Luke 2:1-20

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."
What’s the true meaning of Christmas?
What is the Christmas story?
Is Christmas celebrated the same throughout the world and throughout this country?

These are some of the questions we will try to answer in this Special Christmas Delta Edition.

Looking closely at the cover you will see a stark contrast between a Secular Christmas, as represented by Santa Claus checking his list twice to see who has been good and who has been naughty and nice and the Biblical account of the birth of Christ.

Notice, too, that the presentation of the Biblical account of the Christmas story as attributed to Luke, has been modernized.

Editor’s Note:
Not all Christmas stories are happy and upbeat and about holiday cheer.

Senior Staff Writer Matt Ellis shared this with us.

With the holiday season in full swing and the countdown to Christmas continuing, a lot of focus this year in the media is based around bargain shopping, holiday travel, online shopping, etc.

The true meaning of Christmas over the past 10 years has taken a backseat to video games, iPod’s, and slash price clothing.

This year’s Christmas break takes on added meaning for my family and I, and I especially my grandmother. The doctor told her in September that the cancer had started in her lungs and by the time they had caught it in one of her annual checkups it had already moved into her liver.

She had the choice of doing nothing and taking no treatment which at most would leave her three to four months at best or she could go through chemotherapy and hope to make it through an extended amount of time.

She has been receiving treatment for more than a month and continues to stay positive without thinking too much about what the future may hold.

As I talked to her while visiting her last week, I noticed on her television the numerous ads that were already running for Christmas sales for electronics to clothes and cars.

It made me contemplate if we as a society were forgetting the whole meaning of Christmas. People are now so focused on what’s the hot toy of the season or the can’t miss deal on the new Cadillac, that they forget to stop and appreciate being with loved ones at a time when some people have no loved ones left around them.

Christmas this year for me will not be about the gifts I receive or what family member sent me money in the mail. It will be about making every second count with my family, especially my grandmother, knowing more than likely it will be her last Christmas after seventy one years.

I asked her what she wanted for Christmas from me as a gift, and without hesitation she replied with a smile, “To see you graduate from college and walk across that stage in May.”

Sometimes Christmas can bring sad news . . .

Student prepares for last Christmas with Grandmother

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

—First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

The Delta
Christmas Special

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The Story of Santa Claus

By Jacob Uhrig
Staff Writer

Down the chimney with a bag of toys for children, the jolly old man appears and silently leaves presents for sleeping children who eagerly await the morning. Who is this mysterious person who appears every year on Christmas Eve to deliver these gifts and where does he come from?

The story of Santa Claus is one of the oldest stories ever told. Some of the places where stories of Saint Nicholas are released and lived until December 6, A.D. 343. Before he became a Saint, he was imprisoned by the Roman Emperor Diocletian but was then released and lived until December 6, A.D. 343.

In many parts of Western Europe, December 6 is called Saint Nicholas’ Feast Day where gifts are given and the stories of Saint Nicholas are told. Some of the places where the traditions take place include the Netherlands, where Saint Nicholas is celebrated on the day before with sharing candy, giving presents and games.

Another version of the Santa Claus legend includes the story of Das Christkind (German for “The Christ-Child), according to Wikipedia. This version was created in the 16th century to discourage the figure of St. Nick. The Christ-Child is a spirit-like child with blonde hair and angel wings intended to be an incarnation of Jesus Christ as an infant.

In this version, gifts are usually delivered on Christmas Eve and are a tradition in Austria, Germany, Italy and many other Eastern European countries.

The story of Santa Claus became famous in the United States with the release of the poem “A Visit from Saint Nicholas” by either Clement Clarke Moore, or Henry Livingston, Jr. in 1823, according to Wikipedia. In the poem, Santa is called a “jolly old elf” with “a little round belly that shook when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.” This poem also included the introduction of Santa’s sleigh and his reindeer: Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Dunder (Donner), and Blixem (Blitzen).

The story is still read today by some parents on Christmas Eve, while others read from the book of Luke.

