

# The Origins of Christmas

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WARRINGTON, England—The weeks leading up to the winter solstice were quite frightening for ancient peoples. It was a time when the sun seemed to stand still low in the skies for several weeks (check your sunset calendar from mid-November to the end of December.)

It was thought to be a period of chaos, when the forces of good and evil and of light and darkness were believed to be at war. It was a time of death and, they hoped, of rebirth. If the forces of light failed to win and the sun were not reborn, then the whole world would be plunged into chaos. November and December were a time of fear and trepidation.

The dating of the winter solstice varied slightly and of course changed with changes in the calendar. (Even in our day the autumn equinox has been moved from the 23rd to the 21st of September, so dates are not always static.)

In Babylon and Egypt the winter solstice was considered to be on what we would now call Dec. 25. In Greece it appears to have been Dec. 22. On this day it was proclaimed that the Great Earth Mother goddess, the Queen of Heaven, had given birth to the Son of Light. The sun was reborn and would begin to rise in the sky again. The world was saved, and everyone rejoiced in celebrations lasting, almost invariably, 12 days.

Whether the child is called Ra, Horus, Mithra, Adonis, Marduk or simply the Sun, the basic myth remains the same.

Quite often the mother of the child (Isis, Atargatis, Astarte, Aphrodite) was claimed to be a virgin, often in contradiction to previous quite outrageous and promiscuous behavior. In later religions the White Goddess of the Celts, Rhiannon was called the virgin mother and gave birth to Pryderi on the winter solstice. The star that was named Virgo, in honor of the Virgin Mother, rises in these regions about this time of year. And all these religions venerate statues of the mother (Madonna) and child.

## Ancient customs

The celebrations included decorating homes with evergreens and lights, feasting, dancing and singing (*choraulein*, or carols) and sending presents to one another.

In Northern areas Odin was believed to preside over the festival as Yule Father, giving presents to the faithful. He had a white beard and a reindeer-drawn sleigh and was associated with hearths and fires, hence the idea that he dressed in red.

What has all this to do with the birth of Christ? Not much. The earliest Christians were not concerned about Jesus' birthday. They were far more concerned with His second coming to judge the world, which they believed to be imminent, than with His physical birth. In A.D. 245 Origen declared it was a sin even to think of keeping Christ's birthday.

## Christmas adopted

By about 336 the church in Rome was keeping Christmas on Dec. 25. The reasoning is somewhat muddled but appears to be linked to the arguments over the nature of God at the Council of Nicea and the desire to deify Jesus' mother, Mary. The arguments ran that, if Christ were God and man, He must have had a birthday, and, if He had a birthday, it should be celebrated. Otherwise it could be claimed that He was never really born at all.

Various dates were kept, but, to try to make it easier for pagans to convert to Christianity, Dec. 25 was finally chosen. This meant they could claim Christ had overcome Mithra, the sun and all the other ancient gods.

Having declared Christ as victor, it was a short step to give Mary the title of Queen of Heaven and pronounce her Mother of God. The reality was that the desire for a mother goddess in the hearts of those who claimed to be Christians was far stronger than their love of the Father. In Mary deified, they found the comfort of the Earth Mother goddess.

## Modern customs

An overview of Christmas today shows that the Viking god Odin still presides as Santa Claus or Father Christmas. It is his image that is most often seen. Evergreens decorated with lights and glitter honor, as they did in ancient times, the returning sun reborn anew. Carols, many of which are folk dances with the words amended to try to make them less racy for church use, are still sung. Overindulgence in food and alcohol are rife. And so much money is spent on presents that some people take the rest of the year to pay for them.

## Reborn again

When a child reaches adulthood, be it considered 13, 18 or 21, it is customary to send cards with that age on it. According to Christmas, Christ never gets any older. He is reborn every year, just as the pagan gods were. Every

year he appears anew on Dec. 25 as a tiny baby. Services are held and carols are sung as if this truly were the case (for example, "Away in the Manger").

People keep vigil at midnight, waiting for His "birth." This in itself should be a warning to true Christians that there is something wrong. Where is His growing up, His first Passover, His preaching of God's coming Kingdom on God's true feast days, His defeat of Satan, His death and resurrection and His second coming? Somehow the Christ of Christmas has gotten stuck in a time warp,

I find interesting that so-called advent hymns, sung in the four weeks before Christmas, almost all refer to Christ's second coming, (including "Hills of the North Rejoice" and "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"). Yet come Christmas morn are we treated to a celebration of Christ's second coming?

No, He is reborn once again as a baby. It's almost as if the message is there but gets lost in the annual cycle of the sun. One might ask did Christ defeat Mithra, or has Mithra defeated Christ?

### **'Learn not . . .'**

That Christ's birth was nowhere near Dec. 25 is easily proved and is accepted by most professing Christians. The most-likely time is around the dates of the autumn feasts in Jerusalem: September or October.

Although the Feast of Trumpets cannot be proved to be the date of Christ's birth, it does look forward to His second coming and is often used as a memorial of His first. And, although God's festivals, too, are cyclical, their meaning transcends time. They are either memorials of something that has happened (for example, Passover, which has tremendous meaning now for all true Christians) or look forward to something that will happen in the future (such as the Feast of Tabernacles, which has tremendous meaning for the whole world).

God says we are not to become involved in pagan customs (Deuteronomy 12:29-32). Neither are we to become dismayed at the signs of the heavens as the heathen were (Jeremiah 10:2). Apart from the sin of worshiping pagan gods, there is also the danger of becoming stuck in a Satanic time warp designed to hide the true meaning of Christ's birth, life, death, resurrection and second coming.