

# HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

What does the word "Christmas" mean? A lot of people would probably say "the birth of Christ," coinciding it with the idea of the "Nativity".

"Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church. In the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on Jesus birthday.

Celebration of birthdays, even including that of Christ was rejected as a pagan tradition by most Christians during the first three hundred years of Christianity, but the matter became increasingly controversial. Partly in reaction to the claims by Gnostics that Jesus had not been mortal, Christians began to emphasize the Nativity. The Incarnate God as a lovable infant born to a holy mother evoked powerful instinctive emotions. The third century Christian writer Tertullian supported observance of Christ's birthday, but condemned the inclusion of Saturnalia customs such as exchanging of gifts and decorating homes with evergreens. "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. <sup>3</sup> For the customs of the peoples are futile; for one cuts a tree from the forest, work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. <sup>4</sup> They decorate it with silver and gold; **Jeremiah 10:2-4**

The Protestant Reformation in 16th century Europe was associated with a profound rejection of the Roman Church and a return to scripture as the ultimate source of spiritual authority. There was no scriptural support to be found for celebration of Christmas, no commandment that Christ's birthday be observed and no date of birth had been given that could be used for the celebration. Martin Luther called Rome a modern "Babylon" parallels could be drawn with the mother-goddess worship of the ancient Babylon. The birthday of Mithras and the festivals of Saturnalia for the celebration of Christ would be symptoms of the paganism upon which the Romans had built the Catholic Church.

In 137 AD the Bishop of Rome ordered the birthday of the Christ Child celebrated as a solemn feast. In 350 AD another Bishop of Rome, Julius I, chose December 25th as the observance of Christmas.

In the late 300's, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. By 1100, Christmas had become the most important religious festival in Europe and Saint Nicholas was a symbol of gift giving in many European countries. During the 1400's and 1500's, many artists painted scenes of the Nativity, the birth of Jesus.

The popularity of Christmas grew until the Reformation, a religious movement of the 1500's. This movement gave birth to Protestantism. During the Reformation, many Christians began to consider Christmas a pagan celebration because it included nonreligious customs. During the 1600's, because of these feelings, Christmas was outlawed in England and in parts of the English colonies in America. The old customs of feasting and decorating, however, soon reappeared and blended with the more Christian aspects of the celebration.

The tradition of celebrating December 25 as Christ's birthday came to the Romans from Persia. Mithra, the Persian god of light and sacred contracts, was born out of a rock on December 25. Rome was famous for its flirtations with strange gods and cults and in the third century the unchristian emperor Aurelian established the festival of Dies Invicti Solis, the Day of the Invincible Sun, on December 25.

So, the question we must ask ourselves does Christmas really commemorate the birth of the Son of God? Or is it the birth of the Sun that is honored? The New Catholic Encyclopedia says: The birth of Christ was assigned the date of the winter solstice, December 25 in the Julian calendar, January 6 in the Egyptian, because on this day as the sun began its return to the northern skies the pagan devotees of Mithra celebrated the dies natalis Solis Invicti (birthday of the invincible sun).

The largest pagan religious cult which fostered the celebration of December 25 as a holiday throughout the Roman and Greek worlds was the pagan sun worship "Mithraism." This winter festival was called 'the Nativity', the 'Nativity of the SUN'.

The 25th day of December was sacred, not only to the pagan Romans but to a religion from Persia which, in those days was one of Christianity's strongest rivals. This Persian religion was Mithraism, whose followers worshiped the sun and celebrated its return to strength on that day.

## **Christ and Mass**

The word Christmas has nothing to do with Christ's birth, so what does the word really mean? The word Christmas is a contraction of Christ's Mass, derived from the Old English Cristes mæsse. It is often abbreviated Xmas, probably because X resembles the Greek letter "chi" (C) which has often historically been used as an abbreviation for Christ.

The compound word is made up of two words:

1.) Christ 2.) Mass

"Christ" refers to God's Son Jesus. The word "Mass" comes from Old English mæsse, a modification of Vulgar Latin messa from the Late Latin missa, literally meaning

"dismissal"; as in at the end of a religious service. The Middle English Christemas, comes from Old English Cristes mæsse, literally, Christ's mass, shortened to "Christmas". Meaning the "dismissal" (or passing away) of Christ; or more directly, the death of Christ.

Those who understand the Catholic religion realize that the "Mass" always refers to the sacrificial death of Christ. The word "Christmas" comes from the Roman Catholic ritual.

What is "Mass"? Catholic Definition: "The Sacrifice of the Mass is really the holy and living representation and at the same time the unbloody and efficacious oblation of the Lord's Passion [suffering] and that blood-stained sacrifice which was offered for us on the cross" [The Catholic Encyclopedia, page 375]

"Merry Christ mass? So we have a day that is not connected to Christ's birth as falsely claimed. When people 'make merry' and exchange gifts amongst themselves over the death of Christ and in a sense is mocking the death of Christ and making him relive it over and over again. This also sounds like what happens to the two witnesses.

<sup>3</sup> And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth."

