

Introduction

Christmas is a time that is greatly looked forward to each year, because it is a special day set aside to celebrate, honor, rejoice and observed the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Although it is a day to celebrate Jesus, it has been discovered that the December 25th date has roots in paganism. For a number of years, Pastor Catron of Ark of Covenant Ministries has uncovered and taught about the aspects of Christmas that shed light on these pagan roots, to aid the Christian in becoming aware, in an effort to help believers serve the Lord in truth. The findings in this document are a reflection of those efforts.

Christmas as Believers Observe and Celebrate it

Among Christians, Christmas is a time to celebrate, recognize, honor, and praise Jesus, the Son of the Living God, our Savior and Redeemer, specifically in His birth. The birth of Jesus holds such importance, because, simply put, the coming of Jesus would be the resolution to the issue of sin and its cause that separates us from God. “A disease *has* infected the entire human race, and it is terminal in every case. That disease is sin. However, there is a cure, an antidote—the blood of Jesus Christ” (Evans 288). The Bible tells us in Romans 6:23 that “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” His death, burial, and resurrection are the foundation upon which our salvation lies in that in His death, He was the atonement for our sins, His burial as proof of His death, and His resurrection as “our ‘receipt’ from God the Father that He accepted His Son’s payment for sin on the cross” (Evans 292). Acts 4:12 states that “neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” So, the account of Jesus’ birth is found in the gospels of Matthew 1:24-25:

Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name Jesus.

and Luke 2:1-7:

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called

Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

In Matthew's Gospel, chapter 2:1-12 gives the account of the wise men who visit Jesus to worship Him and give Him gifts:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Today, Christians exchange gifts one with another to recount and remember that Jesus too was given gifts near the time of His birth. For some Christians, the star that led the wise men to the house that Jesus was in is often the star which is placed atop the Christmas tree, representing the "Star of Bethlehem" or "his (Jesus) star," which the wise men called it. Although, the wise men had not gotten

to Jesus the night He was born, the Nativity Scene that Christians also display during this time of year, includes them with the newly born Jesus, the Shepherds (which we will look into next) Mary and Joseph, and certain animals.

In Luke 2:8-20, we get the account of the proclamation by the angels concerning Jesus birth to shepherds who visited Him in Bethlehem the night of His birth:

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

Aside from the giving of gifts, displaying the Nativity scene, and celebrating Jesus, some Christians take part in the pagan rituals of Christmas such as looking for Santa Clause, kissing under mistletoe, putting up the Christmas tree with presents before it, decorations with lights, and seasonal plants.

Christian celebrants of Christmas find that talk of Jesus' birth, and displays of Nativity, which to are deemed "religious," in the eyes of non-Christians, are seemingly cut out from public conversation, in an effort not to offend those who aren't necessarily Christian. In retail stores Christmas songs are played that only mention the pagan aspects of the holiday such as those aforementioned including the

phrase “happy holiday’s” instead of “Merry Christmas.” No songs such as “Silent Night,” “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing,” or “Joy to the World,” are played because of their religious connotations. In school plays, any references to Jesus or the Bible are overlooked or simply removed, as in the case of one New York school district which removed all religious references in “Silent Night” (Starnes).

As a result of this, Christians say that we should put Christ back into Christmas or that He is the reason for the Christmas season. So far we have seen the Biblical account of Jesus’ birth, the sole reason why Christians even celebrate Christmas. Neither account of His birth from the gospels talks about Christmas trees, and winter plants, and nowhere in scripture is the word “Christmas,” mentioned, neither is there a commandment in scripture to celebrate Jesus’ birth. Furthermore, there is no date given as to the time of His birth in scripture. So why do we reserve a particular day to celebrate His birth and why December 25th? How can we really know if Christ is the reason for the season?

Christians Once Frowned Upon the Celebration of Christmas

Throughout the course of Christian history, the celebration of Christmas was not always welcomed, due to the fact of its origins in paganism. You may be asking how the birth of our Lord and Savior can in any way be connected to paganism, which is reasonable. However, it is not His birth that is connected with paganism, but the day in which His birth is celebrated and the other ritual aspects of the holiday that are connected to paganism. We find that the early church of the first few centuries never celebrated Christmas. Much later in 1652, in England, “Christ’s Mass” was outlawed due to its pagan origins which we shall look more into later. The Puritans who settled in the New World, had outlawed Christmas as well. Puritan Minister Reverend Cotton Mather “warned in a Christmas day sermon in 1712, ‘Can you in your conscience think that your Holy Savior is honored by hard drinking, lewd reveling, and by a Mass fit for none but Bacchus or Saturn?’” (Jeremiah Films). We shall come to see why he felt this way. The holiday by Churches was regarded as pagan and even a reproach to the Lord. “By the mid-nineteenth century, American Churches were the last remaining holdout in the war against the validation of Christmas. However, they too finally succumbed as a result of the efforts of the American Sunday School Society who began advocating Christmas programs for children as a method of filling the pews...they offered candy and treats to the children as a means of enticing

families into accepting the holiday despite its notorious history and blatantly pagan roots” (Jeremiah Films).

