

Christmas Traditions

Christmas is so full of wonder, meaning and tradition. But, where did all these things that we now call Christmas -- come from? Lets just briefly sketch the origin and development of what we now celebrate as Christ's Birth.

The Biblical Celebration

- _____ Luke 1:78-79 Through the tender mercy of our God, With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;79 To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace.”
- _____ Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.
- _____ 1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

The Pagan Connection

- Dr. Phillip Schaff, a noted church historian of the last century, wrote a monumental 8 volume History of the Christian Church¹. In this work he relates that history records that the ancients celebrated an annual victory of the Sun over the long night of winter. This religious festival was held near the winter solstice of 12/21 - 22 each year.
- By Roman times there was:
 1. A silent testimony of nature: the seasons that show winter as death and spring as life and resurrection. And,
 2. A Public Celebration in Paganism that:
 3. Related the Sol Invictus legend of the conquest of darkness by the Sun.
 4. This tradition was embodied in the Saturnalia Festival. This festival was a feast of images, the giving of gifts, and the setting free of slaves.
- According to the Astronomers, on the night of 12/21-22, the earth is at its darkest, the night is the longest, the light of day is the shortest, and the Sun is closest to the Earth of any time of the year.
- What an amazing picture of Christ's coming to us. As John 1 says He came to a sin darkened world, He came as a Sunrise from on High and offered a free gift of salvation and liberation from servitude to the servants of darkness.

The Christian Regeneration of this Pagan Celebration

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- By AD 386, Chrysostom was preaching,
- As the centuries went on the tradition grew to include Epiphany [manifestation] when Christ was circumcised on the 8th day after His birth. The Eastern Church celebrates this on January 6th.

¹ III, pp. 394ff.

A Final conclusion:

1. Don't lose the **Spiritual Depth of Christmas** because of its Pagan association.
 2. Don't miss the **Spiritual Delight of Christmas** because of the Commercial association.
 3. Don't forget the **Spiritual Despair of the World** because of Christmas and its wonders.
- Some challenges: As a part of your Christmas celebration this year, we suggest taking your children to a ghetto, to a hospital, to an orphanage, to an old-age home.
1. Teach them the meaning of giving by giving a gift to Jesus. And, like Christ, give to those who can't repay you.
 2. Teach them it is foolish for us to spend money on things we don't need, and on things that others don't need.
 3. Let them spread joy to those who are miserable! Let them give a smile to an old woman's face, whose own children have forgotten and abandoned her in a convalescent hospital.
 4. Let them empty their piggy banks and send the money to missions and the poor. Let there be giving! Costly giving! Let us give our Lord Jesus the whole world for
 5. Pause to sense the darkness outside at night, and then thank God for sending the light.
 6. Read the Scriptures to your family, and start some traditions that point to Christ. Enjoy this wonderful time of the year; don't lose the season for the rush.
 7. Remember it is His birthday! The world and the Lord await our response..."

