

BIBLE ODYSSEY

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Bible Odyssey from the Society of Biblical Literature has put together some resources for you on the Nativity and birth of Jesus just to help inform your December stories.

These articles represent the latest in thinking and research by academic scholars in the Humanities, and some of their insights may surprise both you and your readers.

For example, did you know that...

- The New Testament gospels never mention a “virgin birth” but rather a “virgin conception”?
- The concept of the virgin birth appears in later extrabiblical literature, such as the *Protoevangelium of James*.
- The emphasis of the gospels is not on biology but on social change: God sides with Mary to ‘bring down the powerful and lift up the lowly.’
- Only Matthew and Luke mention the nativity of Jesus. Paul, (the earliest Christian writer), Mark (the earliest gospel writer) and John (the latest evangelist) are all silent on it.
- There are major differences between the nativity accounts in Luke and Matthew.
- The historical record and Luke’s account don’t match. During the actual census of Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, Galilee was not included, and people could register in their home towns. Luke seems to have been off by about 10 years on the date of the census.
- While historians can not know for sure where Jesus was born, there are strong literary reasons why Luke and Matthew situate his birth in Bethlehem—the city of King David.
- The date for Christmas, December 25th, is not decided until the 4th century C.E. Early Christians before that did not celebrate the nativity.
- John 1:45 describes Jesus as the “son of Joseph” with no indication that this was questionable.

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- Matthew 1:22-23 contains a mistranslation: "the **virgin** shall conceive and bear a son." The original text from Isaiah 7:14 that Matthew uses refers to only an '*almah*' or "young woman."
- Mark's gospel leaves open the possibility that Jesus was only chosen by God later in his career.
- Both Calvinists and Puritans in the 15- and 1600s banned the celebration of Christmas.

You'll find these fascinating insights and more in the following articles:

Luke's Nativity and the Battle over Christmas

<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/lukes-nativity.aspx>

The Nativity

<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/main-articles/nativity-luke-2120.aspx>

Bethlehem

<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/places/main-articles/bethlehem.aspx>

The Magi

<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/magi.aspx>

The Nativity in Art

<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/nativity-in-art.aspx>

The Political Significance of Luke's Nativity

<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/political-significance-of-lukes-christmas-story.aspx>

The Magnificat

<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/people/related-articles/magnificat.aspx>

Was Jesus Illegitimate?

<http://www.bibleodyssey.org/passages/related-articles/was-jesus-illegitimate.aspx>

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