Jupiter: June, 2 BC
 - Comet recorded by Chinese in 5 BC



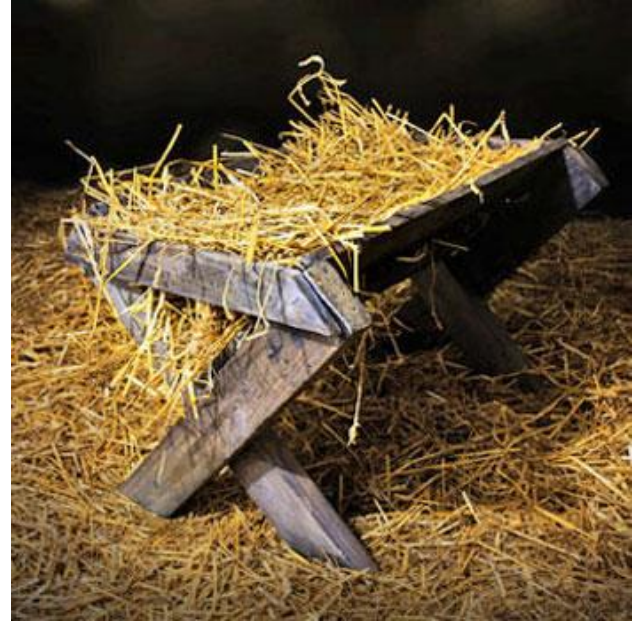
Did Jesus exist?

- Of course! But there are those that doubt
- Want you to have the evidence
- Evidence
 - Bible
 - Ancient documents that date to 1st century
 - as early as 50 AD (Galatians, 1st & 2nd Thessalonians)
 - Gospel of Mark as early as 65 AD
 - Jewish historians
 - Josephus
 - Babylonian Talmud
 - Roman sources
 - Tacitus
 - Pliny the Younger
 - Relics (tread carefully)
 - True cross
 - Shroud of Turin
 - Peter in St. Peter's Basilica



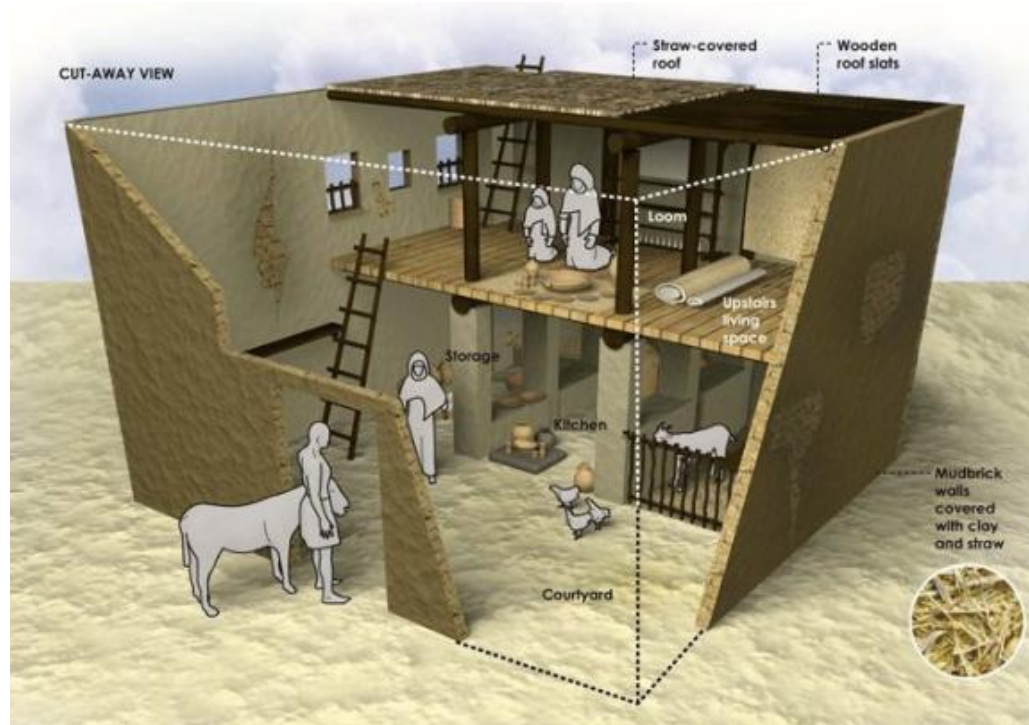
Born in a barn?

- Bible
 - And Joseph too went up from Galilee from the town of Nazareth to Judea, to the city of David that is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. While they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a **manger**, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 2:4-7)
- Manger is not a barn



Born in a barn?

- Ancient Middle Eastern homes were integrated with animals
- 'No room at the inn' means they likely stayed with family not in barn



The Magi

1. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, in the days of King Herod,* behold, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem,
2. saying, “Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star at its rising and have come to do him homage.”
3. When King Herod heard this, he was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.
4. Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.
5. They said to him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet:
6. ‘And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
since from you shall come a ruler,
who is to shepherd my people Israel.’”
7. Then Herod called the magi secretly and ascertained from them the time of the star’s appearance.
8. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search diligently for the child. When you have found him, bring me word, that I too may go and do him homage.”



The Magi

9. After their audience with the king they set out. And behold, the star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was.
10. They were overjoyed at seeing the star,
11. and on entering the house they saw the child with Mary his mother. They prostrated themselves and did him homage. Then they opened their treasures and offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.
12. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed for their country by another way.
13. When they had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him."
14. Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt.
15. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophetd might be fulfilled, "Out of Egypt I called my son."
16. When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi.