The first artist to define Santa in the modern age was Thomas Nast who created the first picture of Santa in Harper’s Weekly in 1863. Also, Nast possibly created the story of Santa living at the North Pole, according to Wikipedia. Artist Jan Steen’s painting “The Feast of Saint Nicholas” presented the idea of gifts for children being delivered down the chimney.

In the late 20th Century, the image of Santa’s elves became popular when the story changed to elves making the toys that Santa had given out and each toy was hand made by them.

The story of Santa Claus has been told many times around the world, with many different versions and dates. The story has continued to please children and adults throughout the ages. The myth continues to grow through songs, movies and other media outlets.
Missouri Valley College’s Santa Claus
Professor shows his holiday spirit in the school’s Christmas show

Above: Dr. Loren Gruber in the 2008 Christmas show. Right: Dr. Loren Gruber in the 2010 Christmas show.

Pictures provided by David Roberts
A bushy gray beard, a large, round belly covered by a red velvet suit and a loud jolly laugh. These are the qualities that everyone looks for in Santa Clause.

We are lucky enough to have our very own Santa here at Missouri Valley College. For the last 17 years, Dr. Loren Gruber has played Santa for the college’s Christmas show in December. You can almost always find him on stage singing and dancing for everyone to see.

For those of you who have never seen him, you may wonder why Gruber has been chosen to play Santa. For those of you who have seen him, you know exactly why he does it year after year. His bushy, gray beard and loud, jolly laugh are exactly the qualities that are needed for Santa. Dr. Gruber’s laugh can be heard throughout the top floor of the Ferguson Center all year round, but every December it belongs in the theatre on campus.

“I weighed over 260 pounds and had a huge beard,” Gruber said, “so Diana Malan asked me if I would play Santa in the Christmas show.”

During his 17 years of performing, Dr. Gruber has only missed one year because he was sick, and another performance because of his mother’s death. Don’t worry though, because Ed Leslie filled in for him in his absence.

Gruber looks forward to being Santa every year. The suit, the hat and the crowd all add to the excitement. One thing he has enjoyed the most in the last few years is seeing Tiffany Bergman’s sons in the front row watching him. According to Gruber, they think he is really Santa, and that his job here is just a cover up. Each year he sends them a letter about things that only Santa (and parents) would know.

Not only is it fun for him to dance with the show choir members in some songs, he also gets a big kick out of seeing some of the reactions of people who don’t know him. In one performance he had a student tell him he was a pimp while he was dancing with some of the women on stage.

Dr. Gruber doesn’t just play Santa for MVC’s Christmas show. He has also been on the cover of the Heartland View in 1992, and has played Santa for the Rotary Club. He’s had children and teenagers sit on his lap and pull his beard, which they find to be real. He’s also had children sit on his lap who are doubters, but walk away a little less doubtful.

One year he had a little girl sit on his lap telling him he wasn’t Santa. Gruber didn’t like that statement, so he asked a woman nearby if she had gotten the car she had asked for the Christmas before. She said yes, and the little girl walked away in awe.

So to answer your questions, yes Gruber loves playing Santa, and yes he does a great job doing so. He is dedicated, and gets into the spirit of Christmas year after year. This Santa is one that is most looked forward to every year by Missouri Valley College and the students and supporters. Do yourselves a favor and check him out. His great bushy beard and jolly laugh may surprise you.
Did You Know......
Stories behind Christmas Traditions

Megan Shepherd
Deltas Staff Writer

Ever wondered why you hang stockings during the Christmas season?
According to allthingschristmas.com, we now hang Christmas stockings in the hopes of receiving gifts thanks to one nobleman who, after his wife died, spent all of his fortunes and left his daughters without any goods to get married.

St. Nicholas heard of their situation and in the night threw three bags of gold down the chimney which just so happened to land in the stockings which the young women had hung by the fireplace to dry.
The family noticed the gold in the stockings the next morning and the girls were elated that they had enough money to get married.

Since then, young children have been hanging stockings by the fireplace. It is believed that young children who misbehave will not receive any gifts in their stockings from Santa Claus.

In some stories (myths), misbehaved children would receive coal in their stockings instead.
Enjoy kissing your sweetheart under the bright red and green mistletoe? The mistletoe plant has been viewed as a symbol of peace, goodwill, and love.

