

The origins of Christmas

This article is from the "Edifying the Body" section of the Church of God Big Sandy's Web site, churchofgodbigandy.com. It was posted for the weekend of Dec. 26-27.

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BIG SANDY, Texas—While millions of people (both those who claim to be Christians and those who are nonreligious) observe the holiday of Christmas, there are many God-fearing people who do not celebrate Christmas.

Do those who refrain from celebrating Christmas reject the birth of Jesus Christ as Savior? Absolutely not.

There are two main reasons why some God-fearing people do not celebrate Christmas.

- First, many believe that Jesus the Savior was born in the fall of the year.
- Second, many believe that the customs of the Christmas celebration come from pagan origins.

Let's take a brief moment to look at some basic information about the origin of Christmas.

World Book Encyclopedia

Let's look at some quotes from the *World Book Encyclopedia* under the section of "Christmas."

The following material is from pages 528-529.

"The first mention of the celebration of Christmas occurred in A.D. 336 in an early Roman calendar, which indicates December 25 as the day of observance. This celebration was probably influenced by *pagan* (unchristian) festivals held at that time. The ancient Romans held year-end celebrations to honor Saturn, their harvest god; and Mithras, the god of light. Various peoples in northern Europe held festivals in mid-December to celebrate the end of the harvest season. As part of all these celebrations, the people prepared special foods, decorated their homes with greenery, and joined in singing and gift giving. These customs gradually became part of the Christmas celebration.

"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 . . .

“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. However, people continued to exchange Christmas gifts and soon started to follow the other old customs again.

“In the 1800’s, two more Christmas customs became popular—decorating Christmas trees and sending Christmas cards to relatives and friends . . . In the United States and other countries, Santa Claus replaced Saint Nicholas as the symbol of gift-giving.

“The celebration of Christmas became increasingly important to many kinds of businesses during the 1900’s. Today, companies manufacture Christmas ornaments, lights, and other decorations throughout the year. Other firms grow Christmas trees, holly, and mistletoe. Many stores and other businesses hire extra workers during the Christmas season to handle the increase in sales.”

Holman Bible Dictionary

The following material is from page 253 of the *Holman Bible Dictionary*.

“In the early centuries, Christians were much more likely to celebrate the day of a person’s death than the person’s birthday. Very early in its history the church had an annual observance of the death of Christ and also honored many of the early martyrs on the day of their death. Before the fourth century, churches in the East—Egypt, Asia Minor, and Antioch—observed Epiphany, the manifestation of God to the world, celebrating Christ’s baptism, His birth, and the visit of the Magi.

“In the early part of the fourth century, Christians in Rome began to celebrate the birth of Christ . . .

“No evidence remains about the exact date of the birth of Christ. The December 25 date was chosen as much for practical reasons as for theological ones. Throughout the Roman Empire, various festivals were held in conjunction with the winter solstice. In Rome, the Feast of the Unconquerable Sun celebrated the beginning of the return of the sun. When Christianity became the religion of the Empire, the church either had to suppress the festivals or transform them. The winter solstice seemed an appropriate time to celebrate Christ’s birth. Thus, the festival of the sun became a festival of the Son, the Light of the world.”

Transformation not for everyone

It is easy to find fault with the commercialism associated with Christmas. Christmas is big business.

It is easy to find fault with the values taught by the lies associated with a mythical Santa Claus.

But, for many God-fearing people who do not participate in the Christmas customs, the major objection is the transformation of the winter-solstice celebrations to Christmas celebrations.

Here are paraphrases of two scriptures that influence the approach of those who oppose the transformation.

■ Deuteronomy 12:30: "Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following the other nations by inquiring after their gods saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I want to do likewise.' "

■ Jeremiah 10:2-3: "Thus says the Eternal, 'Learn not the way of the heathen. For the customs of the people are vain [worthless, empty, futile].' "

Although it can be cumbersome to wade upstream against the strong Christmas current, people have been doing it for years because of their strong convictions. They remember the origins of Christmas.