Etymology of Christmas

Let’s figure for a moment what the word “Christmas” actually means. “Christmas means ‘Christ’s Mass’ and represents, for Catholics, the first and perhaps most popular holy day on the calendar” (Tobin 11). Catholicism is mentioned here because the word “Christmas” is a Catholic invention. Mass is the name by which the sacrament of the Eucharist or Communion is called in the Catholic Church. It is also referred to as a church service. It is interesting to note that “it is no mystery that the word ‘holiday’ is derived directly from the words ‘holy day’ (Tobin preface xi). So, obviously, “Christ’s Mass” of December 25th is a holy day. However, later we will see that it was not only a holy day because of Christ, but known as a holy day to non-Christians centuries before Christ was even born. The author of a book titled *Holy Holidays! The Catholic Origins of Celebration* declares that his book “opens a door to a more detailed exploration of... contemporary Western/Christian holidays that are observed by most of the world, whether religious or secular. Such holidays and festivals (and even the concept of the weekend) are steeped in Catholic theology” (Tobin preface X). We can see that Catholicism has its influence in not only the Christmas holiday, but other holidays we celebrate.

Can we Discover When Jesus was Born?

Although the Bible doesn’t give us a direct answer as to when Jesus was born, below is an argument based on the account of John the Baptist’s Birth, that is most popular regarding trying the time of Jesus’ birth.

John the Baptist’s father, “Zacharias was a priest of the line of the Levites (Luke 1:5, 1 Chronicles 24:1: 10). In the Old Testament it tells us he was the 8th course of the Levitical Priest Hood...that means he was the eighth person to serve a 1 week service at the temple. They had twenty-four courses of priests that served for 1 week...Week 2 the second course would serve. Week 3, the third course would serve, and so on and so forth. We know from the scripture exactly when the course of Zacharias was” (Jim Staley).

According to Luke 1:5-11 and 1 Chronicles 24:1:10, Zacharias would have been serving around May or June when the angel appeared to him declaring that his wife would conceive John the Baptist (Luke 1:8-13). When Zacharias finished his service, “after those days,” according to Luke 1:24, “John

the Baptist was probably conceived shortly after the third Sabbath of the month of Sivan [May-June] (i.e., late Sivan)" (Parsons). So if John the Baptist was conceived in late Sivan (May-June), 9 months later, John would have been born in Nissan (March-April), around the time of Passover. We know from Luke 1:36 that when the angel told Mary that she would conceive Jesus of the Holy Ghost, Elisabeth, Zacharias' wife, was in her 6th month of pregnancy with John the Baptist. Since he was conceived in late Sivan (May-June), six months added to late Sivan would bring us to late Kislev (November-December), the time when Jesus was conceived. From John's Nissan (March-April) birth, we can add six months to arrive at Tishri (September-October), giving us the time when Jesus was born, around the feast of Tabernacles.

There is a problem with this. In Luke 1:24, it is not certain what length of time "after those days," refers to, so we can't say definitively when John the Baptist was conceived. The answer to Jesus birth relies on when John the Baptist was conceived. "In light of these uncertainties, it is perhaps advisable to take a humble attitude and confess our ignorance of the matter. The important thing, of course, is that our Lord was indeed born and ransomed us from the wages of our sins" (Parsons).

Although we cannot find definitive Biblical evidence regarding the birth of our Savior, we can be definitive of the fact that December 25th is not His birthday, and we shall see why based on historical facts. "When all is said and done, based on centuries of speculation and research, today's historians and biblical scholars agree that December 25 is not the true 'birthday' of Jesus of Nazareth, nor the year '0' Anno Domini the correct year" (Tobin 15).

