

The Roman Winter Festivals

December 25th is the day designated on our Roman calendars as the day of Jesus Christ's birth.

Are today's customs at this winter season of Christian origin?

Or are they an example of a mixture between paganism and Christianity?

The word "*Christmas*" indicates that it is a mixture.

Though it includes the name of Christ, it also mentions the "*mass*" of the Roman Church, an elaborate ceremony and complicated rituals are in complete contrast to the "*simplicity that is in Christ.*" [2 Corinthians 11:3]

Looking at it this way the word "*Christ-mass*" is self-contradictory.

The actual date of Christ's birth as December 25th is also to be doubted.

Luke 2:8 [King James] "*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*"

Shepherds in Palestine did not abide in the fields in the middle of winter.

While the Christian Bible does not expressly tell us the date of Jesus Christ's birth, there are indications it was probably in the autumn of the year.

We know that Jesus Christ was crucified in the spring at the time of the Passover [John 18:39], figuring His ministry, as lasting three and a half years, this would place the beginning of His ministry in the autumn. At that time Jesus Christ was about to be thirty years of age [Luke 3:23], the recognised age for a man to become an official minister [priest] under the Old Testament. [Numbers 4:3] If Jesus Christ was turned thirty in the autumn, then His birthday was in the autumn thirty years before.

At the time of Jesus Christ's birth, Joseph and Mary had gone to Bethlehem to be taxed. [Luke 2:1-5] There are no records to indicate that the middle of winter was the time of taxing. A more logical time of year would have been the autumn at the end of the main harvest.

If this was the case, it would have been the season for the Feast of Tabernacles at Jerusalem which could explain why even at Bethlehem "*there was no room in the inn.*"

According to the historian Josephus, Jerusalem was normally a city of 120,000 inhabitants, but during the feasts, sometimes as many as 2,000,000 Jews would gather. Such vast crowds not only filled Jerusalem, but the surrounding towns also, including Bethlehem, which was only five miles to the south.

If the journey of Joseph and Mary was to attend the Feast of Tabernacles, as well as to be taxed, this would place the birth of Jesus Christ in the autumn of the year.

It is **not** essential that we know the exact date on which Jesus Christ was born, the main thing being, of course, that He was born!

The early Christians commemorated the death of Jesus Christ, [1 Corinthians 11:26], not His birth.

Quotation: 'The Catholic Encyclopaedia', volume 3; page 724; article '*Christmas*' –

“Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church, Irenaeus and Tertullian omit it from their list of feasts.”

Quotation: **‘The Catholic Encyclopaedia’**, volume 3; page 725 –

“It was not until the latter part of the fourth century before the Roman Church began observing December 25th.”

Quotation: **‘The Encyclopaedia Americana’**, volume 6; page 623 –

“By the fifth century, it [Roman Church] was ordering that the birth of Jesus Christ be forever observed on this date [December 25th], even though this was the day of the old Roman Feast of the Birth of Sol, one of the names of the sun-god.”

Quotation: **‘The Golden Bough’** by Frazer; page 471 –

*“The largest pagan religious cult which fosters the celebration of December 25th 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.**”*

Quotation: **‘The Catholic Encyclopaedia’**, volume 3; page 727; article ‘Christmas’ –

“The well known solar feast of Natalis Invicti, the Nativity of the Unconquered Sun, celebrated on 25th December, has a strong claim for the responsibility for our December date ...”

As pagan solar customs were being “Christianised” at Rome, it is understandable that confusion would result.

Some thought Jesus Christ was Sol, the sun-god.

Quotation: **‘The Catholic Encyclopaedia’**, volume 3; page 727; article ‘Christmas’ –

“Tertullian had to assert that Sol was not the Christian god. Augustine denounced the heretical identification of Jesus Christ with Sol. Pope Leo I bitterly reproved solar survivals, Christians, on the very doorstep of the apostles’ basilica, turning to adore the rising sun.”

The winter festival was very popular in ancient times.

Quotation: **‘Curiosities of Popular Customs’** by Walsh; page 242 –

“In pagan Rome and Greece in the days of Teutonic barbarians, in the remote times of ancient Egyptian civilisation, in the infancy of the race east and west and north and south, the period of the winter solstice was a period of rejoicing and festivity.”

Because this season was so popular, it was adopted as the time of the birth of Jesus Christ by the Roman Church.

Some of our present-day Christmas customs were influenced by the Roman Saturnalia.

Quotation: **‘The Legacy of Rome’** by Bailey; page 242 –

*“It is common knowledge that much of our association with the Christmas season, the holidays, the giving of presents and the general feeling of geniality, is **but the inheritance from the Roman winter festival of the Saturnalia ... survivals of paganism...**”*

Tertullian mentions that the practice of exchanging presents was a part of the Saturnalia.