<sup>4</sup> These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God<sup>[a]</sup> of the earth. <sup>5</sup> And if anyone wants to harm them, fire proceeds from their mouth and devours their enemies. And if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this manner. <sup>6</sup>These have power to shut heaven, so that no rain falls in the days of their prophecy; and they have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to strike the earth with all plagues, as often as they desire. When they finish their testimony, the beast that ascends out of the bottomless pit will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them. <sup>8</sup> And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our<sup>[b]</sup> Lord was crucified. <sup>9</sup> Then those from the peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations will see their dead bodies three-and-a-half days, and not allow<sup>[c]</sup> their dead bodies to be put into graves. <sup>10</sup>**And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them, make merry, and send gifts to one another,** because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> Now after the three-and-a-half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. <sup>12</sup> And they<sup>[d]</sup> heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they ascended to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies saw them

**Revelation 11:3-12**

The mass is a most subtle and destructive enemy against Christ and his sacrifice. Christ's sacrifice made once by himself on the cross and on the mount of Calvary, is the full and perfect sacrifice to the sanctification of all them that are and shall be saved and never to be reiterated and done again. This Mass signifies an imperfection in what

Christ sacrificed for us, which was perfection, such that God would never require another blood sacrifice to be made for the remission of our sin, ever again! It is as if they are placing him on the cross again and again for as long as they continue this practice and God said it was only needed once.

The Roman Catholic Mass of "Christ" is plainly idolatry. By celebrating the "Mass" of Christ, one is openly supporting the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and its pagan Mass carried over from Mithraism. Many of you know the blasphemy of the Roman Catholic system and yet at year end we embrace Rome's most blasphemous abomination of them all, Christmas, we yoke up and come into agreement with this blasphemy!

Reformer John Knox wrote: "The Mass is Idolatry. All worshipping, honoring a service invented by the brain of man in the religion of God, without his own express commandment is idolatry. The Mass is invented by the brain of man without any commandment of God; therefore it is idolatry." [A Vindication of the Doctrine that the Sacrifice of the Mass is Idolatry, 1550,-John Knox-Extracted from: Selected Writings of John Knox: Public Epistles, Treatises, and Expositions to the Year 1559]

In the Roman Catholic Mass the priest considers himself as the vicar or substitute of Christ who offers Jesus, the victim, as a sacrifice each time the mass is performed. In offering this "sacrifice," the priest believes he has the power to change the bread and the wine of the Communion into Jesus' literal flesh and blood called transubstantiation, which also is a lie, requiring the people to worship these 'sacraments' as Christ Himself. This constitutes idolatry a vain repetition of Jesus' one time sacrifice for sin **Hebrews 9:12, 24-26; Hebrews 10:10, 12, 14.**

To gain even more insight and to verify what we just read, let us look at Catholic sources to gain some truth about the Mass. "The mass is the unbloody renewal of the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary's cross...Christ, through the ministry of the Roman Catholic priest, offers Himself to God in an unbloody manner under the appearances of bread and wine. The mass is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross because the Victim is the same. The purpose of the mass is, among other things, to satisfy the justice of God for the sins committed against Him." Catholic Priest John A. O'Brien, in UNDERSTANDING THE CATHOLIC FAITH, Ave Maria Press, Nortre Dame, Ind, 1955, p. 212:

"When the priest pronounces the tremendous words of consecration, he reaches up into the heavens and brings Christ down from His throne, and places Him upon the (Roman Catholic) altar to be offered up again as the victim for the sins of man...Christ became incarnate a single time, the priest brings Christ down from heaven and renders Him present on the (Roman Catholic) altar as the eternal Victim for the sins of man-not once

but a thousand times! The priest speaks and lo! Christ, the eternal, omnipotent God, bows His head in humble obedience to the priest's command...No wonder that the name which spiritual writers are especially fond of applying to the priest is that of 'altar Christus.' For the priest is and should be another Christ." Catholic Priest John A. O'Brien, again in Faith of Millions, Our Sunday Visitor, Huntington, Ind., pp. 243-244.

## **Saint Nicholas**

St. Nicholas was born in 280 AD, in Patara, a city of Lycia, in Asia Minor. St. Nicholas was a wealthy orphan whose parents died in an epidemic, Saint Nicholas became a bishop at age 17 and at age 30 he became the bishop of Myra (now the city of Demre on the south coast of Turkey) near the beginning of the fourth century. He became the gift giver of Myra. His gifts were given late at night, so that the gift giver's identity would remain a secret. St Nicholas was eventually named the patron saint of children, sailors, Russia and Greece.

Despite being quite young Nicholas had earned a reputation for kindness and wisdom. In the year 303, the Roman emperor Diocletian commanded all the citizens of the Roman Empire, which included Asia Minor, to worship him as a god.

Christians believed in one god and one god alone, so their conscience would not allow them to obey the Emperor's order. Angered by their stubbornness, Diocletian warned the Christians that they would be imprisoned. The Emperor carried out the threat and St Nicholas who resisted too was also imprisoned. For more than five years, St Nicholas was confined to a small cell. He suffered from cold, hunger, and thirst, but he never wavered in his beliefs. In 313, when Diocletian resigned, and Constantine came to power Nicholas was released, and he returned to his post as Bishop of Myra, because of what happened many Christians had defected and the sacrament of confession was created, so that the "traitors" could cleanse their souls before re-entering the Christian Church.