Jesus the Messiah's Nativity and its Relation to (or lack thereof) December 25th

One ministry declared, "Did Christmas observance come from the Bible? Or does its observance predate Jesus Christ? Many cry lets put Christ back in Christmas! But was Christ ever really in Christmas? Is Christmas Christian?" (Shocking). We can answer this question by finding out when the celebration of the birth of Jesus began and why. Here is a quote from Clement A. Miles, author of *Christmas Customs and Traditions Their History and Significance*, a book based on extensive research on the topic, detailing when Christmas was first celebrated:

"When and where did the keeping of Christmas begin? Many details of its early history remain in uncertainty, but it is fairly clear that the earliest celebration of the Birth of Christ on December 25 took place at Rome about the middle of the fourth century, and that the

'Tis the Season to be Pagan: Christmas and Its Origins

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observance of the day spread from the western to the eastern Church, which had before been wont to keep January 6 as a joint commemoration of the Nativity and the Baptism of the Redeemer. The first mention of a Nativity feast on December 25 is found in a Roman document known as the Philocalian Calendar, dating from the year 354, but embodying an older document evidently belonging to the year 336. It is uncertain to which date the Nativity reference belongs; but further back than 336 at all events the festival cannot be traced " (Miles 20).

Here also is another quote from Greg Tobin author of *Holy Holidays! The Catholic Origins of Celebration* regarding how a day was "fixed" to celebrate Christ's birth.

"The December 25 date of the Nativity was adopted in the late fourth century by the churches of Jerusalem, Antioch, and Constantinople-----after Rome-----and in Egypt...The churches of the East in Cyprus, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, and Armenia held on to the January 6 date, through the great preacher and Church Father Gregory of Nyssa advocated for the December feast in Cappadocia around 380 in a sermon on St. Stephen's Day, December 26...Gregory's contemporary critics and colleagues (and fellow saints), John Chrysostom and Gregory Nazianze, were also instrumental in fixing the December celebration in the liturgical calendar. The so-called *Chronography* of A.D. 354, published in Rome, offers the first written mixture of planetary astrology, Roman mythology, and pagan religious imagery adapted to contemporary purposes of placing Church holy days on solar dates, including the winter solstice for the birthday of John the Baptist, Christ's cousin and precursor. In turn, the date of the conception for each was the alternate equinox. So it can be stated with some authority that by about A.D. 400, the Church (in the West, at least) had fixed Christmas on December 25" (Tobin 13-14).

The Western church "constitutes the Latin Church of the Catholic Church..." (Western). So, we see that the Catholic Church set up a date to which the birth of Christ should be celebrated. Prior to this, we find that the early Church did not celebrate Christmas. Here is a quote with information from the Encyclopedia Americana regarding this matter:

"Christmas, according to many authorities was not celebrated in the first centuries of the Christian Church...In the fifth century the Catholic Church ordered it to be celebrated forever on the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol Invictus, as no certain knowledge of the day of Christ's birth existed" (Encyclopedia Americana). Did you notice that historical authorities reveal

that Christmas was not observed by the early church? It was not until the Roman Catholic Church ordered its observance hundreds of years after the apostolic church had been established. Since Christmas meaning the mass of Christ is a Catholic creation, lets see what they have to say. Notice this from the Catholic Encyclopedia:

'Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church...The first evidence of the feast is from Egypt...Pagan customs centering around the January calends gravitated to Christmas'" (Shocking).

As we have so far seen, the early church had not celebrated the birth of Jesus. It was not until centuries later that a date was picked by the Catholic Church to celebrate His birth. "Why, we may ask, did the Church choose December 25 for the celebration of her Founder's Birth... The real reason for the choice of the day most probably was, that upon it fell the pagan festival celebrated by Romans called *Dies Natalis Invicti*, whose celebrants marked it as the birthday of *Sol Invictus* or the unconquered Sun, who on December 25, the winter solstice according to the Julian calendar, began to rise to new vigor after his autumnal decline... What more natural than that the Church should choose this day to celebrate the rising of her Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings, that she should strive thus to draw away to His worship some adorers of the god whose symbol and representative was the earthly sun!" (Miles 23).

To sum up what we now know about how Jesus' birthday came to be on December 25, a quote from the Readers Digest can be applied:

"Christmas and Easter, though the greatest festivals in the Christian Calendar, are celebrated with customs that originated in superstition and heathen rites hundreds of years before Christ was born...Even the dates owe more to Pagan practices than to the birth and resurrection of Jesus...It was not until the fourth century that December 25th, was fixed arbitrarily as the anniversary of the Nativity – because the Pagan festivals from which so many Christian customs spring were held around that time...Although Christianity has swept the world in a relatively short time...the missionaries faced an uphill task. The Pagans were reluctant to give up their false gods and ancient practices...So the missionaries, unable to convert them easily to an entirely new code of worship, did the next best thing. They took the Pagan festivals as they were and gradually grafted the observances of the new faith onto these festivals and the rites

and customs surrounding them...December 25th was not called 'Christmas' until the ninth century. Until then it had been the mid-winter feast, a combination of the Norse Yule festival and the Roman Saturnalia, both of which took place in late December" (Shocking, Strange Stories, *Amazing Facts Reader's Digest*).

