












- 1  **How Pagan is Christmas?**  
Santa and the War on Christmas
- 2  **SANTA CLAUS**  
The man, the myth, the legend
- 3  **Santa Claus**
  - The modern version of the fictional character we know today to be Santa Claus has come a long way from a variety of roots, and is a mixture of a variety of European and Christian traditions.
  - Some of the more significant influences include Saint Nicholas, Saint Basil, Sinterklaas, and the Norse god Odin.
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- 4  **Saint Nicholas**
  - Nicholas of Myra is the primary inspiration for the character of Santa Clause/Sinterklaas.
  - He was the 4<sup>th</sup> Century bishop of the church at Myra (in modern day Turkey).
  - He was known for his generosity and gift-giving, specifically to three impoverished daughters of a man who had no money to provide for their dowries.
- 5  **Saint Nicholas**
  - While there is a tremendous amount of legend surrounding Saint Nicholas, what we do know historically is that:
    - He was five feet tall and had a broken nose
    - He had a penchant for secret gift giving, including leaving gold coins in the shoes and stockings of the poor
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- 7  **Saint Basil**
  - Saint Basil was an important early church father, also a bishop of a church in what is now Turkey.
  - He is most notably one of the most important proponents of the Creed of Nicaea in the early church.
  - He was also a generous man, and even today in Greece Santa Clause is called Saint Basil instead of Saint Nicholas.
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- 9  **Odin**
  - The chief Norse god, Odin was also supposed to lead a great hunting party through the sky during the festival of Yule.
  - The *Prose Edda* refers to Odin as riding an eight-legged horse named Sleipnir that could leap great distances.
  - Odin was portrayed as an old man with a beard and a staff.
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- 11  **Father Christmas**
  - Odin did *not* travel in a sleigh or chariot pulled by goats – in this regard he is often confused with another major Norse god.
  - It is *possibly* from the myth of Odin/Wodan that the 17<sup>th</sup> myth of Father Christmas sprung.

- Father Christmas is supposed to be a tall bearded man dressed in a long green, fur-lined robe.

12 

13  **Sinterklaas**

- Sinterklaas is the Dutch version of Saint Nicholas. He is considered by the Dutch to be a separate entity from Santa Clause, whom the Dutch identify with Father Christmas.
- Sinterklaas is supposed to bring gifts on December 6<sup>th</sup>.
- He rides a white-grey horse over the rooftops at night (for a 3-week period), delivering gifts through the chimney to the well-behaved children.

14  **Sinterklaas**

- Naughty children risk being put in bags carried over the shoulders of Sinterklaas's aids:
  - Krampus
  - The devil
  - Black Peter
  - Knight Rupert
- Sinterklaas was said to carry a book with notes in it of how each of the children had behaved.

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16  **Tomte/Nisse**

- The Tomte/Nisse was a magical sprite or elf in Scandinavian folklore, said to take care of a farmer's home and children and protect them from misfortune.
- As various Father Christmas and Sinterklaas myths made their way to Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, the Tomte or Nisse became the bringer of presents at Christmas.

17  **Santa Claus**

- The modern American figure known as Santa Claus is on some level a mixture of all of these myths and legends.
- When evaluating this (or other Christmas traditions) for our families, the question of "where did it come from?" is not nearly as important as "what is it teaching us?"

18  **Works vs. Grace**

- The danger in Santa Claus lies not in pagan origins or in fears of misleading our children about whether or not Santa Claus is real.
- Rather, it lies in the more subtle subtext of the Santa mythos:
  - Santa only brings presents to the *good* children. To the bad children he brings lumps of coal or, in some versions, they are taken away for a horrible punishment of some sort.

19  **THE WAR ON CHRISTMAS**

Don't grind your axe on the holidays

20  **Alexander Hislop**

- The primary modern arguments for the paganism of Christmas (at least those put forth by Christians) stem back to a pamphlet published in 1853 (and then expanded into a book in 1858) by Alexander Hislop.
- Hislop was a Scottish minister and outspoken critic of the Roman Catholic Church. His pamphlet was called *The Two Babylons*.

21  **The Two Babylons**

- *The Two Babylons: Or the Papal Worship Proved to be the Worship of Nimrod and His Wife*

was an attempt by Hislop to prove that there was a conspiracy at the heart of the Roman Catholic Church stretching back all the way to Babylon.

- Hislop's understandings of the history, religion, and culture of ancient Babylon have since been proven to be incorrect and unfounded.

22  **The Two Babylons**


- *The Two Babylons* is still used by non-believers today as “a tribute to historical inaccuracy and know-nothing religious bigotry”.
- Although extensively footnoted, modern scholars (both secular and Christian) have since found it to be rife with errors and factual inaccuracies.

23  **The Two Babylons**


- Among other claims, Hislop attempted to tie all Catholic festivals (Christmas included, since Christmas was celebrated by the Catholic Church) to a pagan Babylonian conspiracy stretching back to Nimrod.
- Hislop himself admits that all of this hinges on a very shaky assumption – one which is not supported by any scholarship.

24  **The Two Babylons**

- “Now, assuming that Ninus is Nimrod, the way in which that assumption explains what is otherwise inexplicable in the statements of ancient history greatly confirms the truth of the assumption itself.” (*The Two Babylons*, 25).
- Hislop then goes on to say that all winter festivals can be traced back to Nimrod – something that is irresponsibly unsupportable.

25  **Christmas and Paganism**

- Yes – There are elements of paganism that have managed to make their way into some of our Christmas traditions.
- No – The origins of Christmas cannot be responsibly traced back to any specific pagan festival.
- Yes – Christmas has been celebrated in the wrong way and for the wrong reasons by people throughout the centuries.

26  **Christmas and Paganism**

- Yes – There were many pagan festivals focused at or around the winter solstice.
- No – This does not mean there is an over-arching conspiracy surrounding Christmas traceable back to ancient Babylon.
- The key to handling Christmas and our Christmas traditions can be found in the book of 1 Corinthians:

27  **1 Corinthians 10:31**

- *Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.* (1Co 10:31)
- This is what Scripture teaches about holidays:
  - If you celebrate them, you have the freedom to do so, but they *must* be about Christ.
  - If you don't celebrate them, you have the freedom to do so, but in doing so you *must* make Christ your focus instead.

28  **Shadow and Substance**

- *Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.* (Col 2:16-17)
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29  **Whatever You Do**

- *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. (Col 3:16-17)*

30  **Do... Or Don't**

- *One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. (Rom 14:5-6)*

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31  **How Pagan is Christmas?**

- Christmas is exactly as pagan as we allow it to be.
- If we choose to reject Christmas as something that is wholly secular or wholly pagan, instead of appropriating and redeeming, then we give the holiday to the world.
- We need to think seriously, not only about our own family traditions, but also about the impact we are making on the culture around us.

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