St. Nicholas did not like to be seen when he gave away presents, so the children of the day were told to go to sleep quickly or he would not come! Nothing has changed and Santa Claus will not arrive this Christmas unless the children go to sleep early

St. Nicholas was a vigorous opponent of Arianism, the belief of the Alexandrian bishop Arius that Christ was created by God and therefore independent of God and inferior to God a form of polytheism intended to explain how Christ could be both human and divine. According to Arius, Jesus Christ had not existed before God created Him, and Jesus prayed to his Father in Heaven, to whom He was subordinate.

Constantine wanted the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. to resolve the bitter conflict in the Eastern Church over Arianism. Nicholas reputedly not only attended Nicea, but physically accosted Arius there. The Nicene Creed supported the unity of God, Christ and the Holy Ghost as a single Being (with God and Christ equally divine, but of the same divine substance), thereby affirming the monotheism of Christianity. Constantine exiled Arius and ordered his books to be burned.

Saint Nicholas became the subject of many legends, one famous story about St. Nicholas, is about a poor man who had no money to give to his three daughters on their wedding day. St Nick dropped bags of gold into the stockings which the girls had left to dry by the fire. The sisters found the gold and ever since, children have hung up stockings on Christmas Eve hoping that they will be filled with presents by Christmas morning. A sailor who fell overboard was reputedly saved by Nicholas when the saint walked on water, retrieved the sailor and carried him back to the ship. After an innkeeper had robbed & dismembered some students, Nicholas reputedly re-assembled them and restored them to life. Nicholas took pity on a poverty-stricken family with 3 daughters who faced the threat of being forced into prostitution because they had no wedding dowries. For two daughters he crept-up to their house at night and threw bags of gold through a bedroom window. For the last daughter, he threw a bag of gold down the chimney which landed in a stocking she had set by the fireplace for drying. The traditional association of chimneys & stockings with Santa Claus comes from this story. Nicholas was also noted for his generosity with children he would reward them with treats if they had studied their catechism & behaved well. Nicholas was therefore patron saint of schoolchildren & sailors.

He continued his good works and became even wiser and more understanding by the time of his death on December 6, 343. The bones of Saint Nicholas lay in his tomb in Myra until 1087. Because the Turks had taken Antioch in 1084, and Myra was no longer Christian, three ships of sailors & merchants raided the tomb, confiscated the bones and took them to the Italian seaport of Bari. In 1089 Pope Urban II consecrated a shrine for the relics of Saint Nicholas in a newly constructed crypt. The Basilica di San Nicola was completed in the middle of the 12th century where the crypt was located.

The legend of Nicholas made him so popular that more European churches bore his name than that of any of the apostles. He was made patron saint of Greece and Russia. He was also made patron saint of banking & pawn broking at a time when the two trades were closely related. The 3-ball symbol of pawnshops represents the three bags of gold he threw as dowries. On February 14, 1969 the Pope removed Nicholas from the calendar of saints there are no records of Nicholas ever having been canonized. The

Eastern Orthodox Church continues to recognize the sainthood of Nicholas.

The date of Nicholas's death reputedly on December 6th, 326 AD was widely celebrated as the feast of Saint Nicholas. The fact that the date coincided with the completion of farmwork, the slaughtering of animals for the winter and a period of idleness, abundant food and celebration may actually be the real reason why it was celebrated with such enthusiasm. But the feast of Saint Nicholas was abolished in many European countries as part of Martin Luther's effort to stop the veneration of saints. In keeping with the idea that Christ is the source of all good things, German Protestants had a tall Christ child (Christkindl) distributing presents on December 25th. In English-speaking countries Kris Kringle became another name for Santa Claus.

But in the Netherlands celebration of Saint Nicholas Day (December 6th) continued, despite the rise of Protestantism. Amsterdam has historically been a great seaport, and Saint Nicholas (Sinterklaas) as the protector of sailors has been its patron saint. Saint Nicholas with his long white beard and wearing his red & white bishop's robes would ride down streets on his white horse distributing gifts to children. Even today, December 6th is the day children in Holland receive their gifts although Saint Nicholas travels from Spain rather than the North Pole and may be accompanied by one or more assistants ("black Peters", who are either Moors or people who were blackened by climbing up and down chimneys). (In Germany the assistant of St. Nicholas was Knecht Ruprecht, a "wild man" who was condemned as a manifestation of the devil by the Catholic Church.)

The transformation of Saint Nicholas to Santa Claus happened largely in America with inspiration from the Dutch. In the early days of Dutch New York, Sinterklaas became known among the English-speaking as "Santa Claus" (or "Saint Nick"). In 1809 Washington Irving, a member of the New York Historical Society (which promoted a Dutch Saint Nicholas as its patron saint), created a tale of a chubby, pipe-smoking little Saint Nicholas who rood a magic horse through the air visiting all houses in New York. The elfish figure was small enough to climb down chimneys with gifts for the good children and switches for the bad ones.