Scandinavians associated the plant with their goddess of love and it was promised that anyone who kissed under the plant would have good luck and happiness in the following year.

According to Christmaslores.com, “The modern day tradition of kissing under the mistletoe stems from Norse mythology whereby a Norse goddess declared mistletoe as a sacred plant to symbolize love.”

Today the mistletoe is a symbol of fun, closeness and friendship under which no one can turn down a fun holiday kiss.
The tradition of the Christmas tree began in the 16th century in Germany where fir trees were decorated both indoors and outdoors.
Most family members begin decorating their trees soon after Thanksgiving has passed, but did you know they were originally decorated with colored paper, gilded candles, apples and roses?
The Christmas tree made its way to the United States in 1776 after George Washington and his troops defeated the German Hessians.

Many Germans stayed in the United States after the war where they continued to celebrate Christmas with trees and share their traditions with Americans.
The first supplier of Christmas trees was Mark Carr in New York City. (www.allabouthistory.org)

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Christmas traditions

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A tradition that is sure to satisfy your sweet tooth and please any child is the candy cane. The candy cane started off as straight white sticks used in the 17th century to decorate Christmas trees.

According to Noelnoelnoel.com, “In about 1670 the choirmaster there had sticks of candy bent into the shape of a shepherd’s crook and passed them out to children who attended the ceremonies.”

The plain white candy canes made their way to America in 1800s but did not get their red stripes until the early 20th century. Many have given religious meaning to the candy cane such as it is shaped like the letter J for the name of Jesus. Others say that the white color represents the purity of Jesus and his virgin birth and the red represents the love of God.

In ancient Roman times, evergreen twigs, branches and flowers were handmade into wreaths as a symbol of pride and victory.

Some believe this is where the tradition of hanging Christmas wreaths on doors first began. In Eastern Europe during the Christmas season, which was the darkest season of the year, the gathered wreaths were lit on fire in hopes of coming spring and renewed light.

Catholics and Protestants began using these traditions by the 16th century during the advent season. One 19th century American custom was to use greens and boughs in the shape of wreaths to honor the dead at Christmas.

Later the wreaths would be removed from the cemetery and brought home as part of the holiday décor.

Everyone’s favorite snowman, Frosty, was actually developed as a song before he came to life under his famous black hat. He was created in 1950 by songwriters Jack Nelson and Steven Rollins after seeing the success that Rudolph the Red-Nosed reindeer had in 1949.

They wanted to create a song that could be loved by everyone, young and old alike. They then got legendary cowboy singer Gene Autry to sing the catchy Christmas song in hopes of the song making millions.

Frosty the Snowman was created into an animated television production by Arthur Rankin Jr. and Jules Bass in 1969. “Frosty the Snowman Returns” was later developed for television.

The tune and character are just as catchy today as they were in 1950 and very much still a part of the Christmas traditions.
Adults gather around the piano to sing songs after a hearty meal at night. Children rush downstairs to open gifts in the morning. Fake Christmas trees, food, family and parents. These would be the four must-have words for a perfect Christmas definition.

But, our Missouri Valley College international buddies gave Christmas another dimension. Indeed wherever you are on the globe, Christmas does not have the same value. Europe, Asia or Africa have three different ways to celebrate Christmas.

Let’s take a 12-hour flight to Asia.

Asia

India is primarily a Hindu country, most of the people do not know the frenzy of Christmas time. But, there is still a minority of Christians that celebrate the holiday.

In Japan, the weather is cold and it snows. Ten random Japanese girls wait lining up in front of the cashier desk. All are convinced that they got the perfect gift for their boyfriends.

Boyfriends?
“Everybody tries to find a boyfriend for Christmas,” Megumi Kondo, a senior from Japan, said.

In Japan, Christmas is more of a couples type of thing. It is kind of a Valentine’s Day when the girls have to buy presents for their beloved other half.

The boys will have to, of course, offer something back during the regular Valentine’s Day that they call the “White day,” Megumi explained.

What about the children? The 10-year-old girl that has been (more or less) nice all year to gets that doll that can say “I love you mummy” and crawl and poop.

