

Setting the Records Straight: My Christmas Story!

Introduction

Since the invention of the printing press by a German named Johannes Gutenberg around 1440, westerners have seized the liberty to distort the history and cultures of mankind to an untold proportion through the print media. They intentionally did so to suit their desire to be considered a superior race in the world. Accordingly, most of the early traditions of world religions and beliefs (particularly those of Christianity) were also affected and thwarted or told differently to cater to the whims and caprices of western writers and researchers. For this reason, the literature we read about world history, and particularly about Africa, for example, needs to be reexamined and/or rewritten to set the records straight. Against this backdrop, one typical story that arguably needs to be rewritten is the narrative about Jesus Christ, the greatest man that ever lived on earth and who is widely believed by billions today to be the son of God. Correspondingly, it is important to know who Christ really is and how he should be celebrated both by believers and those who have not experienced the awesome saving powers of Jesus Christ. Thus, to understand and know Jesus as a God made man, his place of birth, race, and teachings are very crucial to this ongoing conversation.

Where Was Jesus Christ Born?



The areas in green (except for Egypt) were originally parts of the continent of Africa now considered as Asia Minor.

Many western biblical scholars argue that Jesus was not born in Africa. They aver that Jesus was born in what is considered present day Asia Minor in a town called Bethlehem in ancient Canaan, which probably includes present day Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. Nevertheless, that assertion or statement can again be questioned because prior to the construction of the Suez Canal between 1859 to 1869 the original land mass of Africa included present day Israel (which may not necessarily be the identical spot or landscape on which the biblical state of ancient Israel

was located), Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arabs Emirates (UAE), and Yemen.

However, today that is not the case because presently the Suez Canal separates these Arab nations from the continent of Africa. The Suez Canal is an artificial sea-level waterway in Egypt that was constructed by the Suez Canal Company to offer a shorter journey between the North Atlantic and Northern Indian Oceans via the Mediterranean and Red Seas and by avoiding the Southern Atlantic and Southern Indian Oceans. Consequently, it is safe to say Christ was born in Africa if one considers the land mass of Africa that includes what is now considered present day Asia Minor prior to the construction of the Suez Canal. Thus, if this assertion is true then it is unrealistic to portray Jesus Christ as a white man as is propagated by most Christian churches around the world. In other words, the truth is that Jesus Christ was not a Caucasian or European but someone of African descent whose complexion might be similar to his distant cousin Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia—commonly known as the “Lion of Judah”!

What Did Jesus Christ Physically Look Like?



Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia, Descendant of the House of Judah on the left and the photo of a Caucasian that is widely spread across the globe as the portrait of Jesus Christ.

Since photography was not in existence during the days of Christ but just artistic drawings and paintings that were sketched by artists as portraits of individuals in the past, we are not sure what Christ physically looked like. However, what we are certain about is that African historians have traced Jesus’ roots to Eastern Africa around the Nile delta which played an intrinsic role in the religion, history, and cultures of Africans in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Egypt and elsewhere. Further, it is even mentioned in the Holy Bible that Jesus’ parents took him to

Egypt to stay with their relatives for safety when Herod the Roman Emperor wanted him dead. Also, there are some indications the late Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie was a distant relative of Jesus Christ and his roots traced through King Solomon and the House of Judah to which Jesus Christ belongs.

Furthermore, there are numerous historical evidence in Ethiopia to show that early Jewish history or Judaism as a world religion began in Ethiopia and adjacent environments even though looking at the map of Asia Minor Ethiopia and Somalia are not mentioned as are other regions which were originally believed to be part of the continent of Africa. Hence, it is more likely that based on the physical looks of Emperor Haile Selassie, his distant cousin, Jesus Christ may have been dark in complexion and not the blond haired, blue eyed Caucasian image that is portrayed of Christ around the world.

What Is Christianity: A Western Religion or an African Way of Life?

Christianity in my view is not just a religious conviction or faith. Rather, it is a way of life that deeply reflects the cultural precepts of the African people. In short, its teachings call for being one's brother's keeper; sharing the little you have with those around you who are less fortunate. Also, Christianity fosters the concept of the trinity—three persons in one God (the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit); life after death, and the concept of renewal after you fully embrace the dicta of Christianity. These beliefs are embedded in African traditions and customs that are still practiced by Africans on the continent of Africa and in the diaspora. I will briefly explain a few of them just to lead you in the direction I am shaping this conversation.

For an example, if you read the story of Jesus very keenly in the Holy Bible you will observe that he was a very good storyteller—a rich African tradition that helped to preserve our African history and culture over the ages—since most of what we know about Africa is through oral tradition and not written history. Also, Jesus told parables when he addressed the crowds to teach them moral lessons as our African ancestors did around the fireside at night to embed into our heads wisdom and knowledge. Further, Christianity advocates that in Christ we are all brothers and sisters—and that we are joint heirs with Christ, irrespective of where we come from or who we are. Consequently, Christ does not segregate with respect to creed or color but emphasizes that we all have one lineage. Unfortunately, we see in the western world many Christian churches segregate based on race. What a great diversion from the precepts of Christ!