Some have sought to link Christmas gifts with those presented to Jesus Christ by the wise men.

This cannot be correct.

By the time the wise men arrived, Jesus was no longer “lying in a manger,” as when the shepherds came, but was in a house. [Matthew 2:9-11] This could have been quite a while after His birthday.

Also, they presented gifts to Jesus Christ not to each other!

The Christmas tree as we know it, only dates back a few centuries, though the ideas about sacred trees are very ancient.

An old Babylonian fable told of an evergreen tree which sprang out of a dead tree stump. The old stump symbolised the dead Nimrod, the new evergreen tree symbolised that Nimrod had come back to life again in Tammuz!

Among the Druids the oak tree was sacred, among the Egyptians it was the palm and in Rome it was the fir, which was decorated with red berries during Saturnalia. [Reference 'Curiosities and Popular Customs' by Walsh]

In the Christian Bible there are at least ten references to the green tree in association with idolatry and false worship. [1 Kings 14:23; 2 Kings 17:10; 2 Kings 16:4, etc.]

The Scandinavian god Odin was believed to bestow special gifts at yuletide to those who approached his sacred fir tree.

The use of holly and mistletoe are linked to Druid ceremonies. [Reference 'Festivals, Holy Days and Saints Days' by Urlin]

Jeremiah 10:2-3 [King James] *"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."*

The people in the days of Jeremiah, as the context shows, were actually making an idol out of the tree, the word "*workman*" refers to a person who was forming an idol. [Isaiah 40:19-20; Hosea 8:4-6]

In the sixth century, missionaries were sent by Rome throughout northern Europe to gather pagans into the Roman fold. They found that June 24th was a very popular day among these people, so they sought to "*Christianise*" this day.

By this time December 25th had been adopted by the Romish church as the birthday of Jesus Christ.

Since June 24th was approximately six months before December 25th, they called it the birthday of John the Baptist. [Luke 1:26, 36]

Thus June 24th is known on papal calendar now as St. John's Day. [Reference 'The Catholic Encyclopaedia', volume 8; page 491; article '*John the Baptist*']

In Britain, before the entrance of Christianity, June 24th was celebrated by the Druids with blazing fires in honour of Baal. [Reference 'Druids' by Toland; page 107]

June 24th was recorded as being sacred to the ancient fish god Oannes, a name by which Nimrod was known. [Reference 'The Two Babylons' by Hislop; page 114]

A day which in pagan times had been regarded as sacred to Isis or Diana, August 15th was simply renamed as the day of the "*Assumption of the Virgin Mary*," still highly honoured by Romish church. [Reference 'The Story of Civilisation, The Age of Faith' by Durant; page 746]

Another day adopted from paganism, supposedly to honour Mary, is called "*Candlemass*" or the "*Purification of the Blessed Virgin*" and is celebrated on February 2nd.

In Mosaic law, after giving birth to a male child, a mother was considered unclean for forty days. [Leviticus 12:1-8; Luke 2:22-24]

Having adopted December 25th as the nativity of Jesus Christ, the February 2nd date seemed to fit in well with the time of the purification of Mary.

But what did this have to do with the use of candles on this day?

In pagan Rome, this festival was observed by the carrying of torches and candles to honour Februa, from which our month February is named!

The Greeks held the feast in honour of the goddess Ceres, the mother of Proserpina, who the candle-bearing celebrates searched for her in the underworld. [Reference ‘Festivals, Holy Days and Saints Days’ by Umlin; pages 27-28]

On this day, “Candlemass” all the candles to be used during the year in Catholic rituals are blessed. [Reference ‘The Catholic Encyclopaedia’, volume 3; page 246; article ‘Candles’]

Quotation from above reference: *“We need not shrink from admitting that candles, like incense and lustral water, were commonly employed in pagan worship and in rites paid to the dead.”*

Galatians 4:9-11 [King James] *“But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.”*

The context shows that the Galatians had been converted from the pagan worship to God’s. [v8] When some had turned “again” to their former worship [v9] the days and times they observed were evidently those which had been set aside to honour pagan gods!

How sad and strange that some of these very days were merged into the worship of the Roman Catholic Church as they “Christianised” them.

Also Protestant Churches have **failed** to reject the same “Christianised” pagan days and return to the days ordained by the One and Only Creator God in His Word, the Christian Bible!

1 Timothy 4:1 [King James] *“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;”*

We had better take to heart this warning before it is too late to avoid the wrath of God.

Romans 1:18 [NIV] *“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness,”*