Prior to Jesus even being born, the December 25 date was known as the midwinter feast around the time of the Winter Solstice, and was synonymous with pagan customs and rituals. We shall now uncover why.

The Winter Solstice

During the time of the year near the December 25th date, the Winter Solstice occurred. The movement of the earth around the sun creates the winter and summer Solstices when the Northern and Southern hemispheres are at opposite extremes. Between December 21st -22nd, the Northern Hemisphere is experiencing the longest night without the sun, and the Southern Hemisphere is experiencing the longest day with the sun. In ancient times, it wasn't certain that people would survive the winter, due to the winter's harsh conditions, so they looked for the sun to return to give them hope that their livelihoods would be a little more secure. "Thus ceremonies were almost always based around the need to preserve light and to ensure the return of the sun" (Matthew 14). Several days after the solstice, around December 25, the sun would return and the days would grow longer, invoking in people a need to celebrate the sun's return. So, we get, throughout different cultures, different "sun" gods whose birthdays are on December 25th. "Sometimes it was enough to celebrate the return of the sun, at others it was necessary to make sacrifices to the god (or goddess) who was the source of its light, to insure that he (or she) returned. It is the legacy of these now long-forgotten ceremonies that lies at the heart of our own acknowledgement of the Solstices. Virtually every festival that was celebrated, or which still takes place today, owes something to these ancient celebrations of the year's turning" (Matthew 15).

Sun gods Who share Jesus' So Called December 25th Birthday

Before Christ was born, we now know that among different cultures, December 25th was a day to celebrate the returning sun. According to history and legend, the Nimrod of the Bible became a sun god. This is what the Bible says about Nimrod:

And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, And Resen between Nineveh and Calah: the same is a great city. (Genesis 10:8-12)

Here is what history and ledged says concerning Nimrod and how he became a sun god:

“According to history a great man arose in Babylon after the flood. His name was Nimrod. He was called the mighty one on the earth. Nimrod was the sworn enemy of God and vowed to fight God if He ever sent another flood upon the earth. He gathered the people together against God and convinced them to build a tower which would reach to heaven. The tower was to protect them against the flood and serve as a means for Nimrod to reach and attack God. God stopped the building of the tower by giving the people various languages which further infuriated Nimrod. When Nimrod died his wicked wife Semiramis was with child. A tree was cut down as a symbol of Nimrod’s life being cut short and people honored the stump as a symbol of him. She gave birth to a son Tamuz on December 25th. That very day an evergreen sprouted forth from a dead stump and Semiramis declared Tamuz was the rebirth of Nimrod, and was now god of the unconquered sun. Since Tamuz was believed to be the rebirth of Nimrod which was confirmed by the sprouting of the evergreen, the evergreen tree became the symbol of Nimrod... The evergreen tree was his symbol of eternal life” (Shocking).

In different cultures around the world, Nimrod and his wife Semiramis are know by other names that you may find to be familiar. “In Egypt, they were known as Isis and Osiris. In Phoenicia they were recognized as Ashtoreth and Baal, the very same Ashtoreth and Baal that you see in the scriptures. (Ashtoreth being found in 1 Kings 11:5,33, 2 Kings 23:13; Baal being found in Numbers 22:41, Judges 6:32, Jeremiah 7:9; both being found in Judges 2:13, 1 Samuel 7:4) In Greece, they were Aphrodite and Adonis. In Rome they were called Venus and Cupid. Some of the different names that Baal had in Persia was Mithras, birth of the unconquerable sun 500 B.C.E, in Egypt he was called Osiris, Horus, and Ra and in Rome he was Attis of Rome” (Jim Staley). Mithras, Osiris and Attis are sun gods whose births are on December 25th, which all seem to stem from Nimrod.

If you will recall, the Catholic Church moved Christ's birthday to December 25th, which in Rome was already a day that was recognized as *dies natalis invicti solis*, the birth of Mithras the unconquerable sun god. The birthday of the unconquered sun "was probably first celebrated in Rome by order of the Emperor Aurelian (270-5), an ardent worshipper of the Syrian sun-God Baal" (Miles 23). The reasoning behind moving Christ's birth again was because this was a day to celebrate the coming of the "sun god." And what better way to get converts into Christianity than to move the unknown birthday of the "Son of God," to the birthday of the "sun god" Mithras? Here we have the mixing of a day that is supposed to be holy because it is the supposed date of Christ's birth, with the day that a pagan people believed was the birthday of a pagan god. In Joshua 24:14-15, Joshua spoke to the Children of Israel concerning what the Lord said saying:

Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve;...