(Matthew 2:1-16)



The Magi

- Kings?
 - No. Magi: (dictionary.com)
 1. the class of Zoroastrian priests in ancient Media and Persia, reputed to possess supernatural powers.
 2. astrologers.
- How many?
 - Unstated in scripture
 - 3 gifts
 - St. Melchior, St. Caspar and St. Balthazar are all canonized saints.
 - Fr. George has relics of them (I think)



The Magi

- When did they come?
 - Started traveling after “rising of his star” which would refer to his birth
 - Journey would take months
 - Eventually found Jesus in a home
 - Herod kills all boys less than 2 years old
 - Timeline (approximate):
 - Arrive in Jerusalem (6 months old)
 - Travel to Bethlehem (9 months old)
 - Herod realizes he’s been duped (1 year old)
 - Kills 2 years and younger to be “safe”
- What about people who visited that night?: **Shepherds!**
 - When the angels went away from them to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go, then, to Bethlehem to see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.”
 - So they went in haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the infant lying in the manger. (Luke 2:15-16)



The Magi

- What about that star?
 - Did it lead them to Bethlehem?
 - No, they went to Jerusalem
 - Scribes/Herod told them to go to Bethlehem
 - Did it lead them to the house?
 - Unclear
 - “star that they had seen at its rising preceded them, until it came and stopped over the place where the child was”
 - Could mean verified Bethlehem location



Biblical dovetailing

Event	Matthew	Luke
Genealogy	1:1-17	3:23-38
Zachariah and Elizabeth conceive John		1:5-25
Angel visits Mary		1:26-38
Angel visits Joseph	1:18-24	
Mary visits Elizabeth		1:39-56
John is born		1:57-80
Census/travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem		2:1-6
Jesus is born	1:25	2:7
Shepherds visit Jesus		2:8-20
Presentation in the temple		2:21-24
Simeon and Anna call Jesus the Messiah		2:25-38
Magi visit Herod	2:1-8	
Magi visit Jesus	2:9-12	
Joseph takes family to Egypt	2:13-15	
Herod kills boys under 2	2:16-18	
Joseph brings family back to Isreal	2:19-21	
Joseph takes family to Nazareth	2:22-23	2:39-40



Why do we give gifts?

- Not all cultures do
 - Some give them on Epiphany instead
- Magi gave gifts to Jesus
- Jesus was a gift to us and we are called to give back
- St. Nicholas was known to give gifts
 - 3 daughters of a poor man who couldn't afford a dowry
 - Threw purse of gold through a window



Why stockings?

- Not all cultures do
 - Some use shoes or boots
- At some point St. Nicholas tradition morphed from purse to stocking
 - Some versions suggest he dropped it down the chimney instead of through the window
 - Some versions suggest the purse landed in a stocking hanging from the mantle to dry
- But it definitely seems to come from St. Nick



Santa and St. Nick

- Santa has northern European roots
- Started in the 16th century
- Protestants weren't nearly as big on Saints as Catholics
- But kids still needed their presents
- Things Santa inherited from St. Nick
 - Color: Cardinal red (the color of bishops)
 - Hat: morphed version of bishop's mitre
 - Beard
- Things unique to Santa
 - His weight
 - His clothes
 - His pack
 - North pole/reindeer/sleigh



12 days of Christmas

- Dates to the 6th Century – 2nd Council of Tours
- Covers time from Christmas day to Epiphany
 - Epiphany dates to the 2nd century
 - Celebrated Baptism of Christ as much as the Magi
 - Both are revelation/manifestation of God's divinity
 - Why January 6th is unclear



Christmas trees

- Northern European origin
- Like Santa appears to be a morphing of more ancient tradition
 - Trees of paradise used on 12/24 (decorated with apples to represent temptation of Adam and Eve)
- Modern symbolism centers on evergreen:
Like Christ who lives forever



Christmas house lighting

- Started with candles on the trees
- Symbolizes the light of Christ
- Outdoor displays started with public outdoor Christmas trees
 - Expanded from there
- Didn't really take off until the 20th century and cheap electric lighting



Poinsettias

- Native to central America
- Heavily used by Aztecs as a dye and medicine
- Legend says a poor Mexican girl named Pepita had no present to give the baby Jesus at Christmas and picked some on the way to Church.
 - “Flores do Noche Buena” (Flower of the Holy Night)



Mistletoe

- Name comes from Anglo Saxon words and means ‘dung on a stick’ (spread by birds who eat and spread droppings)
- Has been used in symbolic ways for thousands of years:
 - Greek: Fertility
 - Roman: Peace
 - Celts: Fertility
 - Druid: Fertility
 - Norse: Used as a “kryptonite arrow” in their mythology
- Used in European Christian Christmas decorations as far back as can be seen
 - Perhaps related Roman peace symbolism
- American Christian use comes from 18th century England (kissing under it)
 - Perhaps related to it’s fertility symbology



Next month

- 3rd Tuesday – January 15th
- 7:30 PM in the Morris Hall
 - As always
- Topic
 - Can my non-Catholic friends go to Heaven?
- Future month topics
 - February: What is the point of fasting?
 - March: Were the Jews responsible for the death of Jesus?
 - April: What do eggs and bunnies have to do with the Resurrection?
 - Always looking for suggestions for more topics



Materials

- <http://deaconken.org>
- Slides available on blog
- Check <http://deaconken.org/blog>
- Audio/Video may be available at a later date.