In Japan, a lot of children and adults have adopted the western attitude toward Christmas, including the commercialization.

“Children do eat cake, like a birthday,” Maya Natori Japanese varsity soccer player, said. Society has the tendency to forget that Christmas is actually a birthday. Little Jesus’ birthday.

Buy another plane ticket, and along with the jet lag, you might be on time to celebrate once again Christmas in Europe!

Europe

Europeans keep a minimum of the religious value of Christmas.

“Christmas is the only time of the year when we go to church!” Robin Wagner, a student from Germany, said. That’s not too uncommon from the trend in the United States— with the exception of Easter, of course.

In Serbia, mostly Catholic Orthodox Christmas is celebrated in an old-fashioned way with a huge Christmas tree decorated in an old-fashioned design.

In France, Christmas songs give rhythm to Christmas time. The well-known “Jingle bells, Jingle bells, jingle all the way!” is translated by a “Hooray Wind, Hooray Wind, Hooray Winter wind!”

But the romanticism of a Christmas in Paris is nothing next to all the pastries and refined candies.

The “Buche de Noel”, or Yule log, is as important as the black, all-natural milk chocolate Santa Claus. Every sweet-tooth is ecstatic during Christmas time in France.

Take your shorts and flip-flops to celebrate Christmas in the warm African weather.

Africa

Family and festivity are the key words to describe the Sub-Saharan African Christmas. The advent period of Christmas is symbolized by the tremendous amount of food.

“People keep coming and eat,” Kess Akesseh, a Ghanaian student, said. “More exciting is that Christmas time is the moment when they go visit members of the family or friends they have not seen for ages,” Nadia Quainoo, also from Ghana, added.

We’ve made our trip. We’re tired when we come back to the United States of America. Christmas is “a little bit the same as Thanksgiving but better because we get some cool stuff,” said a little American girl as she was cutting a piece of turkey.

What does the American Christmas consist of? That beautiful and chubby sweet-heart’s simplification of the Christmas was actually smart and efficient.

But, in trying to define what a perfect Christmas consists of, the list of “must-have” words would have to be longer. Fake or real and huge Christmas tree, food and refined candies, family, lovers, joy, jingle bells, et cetera.
How do you recognize the Christmas season? Turn on the television. Commercials tell you it is now time to think about family, friends, children and buying that brand new IPod or Ipad.

Go to the cafeteria. A little twinkling Christmas tree next to the microwave keeps you aware: you are in the frenzy period of the advent.

Drive downtown or to Wal-Mart, 50% off, 75%, 90%. Nothing is for free, but everything is priceless for the ones we love. Right?

Look at that boy pointing at the store shelves and shouting to his parents what is what he wants for Christmas.

“Well put it on your list to Santa Claus honey,” they answer. He already wrote it as the fourth toy on a 10 toy long list.

These days, Christmas is ripping paper from “gifts without taking the chance to look at it,” the Rev. Pam Sebastian, the Campus Chaplain, said.

People agree with the idea that Christmas materialism is stoked by our modern consumer culture. Bigger is better, more is best!

It is an idea that is so deeply-rooted that it has become normal and we forget what the real spirit of Christmas is.

“It is a time of expectation, anticipation and reflection,” Reverend Sebastian said. When the Rev. Sebastian was younger, her mother would cook special things, she went to church on Christmas Eve, and people could not shop on Sundays.

The 2010 Christmas is influenced by movies that, for sure, carry the message of Christmas and make everybody say “awwwe” because it is full of kindness.

But it has to be over by the midnight sales.

Quietness and gratitude are what Christmas is supposed to be, not noise and greed.

So what would be the solution in a century when Jesus gets clearly knocked out by the Coca-Cola Santa Claus?

“Slow down!” the Rev. Sebastian said. She stays away from the noise and offers meaningful gifts. She makes donations to some associations in the name of people she cares about.

“Do not give a one-more-thing-to-dust type of present. The trick is to give something they would appreciate everyday,” she said.

Except for non-believers, everybody loves Christmas. Everybody wants it to be perfect, even if nobody knows what perfect is. Here is a clue though. If you love this period make it last, have a blast and give...plenty of love.