How can we serve the true God in sincerity and truth when we've moved the supposed birth of His son Jesus to the same day as the birth of another god? It is true that the Lord doesn't tell us in His word when Christ was born. At the same token, we cannot simply just declare a day to be His birthday, when we have no Biblical evidence to back it up. This doesn't mean that we can't celebrate His birth, but if are going to celebrate and honor His birth, we can't deliberately honor it on the same day as another god. For Elijah said in 1 Kings 18:21 "...How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him..."

We find that not only was Mithras worshiped on December 25th in old Rome, but this was also a time for "worshipping Saturn, the god of seed sowing and wealth" (Ratsch 504). There was even a festival dedicated to Saturn called Saturnalia. "The ancient festival from which we derive many of the traditional celebrations associated with Midwinter is the Roman Saturnalia. The Roman presence in Britain and other parts of Europe from the second century B.C. to the fourth century A.D. probably accounts for this...Saturnalia itself developed from the older rituals of Midwinter into a riotous assemblage of fun, laughter, and gift giving. It is, indeed, from this festival that we receive the idea of giving gifts at Christmas and not from the gifts of the Magi as commonly supposed" (Matthews 23).

Saturnalia was observed from December 17th-24th, “during which time the normal patterns of social behavior were abandoned. Masters served their slaves (who dined with their usual masters wearing the badge of freedom known as the *pillius*), the law courts and schools were closed, and the whole community gave itself up to feasting, gambling, and drinking” (Matthews 23). The end of the celebration was December 25th, in which everyone exchanged gifts.

Starting to sound familiar? Let’s take a look at other customs and traditions associated with Christmas that Christians and non Christians alike observe, quite often without thinking about their origins and history.

Customs and Traditions of Christmas Christians and Non Christians Observe

“There is no holiday more universally accepted as a religious occasion as the observance of Christmas” (Shocking). Christians and non Christians look forward to this particular day, year after year, as a day of warmth, pageantry, merry-making and peace. “Today we celebrate the birthday of Christ on December 25th without thinking” (Matthews 52).

Christmas Trees and the Star on Top

If you’ll recall in the section about Nimrod and his history, the evergreen tree became his symbol of eternal life. “To the ancients, the fir tree that became the Christmas tree represented the male element, the spear, and the phallus—life-sustaining world tree or world axis” (Ratsch 1833). “Trees have been worshipped by virtually every pagan culture in the world and was again, a major symbol of sun-god worship and fertility. It took the place inside the pagan home of the obelisk as a picture or symbol of the sun god” (Jim Staley). Here we get a glimpse into why a tree is brought into the home during Christmas time. But how does the Christmas tree relate to the obelisk? According to Masonic and occult history, the word ‘obelisk’ literally means ‘Baal’s shaft’ or Baal’s organ of reproduction. “It is almost always placed in the center of a circle, which represents the female genitalia and the physical sexual act” (Jim Staley). Christmas reefs with candles placed in the middle of them are also representations of this. There are obelisks all around the world, but one of the most amazing displays of one can be found in Rome, right in the Vatican. In St. Peters square, there is an obelisk in the center of an eight pointed star. However, from an aerial view, one can see that the entire architecture of St. Peters square and the entire Vatican building were designed in the shape of the male genitalia! So we see that obelisks were erected as symbols of the sun gods. Since the evergreen

tree is a symbol of Nimrod, seemingly the father of the sun gods, green trees were brought into the home as a symbol of the gods.

Surprisingly, the same star that the obelisk is usually found in the center of is the same star that is placed on top of Christmas trees. The eight pointed star is also known as the sunburst or solar wheel. "The symbol is found in Babylonian alters for the sun god Baal, over Buddhist Temples, in Roman Catholic alters, pulpits and even in the Court of St. Peter at the Vatican in Rome, and Roman Catholic statues of saints behind their heads" (Jim Staley). The star that is placed atop the Christmas tree does not represent the star of Bethlehem the wise men followed that lead them to Jesus. "Unfortunately the star of the ancient pagan sun gods predates the star of the Christmas tree...by over one thousand years. They were taking the sun burst and connecting it to the tree of Nimrod" (Jim).

Biblically speaking, some would say that Jeremiah 10:2-5 directly speaks about the Christmas tree:

Hear ye the word which the Lord speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.

However, this is actually a reference to how idols were made out of the wood of trees that were cut down. The entire 10th chapter of the book of Jeremiah talks about idolatry as during the time "the threat of Babylonian invasion spurred the people of Judah to great activity in the manufacture of idols, as if idols could save them" (Halley 312).