In like manner, almost all African languages do not have terms that tend to delineate one family member from another such as “uncle”, “aunt”, “cousin”, etc. Instead, the principal family terms that cut across almost all African languages are: “father”, “mother”, “brother”, “sister”. Against this backdrop, an African child would refer to his mother's brother or sister not as his uncle or aunt as kids in western societies do; but rather, the African child will use the word “father” or “mother” to address his uncle or aunt. Similarly, he would refer to his uncle's and aunt's children not as “first cousins” as folks do in western society but as “brothers” and “sisters” because there are no family terms of such categories in African vernacular vocabularies. So, you can see that even the teachings of Christ are exemplified in the languages Africans speak and the way in which they address one another. Regrettably, this concept took on a new trend and

meaning after Christianity was reintroduced to Africans by European explorers and ‘missionaries’ whose goal was to divide and conquer the African peoples they met on the continent of Africa and other peoples in the western world, such as the American Indians.

Furthermore, the concept of life after death is very pivotal to the Christian doctrine. It sets Jesus Christ aside as the only human being that conquered death: he suffered death, was buried, and rose again and will come again in human flesh. Thus, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the highlight of the Christian faith. Therefore, Christians firmly believe that had Christ not died for our sins we would all not be saved and our faith would be in vain. Correspondingly, Africans believe in the process of reincarnation or rebirth. We strongly believe that our loved ones who leave this earth journey to the other side of life from which no one has returned to tell the story. However, through the process of reincarnation we name our children and offspring after deceased relatives with the firm belief they have returned unto us to start a new life or journey either as our children and grandchildren or as influential leaders who made significant contributions to our existence prior to their death. That is why to reinforce this belief Africans exhibit deep faith during the birth of a newly born child when he or she is named for a deceased relative; and, that indeed the child is the reincarnation of the person for whom he or she was named. For this reason, all honors are bestowed on that child as it was previously bestowed on the deceased relative when he or she was alive on earth before he or she passed.

One last example I want to share with you before I wrap up is the concept or belief in the existence of the trinity (three persons in one God). In the African tradition, the concept of the trinity is represented through the three stalls of an African fire hearth that is usually made of three mounts of clay or dried mud to form a tripod on which to lay a cooking pot. For an example the Krahn people of Liberia and Cote d’Ivoire believe that the tripod of the fire hearth represents equilibrium—a state of balance. Therefore, when a pot is set on the tripod it sets still and is safe. The pot does not capsize or fall off the tripod. Hence, there is a parable in the Krahn language that says: “The tripod or the three stalls of a fire hearth is reliable.” The tripod of the traditional African fire hearth stays firm and ensures that what is set on it does not turn over. Consequently, through God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit our faith is cemented and we are strengthened to face the challenges of our times. And, the lack thereof may spill our hope in Christ and subdue us to the frailties of human life. Also, in real life, our essence or being is incomplete if our bodies, minds, and souls are in disequilibrium. On the contrary, we are complete human beings and may have full control of our entire being or essence when our physical, spiritual, and intellectual properties are balanced out.

What Is Christmas?

Christmas for me is a not just about gifts-giving; a wild shopping spree, or throwing lavish parties. Rather, it is a time of reflection—a time to sit quietly by myself or with my family to reminisce over the past year and like the new born babe recommit myself or ourselves to the teachings of Christ which are briefly summed up and outlined in this narrative. Christmas is a time for me to ask myself how effective I was in being my brother’s keeper. It is a time to think of how many times I failed to share the little I had with those who were less fortunate than I am.

Christmas is also a time to reflect on the lives of those who paved the way to make us who we are today—those that lent a helping hand when we needed it most.

Christmas is also a time to reflect on how we lived with our neighbors—how willing we were to take risks to speak on behalf of the millions who do not have a voice of their own—even at the risk of being demonized, disdained, or rejected by our own fellow countrymen and women, or brothers and sisters. Above all, Christmas for me is the time to thank Almighty God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for giving me the spiritual nourishment, fortitude, wisdom, and knowledge to make a difference in the lives of millions of my fans around the world. Also, it is a time for repentance and reconciliation—a season to say “never mind” or “sorry” to those we offended during the year and to ask for forgiveness and an opportunity to start a new and clean slate with the *others* around us.

One the one hand, no matter how much partying we do; how many gifts we share with our family members and friends, if we do not soberly reflect on the reason God sent our Brother Jesus Christ in the world to die and to save us, then our celebration of Christmas or the birth of Jesus Christ will be in vain and saying “Merry Christmas” to anyone will be meaningless! But on the other hand, if we truly know who Christ is, that he is one of us and not the Christ that is widely portrayed across the globe as the *other* who is unlike us in our skin color, designed in a deliberate attempt to distort God’s truths and further mislead people into the dudgeon or abyss of ignorance, disease and poverty, then “Blessed will be the tide that binds our hearts and minds as one...” and then Christmas will have a reawakening meaning for each of us as God’s chosen race and the children of Israel!

Happy Holidays, my dearly beloved!

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About the Author

Dr. Joe Gbaba is a versatile University of Liberia, UNC-Greensboro and Jesuit-trained scholar, playwright, theatre director, actor, and researcher. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature from the University of Liberia, an MFA from UNC-G School of Music, Theatre, and Dance in Directing, a M. Sc. Ed. in Elementary and Special Education and Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership from St. Joseph’s University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His doctoral research work entitled “***The Chiandeh Afrocentric Curriculum and Textbook Experience: Exploring Children’s Responses to an Afrocentric Curriculum***” (2009) centers Africans in their own discourse and narrative as they seek to make meaning of their varied experiences in life through the production of Afrocentric literature, and the visual and performing arts. He is founder and Executive Director of Dehkontee Artists Theatre, Inc. (DATI), a 501 ©(3) nonprofit cultural and educational organization located in the City of Bowie, Maryland and former Acting Deputy Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Liberia.

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