By 450, churches in Asia Minor and Greece were being named in honor of him. By 800, he was officially recognized as a saint by the Eastern Catholic Church.

In the 1200s, December sixth began to be celebrated as Bishop Nicholas Day in France.

By end of the 1400s, St Nicholas was the third most beloved religious figure, after Jesus

and Mary. There were more than 2000 chapels and monasteries named after him.

In the 1500s people in England stopped worshipping St Nicholas and favored more another gift giving figure Father Christmas. Over the centuries, St. Nicholas' popularity grew, and many people in Europe made up new stories that showed his concern for children. The name Santa Claus was derived from the Dutch Sinter Klass pronunciation of St. Nicholas. Early Dutch settlers in New York (once called New Amsterdam) brought their traditions of St Nicholas. As children from other countries tried to pronounce Sinter Klass, this soon became Santa Klass, which was settled as Santa Claus. The old bishop's cloak with mitre, jewelled gloves and crozier were soon replaced with his red suit and clothing seen in other modern images.

### **What is a Saint**

In the eyes of the Catholics, a saint is someone who has lived such a holy life that after dying and going to heaven, he or she is still able to help people on earth. They often become patron to different groups of people one such was children and many legends sprang up to explain his presence

### **The customs of Christmas**

The custom of gift giving on Christmas goes back to Roman festivals of Saturnalia and Kalends. The very first gifts were simple items such as twigs from a sacred grove as good luck emblems. Soon that escalated to food, small items of jewelry, candles, and statues of gods. To the early Church, gift-giving at this time was a pagan holdover and therefore severely frowned upon. However, people would not part with it, and some justification was found in the original gift giving of the Magi, and from figures such as St. Nicholas. By the Middle Ages gift giving was accepted. Before then it was more common to exchange gifts on New Year's Day or Twelfth Night.

Santa Claus is known by British children as Father Christmas. Father Christmas of these days, is quite similar to the American Santa, but his direct ancestor is a certain pagan spirit who regularly appeared in medieval mummer's plays. The old-fashioned Father Christmas was depicted wearing long robes with sprigs of holly in his long white hair.

Children write letters to Father Christmas detailing their requests, but instead of dropping them in the mailbox, the letters were tossed into the fireplace. The draft carries



the letters up the chimney, and theoretically, Father Christmas reads the smoke. Gifts are opened Christmas afternoon.

From the English we get a story to explain the custom of hanging stockings from the mantelpiece. Father Christmas once dropped some gold coins while coming down the chimney. The coins would have fallen through the ash grate and been lost if they hadn't landed in a stocking that had been hung out to dry. Since that time children have continued to hang out stockings in hopes of finding them filled with gifts.

The custom of singing carols at Christmas is also of English origin. During the middle ages, groups of serenaders called waits would travel around from house to house singing ancient carols and spreading the holiday spirit. The word carol means "song of you." Most of the popular old carols we sing today were written in the nineteenth century.

The hanging of greens, such as holly and ivy, is a British winter tradition with origins far before the Christian era. Greenery was probably used to lift sagging winter spirits and remind the people that spring was not far away. The custom of kissing under the mistletoe is descended from ancient Druid rites. The decorating of Christmas trees, though primarily a German custom, has been widely popular in England since 1841 when Prince Albert had a Christmas tree set up in Windsor Castle for his wife Queen Victoria, and their children.

The word wassail is derived from the Anglo-Saxon phrase "waes hael," which means "good health." Originally, wassail was a beverage made of mulled ale, curdled cream, roasted apples, nuts, eggs, and spices. It was served for the purpose of enhancing the general merriment of the season. Like many of the ancient customs, wassailing has a legend to explain its origin. It seems that a beautiful Saxon maiden named Rowena presented Prince Vortigen with a bowl of wine while toasting him with the words Waes hael. Over the centuries a great deal of ceremony had developed around the custom of drinking wassail. The bowl is carried into a room with great fanfare, a traditional carol about the drink is sung, and finally, the steaming hot beverage is served.

### **The Nativity scene**

The popularity of the Nativity scene, one of the most beloved and enduring symbols of the holiday season, originated in Italy. St. Francis of Assisi asked a man named Giovanni Vellita of the village of Greccio to create a manger scene. St. Francis performed mass in

front of this early Nativity scene, which inspired awe and devotion in all who saw it. The creation of the figures or pastori became an entire genre of folk art.

## **Yule log traditions**

"The ceremony of the Yule log, like so many of the oldest Christmas traditions, was thoroughly pagan in origin."

The word Yule comes from the Anglo-Saxon word *geol* (feast), applied to December (*geola*, feast month). Or it may come from a Norse-Saxon word meaning wheel, referring to the seasonal cycles of the sun. Or it could have come from the Scandinavian *Jule* (*Jul*), who was the god of sex and fertility. ("Tide" as in "yuletide" may have come from an Old English word meaning time, occasion or season.)