What explanation then is there to the decoration of the tree when it is brought into the home? Today, when trees are taken into the house, they are decorated and the tree is called the *jultree*, the light tree, the Christmas tree, or the Christ tree. "How many are aware that this custom was for a long time reviled by the church? In the folk literature, numerous sources refer to the fact that the custom of cutting and putting up fir or spruce branches or even whole trees-*maien* or *meyen*-was despised as a heathen practice, and was explicitly forbidden by the church, and specifically because of its shamanic

pagan past: 'Because of the pagan origin, and the depletion of the forest, there were numerous regulations that forbid, or put restrictions on, the cutting down of fir greens throughout the Christmas season' (Ratsch 730-737). "In the Bible, no connection is drawn between Jesus Christ and the fir tree or any other needle-bearing tree. And it is easy to see why. Except for the pine tree, there are no needle-bearing trees in the Holy Land" (Ratsch 737-743). When we decorate the tree, we really don't think about why we do it. Decorating the Christmas tree has simply turned into one of the many traditions of the holiday. "...But the decoration of the trees is actually an age-old custom practiced throughout the world. Everywhere—in the shamanic world, in pagan cultures, and in religious customs—holy trees are decorated with pieces of cloth, pictures of saints, and offerings. The tree decoration of the Christian religion has roots in old celebrations of the Christmas feast: 'On Christmas Eve there was a desire to stimulate the fertility of the trees by making a ritual offering of Christmas Eve supper leftover and even putting cake of the leaf' (Ratsch 1582-1590).

The lights that we place on the tree can be traced back to a Saturnalia ritual. "Candles made of tallow are presumably of Etruscan or old Italian origin and played a central role in the worship of gods and goddesses as well as in burial rituals. During Saturnalia, candles and clay doll—'life lights' and 'clay men'—were exchanged as presents. The glow of candles symbolizes the return of the sun and the light of life...The successor of the Christmas candle is the electric Christmas bulb..." (Ratsch 1718, 1730).

Kissing by the Mistletoe

One of the most common types of greenery associated with Christmas besides the fir tree is the mistletoe. "...we bring mistletoe into the house and joyfully place it over a door. Why?... What lies behind this Christmas custom and its symbolism?..." (Ratsch 2591). The mistletoe is parasitic because it takes water and mineral salts from the host upon which it grows such as poplar, apple, and pear trees, but also on firs and sometimes even on stone oaks. It grows into a ball shape and keeps its leathery green leaves year round. Its pearly white berries, which many don't know are poisonous are slimy inside and grow around the November and December months. "The Celts believed that the slimy berries were drops of semen from the cosmic bull that impregnated the fecund goddess Earth..." (Ratsch 2602). Possibly, this is the reason why mistletoe is related to fertility. "In Austria, the people placed mistletoe in the bedroom to help encourage the conception of a child. In Wales, folk healers made a remedy from dried mistletoe to prevent infertility. The familiar tradition that allows a boy to

kiss any girl standing beneath the mistletoe further demonstrates the long-standing association of mistletoe with fertility” (Ratsch 2623).

Yule

Around this time of year we hear of people burning the Yule Log, others wishing that you have a “cool Yule,” and the idea of the 12 days of Christmas. What is Yule, and where do its customs come from? “Whatever its source may be, it is clearly the name of a Germanic season---probably a two-month tide covering the second half of November, the whole of December, and the first half of January” (Miles 25). The word *Yule* has been variously interpreted as deriving from the Saxon word *hweol*, wheel, referring in this context both to the circling of the year and circular motion of the sun. “A more distinctive meaning here may be to the wheels of the Norse god Odin’s chariot, in which he sped through the air in search of the souls of recently dead heroes. One of the many names of Odin was Jolnir, which is etymologically associated with Yule, and there is no lack of evidence to suggest that the Midwinter festival among the peoples of the North (and later England) included some kind of sacrifice to the god” (Matthews 98).

The Chaldeans called Christmas Yule day, which can also mean day of the infant, the infant referring to Tammuz, Nimrod’s son “who was the ‘son of god’ (god being Nimrod) who one day would come back and save them from the world” (Jim Staley).

“During this time of year a log was cut down and fashioned into a fertility symbol, and burned for twelve days. On each successive day a new sacrifice was performed...sometimes but not always these sacrificial victims were human beings” (Jeremiah Films). Twelve days was the length by which the log would stay alight, and it is from this custom that we get our modern 12 days of Christmas. “...The celebration was of the turning wheel of the year, and the log must not be allowed to burn through, but a fragment preserved that would then be used to kindle the next year’s fire, thus bridging the gap between the old and New Year. The importance of keeping the fire alight, and of passing its flame from one year to the next is a very ancient one, dating back to a time when to keep one’s fire burning might meant the difference between life and death” (Matthews 100).

