

# ADVENT FRIDAYS

## CHAPTER 1 - Was Jesus a Real Person?

And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus.”  
(Luke 1:30-31 ESV)

It's the most wonderful time of the year,  
with the kids jingle belling, and everyone telling you be of  
good cheer. It's the most wonderful time of the year  
(Eddie Pola / George Wyle)

I can't help but smile as this melody rings in my ears. The magical season of Christmas is an invitation back to generosity and good cheer that transcends the challenges of the world in which we live.

One division that remains, however, concerns who captures our attention at Christmas: Santa or Jesus? Why does Santa receive more reverence than the baby boy born in a Bethlehem manger 2000-plus years ago? Maybe because many struggle to answer the question: *Was Jesus a real person?*

The entire Christmas story hinges on the answer. So then, how do we know and trust that Jesus was a real person?

In *Is Christmas Unbelievable?* author Rebecca McLaughlin offers three historical references as evidence to the time and place that Jesus really lived. While we as followers of Jesus stand on the shoulders of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, these sources from non-Jesus followers can help validate the good news of Christmas through our Links Fellowships and beyond.

A Jewish historian named Josephus is regarded as a credible source in substantiating many events in the Biblical narrative. In AD 93, he recorded that in AD 62 the Jewish high priest “had a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others’ stoned (i.e., executed).”

In a 2nd-century document written by Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus says, “Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus.” Tacitus’ written words confirm that Jesus was alive when Pontius Pilates was governor in Judea from A.D. 26 to 36.

Our third reference is from a letter written by Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor in Turkey around 109-111, to the emperor of Rome. His persecution of Christian women and slaves confirms that Christianity had spread to people “of all ages and ranks and of both sexes.”

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# CHAPTER 1 - Was Jesus a Real Person? (Continued)

As we zero in on the Gospels, Matthew and Luke enlighten their readers (and us) with details about Mary, Joseph, the angel called Gabriel, and most importantly Jesus' mission to bring God's broken creation back to himself.

May we be confident that, at a particular time and place in history, Jesus was a real person who undeniably changed the world.

## Opening Questions

1. Have you ever questioned if a friend's golf story is real or not? How do you know if the truth is being told?

Readings: (*Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:46-56, 2:6-7; Micah 5:2*)

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2. Do You Believe? (*Matthew 1:23, 25*)

How many times have you skimmed through this part of the Christmas story without pause?

What can you do this week to allow this familiar story to become real and personal to you?

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A Song of Praise (*Luke 1:46-47*)

3. Mary went with haste to Elizabeth to find comfort in what was happening to her and was moved to sing a song of praise to God. In what ways might you magnify the Lord and rejoice in him as your savior this week?

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A Foreshadowing (*Micah 5:2*)

4. How does studying the Old Testament help us understand the four Gospels and letters of the New Testament?

How does Micah's prophecy help you deepen your personal belief that Jesus was a real person?

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