The Yule Log tradition comes to us from Scandinavia, where the pagan sex and fertility god *Jul*, or *Jule* (pronounced 'yule'), was honored in a twelve-day celebration in December. A large, single log (generally considered to have been a phallic idol) was kept with a fire against it for twelve days, a different sacrifice to *Jul* being offered in the fire on each of the twelve days

"The Yule log was originally an entire tree, carefully chosen, and brought into the house with great ceremony. The butt end would be placed into the hearth while the rest of the tree stuck out into the room. The tree would be slowly fed into the fire and the entire process was carefully timed to last the entire Yule season."

Midwinter sun festivals were celebrated in ancient Britain & Scandinavia. In Germanic & Scandinavian countries a huge log was carried into the house to serve as the foundation for holiday fires. The Yule log at *Jultid* (Yuletide) would burn for twelve days, and a different sacrifice would be made on each of the twelve days. Lighted candles and winter fires were used by sun-worshippers to encourage the rebirth of the Sun. Similarly tying fruit to the branches of trees was intended to encourage the coming of spring.

The dark cold winters inspired the development of traditions concerned with warmth and light. Yuletide, meaning the turning of the sun or the winter solstice, has traditionally been a time of extreme importance in Scandinavia a time when fortunes for the coming year were determined and when the dead were thought to walk the earth. For a long time, it was considered dangerous to sleep alone on Christmas Eve. The extended family, master and servant, alike would sleep together on a freshly spread bed of straw.

The Christmas tree has never been particularly popular in France, and though the use of the Yule log has faded, the French make a traditional Yule log-shaped cake called the "buche de Noel," which means "Christmas Log." The cake, among other food in great abundance, is served at the grand feast of the season, which is called Le reveillon. Le reveillon is a very late supper held after midnight mass on Christmas Eve. The menu for the meal varies according to regional culinary tradition. The traditional Christmas dinner is made of turkey with chestnuts puree, and the buche de Noel as desert. Oysters are eaten on New Year's Eve only because New Year's is more an adult celebration and usually children are not very fond of oysters. The tradition in Paris is to eat grilled chestnuts in the streets during the month of December and part of January.

## **Mistletoe**

"Mistletoe was always known to have played an important part in the rituals of the Druids, and consequently, was never really accepted by the Church. The Druids gave the world the tradition of hanging mistletoe in the house.

The Mistletoe is a parasitic plant that attaches itself to trees, never touches the ground and can bear fruit in the winter. The Druids regarded mistletoe as sacred. The Scandinavians associated it with the goddess of love. Ancient Babylonian legend regarded mistletoe as a divine branch from heaven which was grafted to earthly trees. Mistletoe was a token of peace & reconciliation with a kiss symbolizing pardon. Kissing under mistletoe was a Roman custom. The unholy & pagan associations with mistletoe (and the adulterous temptations) caused the church to ban its use and substitute holly wreaths, which could represent Christ's crown of thorns (with the blood-red berries). (Puritans later condemned holly wreaths as a pagan symbol of sun-worship the shape symbolizing the sun.)

With its large red & white leaves (the colored upper leaves are often mistaken for flowers), the poinsettia has become the Christmas "flower". Eighty-five percent of potted plants sold at Christmastime are poinsettias. Poinsettia leaves can turn from green to brilliant red in the month of December. The flowers were brought to the United States by physician, statesman and botanist Joel Roberts Poinsett upon his return as American Ambassador to Mexico in 1828. Poinsett cultivated the Aztec plants in his South Carolina greenhouse. In Mexico the poinsettia is called "flower of the Holy Night".

## **CHRISTMAS TREES AND OTHER PLANTS**

"The tradition of bringing holly, ivy, or any evergreen into the house is another Christmas practice which goes back to the Romans northern European beliefs. Celtic and Teutonic tribes honored these plants at their winter solstice festivals as symbolic of eternal life, and the Druids ascribed magical properties to the mistletoe in particular."

"Christmas incorporated many other pagan customs. Holly and ivy, for instance, sacred to the ancient gods Saturn and Dionysus, were believed to have magic power against evil. Many other Christmas decorations used today were once pagan symbols. The Romans used flowers and leafy boughs in their rites. Records show that the Saxons used holly, ivy, and bay in their religious observances."

The use of evergreens was so closely associated with the garlands of pagan days that in many of the early Church celebrations they were forbidden." "The use of Christmas wreaths is believed to be traceable to the pagan customs of decorating buildings and places of worship at the feast which took place at the same time as Christmas. The Christmas tree is from Egypt and its origin dates from a period long anterior to the Christmas era."

Ancient Egyptians used palms in their Winter Solstice festivals and the Romans used firs in anticipation of the lush greenery of spring with the return of the Sun. Bringing an evergreen tree into the house during winter solstice festivals was a tradition among the Germans from at least 700 AD.

Like the Christmas tree, the Advent wreath and its candles are of German origin although candles were common gifts during Saturnalia and candles have a long tradition in pagan rituals.

Victoria became Queen of England in 1837 at age 18. She proposed to the German Prince Albert and married him in 1840. Albert provided the first Christmas tree, well decorated, to his family at Windsor Castle for the Christmas of 1841. Albert distributed Christmas trees to schools and army barracks to foster his childhood love of the seasonal tree in his adopted country. Newspaper illustrations in 1848 showing the royal family with a Christmas tree decorated with glass-blown ornaments, candles and ribbons in Windsor Castle excited the popular imagination in Britain, a sentiment not shared by Americans.