Santa Clause

Santa Clause is a very prominent figure of the Christmas Holiday. We know him as the great, jolly old gift giver, dressed in red and white, who spends all year making toys for every child, with the

help of his elves, only to deliver them all on the eve of Christmas. Where does this character stem from? The history of Santa can be traced back to several individuals and gods. One such god is called Odin. "Along with the celebration of the sun-gods, the Scandinavians also worshipped Odin, who was the god of intoxicating drink and ecstasy, as well as the god of death. Odin/Wodan was the god of wisdom, magic and occult knowledge, runes, poetry and war. His name means 'the inspired one.' The main symbol of this mystical being that had god-like powers was the 'eternal' fir tree" (Jim). As we have already learned, the evergreen tree was the symbol of Nimrod, the sun god. Odin is known as a tall, old man with a long white beard, who traveled around the world on a white horse that had eight legs. The eight legs represent the eight reindeer that Santa travel with. According to the story of Santa and the reindeer today, there are 9 reindeer because Rudolph was added in modern times. It is interesting to note that Odin's symbol is the fir tree, and Santa Claus is synonymous with the fir tree that is erected during Christmas time, which he places gifts under. Odin also carries behind him dark helpers called Krampus' "which are half-human, half-goat" (Jim). The Krampus' today have evolved into Santa's little helpers called the elves. In other regions, Krampus is known by different names. "In Germany there is the Klaubauf...beings with fiery eyes and a long red tongue...carries clanking chains not unlike those carried by the ghost of Jacob Marley in Dicken' *A Christmas Carol*...Austria there is Krampus who carries a chain; in Styria he is called the Bartel; in Swabia the accomplice is female and named Budelfrau. But by far the most interesting figure is the German Knecht Ruprecht," whom we will learn more about later (Matthews 120).

The origins of Santa Clause can also stem from a Catholic Saint known as St. Nicholas. *Santa* actually means saint, and is of modern usage. St. Nicholas of Patara, was a third-century Bishop of Myra, near present-day village of Demre in Asia Minor. Born in Turkey to a wealthy family around A.D. 270 he became well known for his anonymous gifts to the poor. "Tradition has it that he left these offering in the houses of selected recipients, sneaking in during the night to leave money or food in the shoes or stockings of children --- though it is doubtful whether they would have worn either in that hot land, assuming they could afford such luxuries anyway. However, such is the tradition and it is from this that we derive the custom of hanging stockings by the fireplace..." (Matthews 114). The giving actions of the Bishop did not evolve into the Santa Clause image for many centuries. "The earliest picture of St. Nicholas distributing Christmas presents dates from the fifteenth century. But in the

nineteenth century, many of the atmospheric illustrations of German romantics, such as Moritz von Schwind or Ludwig Richter (1803-1884), made the holy man popular as a harbinger of the Christmas season—and one who gave presents to children” (Ratsch 1118-1139). Why does Santa enter through the chimney to bear gifts? “The belief that Santa enters the house through the chimney developed from an old Norse legend. The Norse believed that the goddess Hertha appeared in the fireplace and brought good luck to the home” (Jim). In addition to Hertha, there were other hearth gods who made sure the food was cooked properly, and that everyone was warm. “At a certain time of year at the middle of winter, typically, the hearth god would come down the chimney, dressed in red to reward those who have pleased him during the course of the previous year and to lay curses or hexes or other forms of punishment upon people who have displeased him (Jeremiah Films). “Druid homeowners would leave a treat consisting of milk and pastries to appease this god that came down into their chimney into their fireplace” (Jim).

Santa’s origins can also be connected with Shamanism. “Images from Dutch and German immigrants added a rudimentary shamanic influence. The Dutchmen Tony van Rentergehem, who immigrated to the United States in 1948, dedicated a whole book, *When Santa Claus was a Shaman*, to the shamanic roots of the Santa Claus image” (Ratsch 1180). In the case of the bells that ring on Santa’s Sleigh and on the harness of the magical reindeer, “Contemporary accounts of northern shamans...again and again emphasize the importance of bells in their traditional costumes. These form a double function; as noise-makers to announce the presence of the shaman as he enters the spirit world, and to frighten off any unfriendly spirits who might be lying in wait for him” (Matthews 116). Santa’s garb has roots in the shamanic tradition of the shaman to wear red. “This is, on one level, significant of the sacred blood that links all human beings and that is also perceived as a link between humans and animals, and between shaman and the earth. It is also, of course, a symbol of fire, that most powerful of magical weapons, as well as the gift of warmth and life to all...” (Matthews 117). Even the magical reindeer have some connection with the shaman. “...Reindeer with bells on their harnesses, who can fly through the sky and cover vast distances in no time at all. This is yet another echo of the shaman’s journey into and through the heavens, in search of the gifts of fire and prophecy. It is significant then that the shamans hunted the reindeer, ran with them in spirit form, drew their shapes on rocks with red ochre as a means of capturing them, even saw them as a symbol of the newly