German immigrants to eastern Pennsylvania ("Pennsylvania Dutch") were decorating Christmas trees in their homes at least as early as the 1820s. (Christmas trees were limited to the Strasbourg area of Germany prior to 1750, and only became popular throughout Germany in the 19th century.) In 1851 when some Pennsylvania Germans placed a Christmas tree outside their church, others in the community told the minister to remove the pagan symbol.

The first printed image of a Christmas tree in the United States was in a 1836 Gift Book. Christmas trees did not gain popularity in the US until late in the 19th century. The German song "O Tannenbaum" became translated into the American "O Christmas Tree" (and is the melody for the state songs of Maryland, Iowa, Michigan and New Jersey).

The placing of tinsel on Christmas trees began in Germany originally as beaten silver strips. According to legend a poor woman's tree was covered with spider webs and this saddened the Christ Child so much that He turned the webs into silver. The Germans also decorated their trees with fruits, pastries, candies, colored paper figures, tin angels and other ornaments. In the United States F.W. Woodworth unexpectedly made a fortune in the 1880s selling German-made Christmas tree ornaments which he had reluctantly stocked in his five-and-dime stores.

In 1882 Edward Johnson, a colleague of Thomas Edison, became the first person to light a Christmas tree with electric light using a string of 80 small bulbs. Because they are such a fire hazard, candles were traditionally only placed on a tree on Christmas Eve. With electric lights, trees could be illuminated safely for longer periods, but they were only affordable by the wealthy until 1903 when the Ever-Ready Company offered the first string of ready-made lights. Lighting trees outdoors was made practical by electricity. Decorating houses & landscapes with strings of multicolored lights at Christmastime became popular early in the 20th century. Candles had traditionally been placed in windows to help Christmastime travelers to find and identify houses and to create holiday cheer.

The first American President to have a Christmas tree in the White House was Franklin Pierce in 1856. Theodore Roosevelt interrupted the tradition in 1900 out of concern over national consumption of evergreen trees, but Woodrow Wilson presided over the first national Christmas tree in 1913. About 20% of American homes had decorated Christmas trees at the beginning of the 20th century and about 85% had decorated trees near that end of that century.

"The Christmas tree, now so common among us, was equally common in pagan Rome and pagan Egypt. In Egypt that tree was the palm tree. In Rome it was the fir. The palm tree denoting the pagan messiah as Baal-Tamar (Judges20:33) [Baal-Tamar = lord of the tree (palm)~kh], the fir referring to him as Baal-Berith [Baal-Berith, meaning "lord of the covenant" another false title that resembles the truekh]. The mother of Adonis, the sun god and great mediatorial divinity, was mystically said to have been changed into a tree and when in that state to have brought forth her divine son. If the mother was a tree, the son must have been recognized as "the man of the branch" and this accounts for the putting of the yule log into the fire on Christmas Eve, and the appearance of the

Christmas tree the next morning"

"The Christmas tree is the symbol of the spirit of the Yuletide in many homes. The custom came from Germany and dates to long ago when primitive people revered trees -particularly evergreens."

## **Gift Giving**

"The idea of giving presents goes back to the Romans. "The custom of presenting friends with gifts at Christmas dates back to the time of the ancient Romans

The wise men gave their gifts to Christ, but did not exchange gifts with each other. The gifts presented to Christ were to a king, because of his royalty, and not because of his birthday: "He was a king, and the people of the East never approached the presence of a king without a present in their hands"

"The interchange of presents between friends is alike characteristic of Christmas and the Saturnalia, and must have been adopted by Christians from the Pagans, as the admonition of Tertullian plainly shows."

"The giving of presents at this time of year has been a custom that has quite naturally lingered through the ages from the Saturnalia and Kalends celebrations when garlands of flowers, candles and dolls were presented as symbolic gifts to bring good luck and prosperity for the future. Although the early Christian Church turned its nose up at pagan rituals, its members saw that they were missing out on the present-giving and cleverly decided to adopt the practice in remembrance of the gifts brought to the infant Jesus by the kings and the shepherds."

"Because gift-giving was so essential a part of the pagan celebrations [of Saturnalia], the early Church frowned upon it as sternly as upon other and more questionable New Year celebrations."

"The practice of exchanging presents at Christmas stems from the ancient Roman custom called Strenae. During the Saturnalia, Roman citizens used to give "good luck" gifts (strenae) of fruits, pastries, or gold to their friends on New Year's Day."

## **Similar celebrations**

The Roman's celebrated their god Saturn. Their festival was called Saturnalia which began the middle of December and ended January 1st. With cries of "Jo Saturnalia!" the celebration would include masquerades in the streets, big festive meals, visiting friends, and the exchange of good-luck gifts called Strenae (lucky fruits).

The Romans decked their halls with garlands of laurel and green trees lit with candles. Again the masters and slaves would exchange places.

"Jo Saturnalia!" was a fun and festive time for the Romans, but the Christians though it an abomination to honor the pagan god. The early Christians wanted to keep the birthday of their Christ child a solemn and religious holiday, not one of cheer and merriment as was the pagan Saturnalia.

But as Christianity spread they were alarmed by the continuing celebration of pagan customs and Saturnalia among their converts. At first the Church forbid this kind of celebration. But it was to no avail. Eventually it was decided that the celebration would be tamed and made into a celebration fit for the Christian Son of God.

Some legends claim that the Christian "Christmas" celebration was invented to compete against the pagan celebrations of December. The 25th was not only sacred to the Romans but also the Persians whose religion Mithraism was one of Christianity's main rivals at that time. The Church eventually was successful in taking the merriment, lights, and gifts from the Saturnalia festival and bringing them to the celebration of Christmas.

Similar celebrations were held at Kalends, the Roman New Year festival held January 1st to January 5th. People stayed up on Kalend's Eve to celebrate the New Year with drinking and singing. Gambling was normally illegal in Rome, but was permitted and enthusiastically practiced during these festivals. People spent lavishly on gifts for others as well as for self-indulgence. Slaves were relieved of their duties and partied as equals with their masters. Social inversions ("mock rulers") were part of the entertainment, inspired by earlier Mesopotamian traditions.

In 64 AD the Roman emperor Nero is believed to have started a fire in Rome, which conveniently cleared ground for the expansion of his palaces. Nero blamed the Christians for the fire, beginning a Roman policy of persecution that lasted more than two centuries. To avoid persecution the Christians decked their homes with holly and the second bishop of Rome (circa 130 AD) declared that the Nativity of Christ should be celebrated during the Saturnalia period. (It was a "movable feast", a single day was not specified.)

The ancient polytheistic religions of Egypt, Persia, Babylonia and eventually Rome increasingly consolidated their pantheons of deities under a single primary god, usually

a Sun-god. The Egyptians believed in a transubstantiation of their Sun-god Ra into a disk-shaped wafer that could be eaten in a sacred ritual. The Persian Mithra (Roman Mithras) held special prominence as god of day (light) and the only son of the God of Heaven. But some time before the 5th century B.C. the Persian prophet Zoroaster (Zarathustra) taught a dualism based on the conflict between the God of Heaven and the God of Evil. Humans could choose between good (light) or evil (darkness) and on judgment day be sent to Heaven or Hell based on their choices. Mithras was identified as the redeemer prophesied by Zoroaster: the sun-god who would appear as a human being at the end of time.

Mithras was a divine being borne of a human virgin on December 25th (the Winter Solstice by the Roman Julian calendar), his birth watched and worshipped by shepherds. As an adult, Mithras healed the sick, made the lame walk, gave sight to the blind and raised the dead. Before returning to heaven at the Spring Equinox Mithras had a last supper with 12 disciples (representing the 12 signs of the Zodiac). Mithraism included Zoroastrian beliefs in the struggle between good & evil, symbolized as light & darkness. This militaristic black-and-white morality (including a final judgment affecting an afterlife of heaven or hell) probably accounted for the popularity of Mithraism among Roman soldiers. Mithraism was like an ancient fraternity: a mystery cult open only to men which had seven degrees of initiation including the ritual of baptism and a sacred meal of bread & wine representing the body & blood of Mithras. Late in the second century AD Commodus became the first Roman emperor to be initiated into Mithraism. The priests of Mithraism were called Father Christians at the time were forbidden to use "Rabbi" or "Father" in reference to church leaders based on the admonition in **Matthew 23:8–9**.

Around 220 AD the unpopular Syrian-born Roman emperor Elagabalus attempted to replace Jupiter with Sol invictus ("unconquerable Sun") as the head of the Roman pantheon. In 270 AD a professional army officer named Aurelian rose to be emperor and was able to reunite the Roman Empire through military might. In 274 AD he attempted to unite the religions of the empire under the state cult of Sol invictus. Aurelian's new temple enshrined the Sun gods of Babylonia (Baal, Bel or Marduk). Although Mithras was not formally acknowledged, Natalis solis invicti ("birth of the unconquered sun") was, nonetheless, on December 25th. By the time of the reign of the military despot Diocletian (284–305 AD) ten percent of the Roman Empire was Christian. The attempts by Diocletian to impose the state religion on everyone led to the last and most terrible of all persecutions. But many people saw the state as a greater enemy than the Christians, who were respected for their willingness to die for their beliefs. Slaves & upper-class women (who were excluded from other religions) were drawn to a god with a human face who espoused justice & love.



Despite the intense persecutions of Christians in the Roman Empire, Christianity continued to win many converts from paganism. Many of the former pagans were unwilling to relinquish their traditional winter solstice celebrations. When Constantine replaced Diocletian as Emperor of the Western Roman Empire in 305 AD he ended all of the persecutions. Constantine was said to have accepted Christianity in 312 AD on the eve of a battle when he had a vision of a cross of light superimposed upon the sun. Persecution of Christians ended in both the Eastern & Western Empires in 313 AD when Constantine & Licinius issued the Edict of Milan. Constantine sought to unify Sun-worship and Christianity into a single monotheistic state religion. (Although Constantine was baptized on his deathbed, this was not an indication of his insincerity it was a common practice of early Christians to delay baptism so as to die without sin.)