born sun of Midwinter” (Matthews 117). Knecht Ruprecht, who accompanies Santa as his helper, has some root in shamanism too. “Roughly dressed in skins and straw, he is considered a *ru-klas* or ‘Rough Nicholas,’ riding or capering before the saint, who is usually mounted on a white horse called the Schimmel. He is very much like the old shaman figures we looked at, carrying a bag of ashes from the Yule Log and hung around with bells and chains. As with many of these attendant figures, he has a dark and light side, doling out both gifts and blows depending on how he perceives your track record for the past year” (Matthews 120).

These aspects of Santa were refined and evolved and were manufactured in North America. During the time of the Puritans in the new world, in 1664, Santa was suppressed, along with the rest of the more secular Christmas. However, he had reappeared as “The Spirit of Christmas Rejoicing, a role he was to adhere to brilliantly for the next three hundred years, gradually transforming into the figure we recognize today (Matthews 125). During Queen Victoria’s time (in England) during the 1800’s “Santa began to ride on a sleigh, to descend chimneys, and to fill stockings, just as he had in Germany...Charles Dickens took up the reins in this period and in his immortal *Christmas Carol* captured an image of Santa that was a blend of both old and new” (Matthews 125). A book called *Father Knickerbocker’s History of New York* published in 1809 by the great American humorist Washington Irving described Santa riding over rooftops in his sleigh, putting his finger to the side of his nose, (ancient Celtic signal of shamanic ‘knowledge’) and bringing gifts to good children...the book was intended as a satire of life in New York at the turn of the century, but in the end it went a long way toward the ‘reinvention’ of St. Nicholas as Santa Claus. “Then, on Christmas Eve 1822, a journalist named Clement C. Moore put pen to paper and gave us the ‘jolly old elf,’ the eight Teutonic reindeer, and all those details that everyone knows and loves.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot, and his clothes were all covered in ashes and soot; A bundle of toys he had flung on his back, and he looked like a peddler just opening his pack. His eyes how they twinkled! His dimple how merry! His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry! His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow, and the beard on his chin was as white as the snow. The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth, and the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath. He had a broad face and a little round belly that shook, when he laughed, like a

bowl full of jelly. He was chubby and plump, a right holly old elf, and I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself (Matthews 127).

“Then, between 1860 and 1881, the New York Illustrator and cartoonist Thomas Nast produced a series of drawings of Santa that added a selection of significant details. Santa’s ‘workshop’ was sited at the North Pole, his costume assumed the color and style with which we are now most familiar, and he acquired a book in which he recorded the names, addresses, and deeds of the children he would soon be visiting” (Matthews 127).

Should Christians Celebrate Christmas?

In light of all the information presented, as a Christian should you still celebrate Christmas? It could be that this information has caused you to look at Christmas in a different light. Lets consider the story of King Saul for a moment in 1 Samuel 13:9-14.

The Philistines had gathered to fight against Israel, however, Israel was distressed and hid themselves and were scattered away from Saul. Samuel had given Saul instructions on what he should do during this time in 1 Samuel 10:8, in which Saul should wait for Samuel to come and offer sacrifices. However, Saul went ahead of Samuel and offered sacrifices to God himself, a duty that only priests could perform. Samuel said of Saul’s disobedience “...thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom.” Saul did what he thought was right in his own eyes. Proverbs 16:25 says: There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.

Any thing that is contrary to the word of God, you are not to abide in it.

Conclusion

What then can we say about celebrating the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on a day which the Lord never told us to? As long as we don’t acknowledge Mithra or the other sun gods, or Santa, or put up a Christmas tree, or participate in drunken revelry or decorate our homes with greenery and lights, as non Christians do, December 25th can still be a special day to remember Christ’s birth. While celebrating Christmas for the sole purpose of remembering and honoring Jesus birth may seem right in our eyes, we have to stop and think if it is right in the eyes of God. “Very few of us ever reflect on why we believe what we do, why we follow the customs we do. We rarely examine the origins of those customs. We still often think it doesn’t really matter because after all everyone else is

'Tis the Season to be Pagan: Christmas and Its Origins

By Lady Alissa Catron

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doing it" (Shocking). Jesus wasn't born on December 25th, so why do we continue to celebrate His birth on this day? It has become a tradition for Christians and non Christians alike, and even Jesus Himself said "but in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matthew 15:9) In closing, I leave you with these words from Pastor Catron: "It is the choices that we make that determine our end."

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