Although the Bible sanctifies Saturday as the Sabbath, many Christians regarded Sunday (the day of the resurrection of Christ) as the new holy day especially because this distanced Christianity from Judaism. In 321 AD Constantine made Sunday rather than Saturday (Saturn's Day) the weekly holiday of the state religion of Sun-worship. The revolt of the Jews & the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the rejection of the Hebrew calendar and the increasing pre-eminence of the bishop of Rome were all part of the Romanization of Christianity which accompanied the Christianization of Rome.

Constantine regarded himself to be the supreme spiritual leader of both the Sun-cults and of Christianity. Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire from Rome to Constantinople, a city he immodestly renamed after himself. Constantine called himself "first of the apostles" and he did not recognize the papacy of the bishop of Rome. In 325 AD Constantine called the first Council of Nicea (Nicaea) to resolve controversy and establish Christian orthodoxy. The Council established the Unity of the Holy Trinity, the date of Easter and a doctrinal statement of Christian belief (the Nicene Creed). The Council of Nicea was the first ecumenical conference of Christian bishops, the nucleus of the institution which was to become the hierarchical Roman Catholic Church, dominated by celibate male priests. (Celibate priests had not been part of the teachings of Jesus many of his apostles, including Peter, were married.) The Council sanctioned the efforts of Irenaeus, Eusebius and others who were establishing certain scriptures as the infallible canon of the New Testament, while declaring other scriptures to be heresy notably Gnostic Gospels such as the Gospel of Mary and the Gospel of Thomas, which support the idea that Mary Magdalene was an apostle and that salvation is possible without a church. With orthodox Christianity incorporated into the monolithic state religion Christian "heretics" were heavily persecuted.

Also in 325 Constantine declared December 25th to be an Immovable Feast for the

whole Roman Empire. The bishop of Rome may have accepted December 25th as the date of birth of Jesus Christ as early as 320 AD, but historical documents provide no evidence for a date earlier than 336 AD. The Church was pushed by political forces and pulled by the desire to co-opt a popular pagan holiday, despite a lack of evidence that Christ was born in December. Constantine built the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, one of the oldest continually operating churches in the world (currently administered by a coalition of Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox clerics).

In Egypt, January 6th was the birthday celebration of the child-god Aeon, borne of the virgin goddess Kore celebrated in the Temple of Kore at Alexandria. Egyptian Gnostic Christians celebrated January 6 as the date of Christ's baptism ("spiritual birth"). (Gnostics believed that spiritual is more important than physical, that the knowledge Christ brought to the world is far more important than his physical birth or crucifixion and that direct personal experience of God is of greater importance than churches or other institutions.) Later the Eastern Christian Churches celebrated January 6th as the date of both the Nativity and the Epiphany (Greek for manifestation) the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles (the wise men) as well as Christ's baptism by John the Baptist. (The rebirth of the Greek god Dionysus had been celebrated on January 6th.)

In the 4th century, the Eastern Orthodox Churches began to accept December 25th as the date of Christ's birth and the Roman Church began to introduce the January 6th feast of Epiphany. (Only the Armenian Orthodox Church refused to abandon January 6 as the date of the Nativity.) Epiphany for Western churches means the visit of the Magi, whereas for the Eastern churches Epiphany is the anniversary of Christ's baptism. The 567 AD Council of Tours proclaimed the duty of Advent feast and established the period between December 25th and January 6th as a 12-day holy festival the Twelve Days of Christmas (if the first day is the day after Christmas, the twelfth day of Christmas is Epiphany).

### **The conclusion**

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth. **3 John 1:4**

How many 'Christian' parents have bore false witness to promulgate this myth? Santa is neither Real nor Christian. So this is a lie.

Is it okay to break God's laws to give the kids "a good time"? If you are a Christian ... you know the answer you must give. You do not need a pagan holiday as an excuse to buy someone a gift (not expecting reciprocity). You can surely give your children gifts

any other time of year, good gifts, not tainted by pagan holidays or lies.

It's all pagan. Not one lick of it originated in Christianity. So can you exchange the lie for the truth? Or take a pagan festival, abhorred by the God of the Bible, and whitewash it and call it acceptable in God's sight? "Are Christmas customs "holy and acceptable" to God or is it "corrupt and abominable" to Him? The golden calf was built and the celebration declared a 'feast to the Lord.' The people had declared a celebration to honor God that he did not recognize as being in his honor and he was angered by this idolatrous worship."

**Christmas, by name, intent and origin is clearly not connected to the 'birth of Jesus Christ' but to pagan gods. This study was not intended to make any statement that you should or should not observe Christmas, but with the information provided we can conclude that this is not a Holy day to observe Jesus Birthday as this is being done on a Pagan holiday and does not honor Jesus or God in any way, because as you have seen with the Israelites God is not pleased with man maid holiday's, festival or Sabbaths, especially those with any form of Idolatry, which Christmas is full of, so it would be best if you do choose to observe this Pagan holiday, don't observe it as Jesus Birthday, because Jesus is not the reason for the season as claimed in many churches.**