

"To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child."

—Cicero

21-Dec-18

## Reasons for Not Celebrating Christmas

When someone at work asked me why I do not celebrate the holidays, I did not have what I thought was a good response to give her, but this essay will provide a handful of valid reasons.

First, Jesus was not born on December 25. While the Bible does not give an exact date for His birth, John Reid, in the *Forerunner* article, "[When Was Jesus Born?](#)" tells us that the Bible leaves clues that point to His actual birth date. The article provides a method of calculation starting with John the Baptist's father, Zacharias. Based on when Zacharias would have served in the Temple during his priestly course, John the Baptist's birth would have occurred in the latter half of March. Since he was six months older than Jesus ([Luke 1:32](#)), we can extrapolate that Jesus would have been born in the second half of September, around the fall holy days.

Lawrence Kelemen, a Jew, brings up several points about the problems people face when they attempt to justify their keeping of the holiday. He affirms that the Bible does not list the actual day of Jesus' birth anywhere.

He infers that, since Mark, the earliest gospel (written a half-century after Jesus' birth) begins with the [baptism](#) of Jesus as an adult, first-century Christians cared little about His birthday.

Second, the roots of [Christmas](#) are found in Saturnalia. Pagans in Rome celebrated this weeklong period of bedlam and lawlessness between December 17-25. During this period of anarchy, no one could be punished for their vandalism and mayhem. An "enemy of the Roman people" was chosen to represent the "Lord of Misrule." Each community selected a victim and forced him to gorge himself on food and other indulgences throughout the week. On the last day of the festival, December 25, they took vengeance against the forces of darkness by brutally murdering this victim. Kelemen writes that besides this human sacrifice, there was widespread drunkenness, public nudity, rape, and other sexual license.

After Constantine converted to Catholicism, many pagans followed him once they were allowed to maintain their celebration of Saturnalia. They solved the problem of Saturnalia having nothing to do with Christianity by declaring December 25 to be Jesus' birthday, replacing the celebration of the birth of *Sol Invictus* (the Invincible Sun), but little changed in practice.

These practices are blatant violations of God's command in [Deuteronomy 12:30-31](#):

. . . take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise." You shall not worship the LORD your [God](#) in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

Third, many of the trappings of Christmas are directly imported from paganism. For instance, the Catholic Church shamelessly welcomed the pagan tree worshippers into their fellowship. They simply called their trees "Christmas trees." Mistletoe is another example of such syncretism. The ancient Druids used its supposed mystical powers to ward off evil spirits and bring good luck. In ancient Norse mythology, mistletoe was used to

symbolize love and friendship. The custom of kissing under the mistletoe is a later blending of the sexual license of Saturnalia with Druidic practice.

The Catholic Church says that the practice of gift-giving was begun by an early bishop, Nicholas, who died in AD 345 and made a saint in the 1800s. Nicholas was a senior bishop who convened the Council of Nicaea in 325. Some 750 years later, a group of sailors who idolized him moved his bones from Turkey to Italy, where he supplanted a favor-granting deity called the Grandmother, who used to fill children's stockings with gifts. In his honor, his followers would give each other gifts on the anniversary of his death, December 6.

From there, his cult spread to the German and Celtic pagans. Many of them worshipped Woden, who wore a long, white beard and rode a horse through the heavens each fall. Through the process of syncretism, Nicholas and Woden were combined. Nicholas now sported a beard, rode a flying horse, wore winter clothes to battle the elements, and took his trip in the last month of the year instead of in the fall. As it evangelized in Northern Europe, Catholicism absorbed the Nicholas cult and persuaded its adherents to give gifts on December 25 instead of December 6.

In 1809, novelist Washington Irving satirically wrote of this Saint Nicolas using his Dutch name, Santa Claus. Thirteen years later, Clement Moore wrote a poem based on this Santa Claus, *The Night before Christmas*. The poem incorporated the giving of gifts, added his descent down the chimney, and replaced the horse with a sleigh and eight reindeer.

Our modern image of Santa Claus was provided by a Bavarian cartoonist, Thomas Nast, who drew over 2000 pictures in the late nineteenth century for *Harper's Weekly*. Before Nast's cartoon, Saint Nicholas had been depicted as "everything from a stern looking bishop to a gnome-like figure in a frock." Nast provided many of the traditional details: He gave him a home at the North Pole and a workshop with elves who made toys.

The creation of Santa was completed in 1931 when the Coca-Cola Corporation developed a marketing campaign for a Coke-drinking Santa. Swedish commercial artist Haddon Sundblom modeled a chubby Santa, dressed in a bright Coca-Cola red outfit. Kelemen states, "[The modern]

Santa was born—a blend of Christian crusader, pagan god, and commercial idol."

Fourth, December 25 has traditionally been the day when pagans marked the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year. It is a day venerated every year by worshippers of the sun god. Egyptians celebrated Horus' birthday on December 25. Other cultures also worshipped their gods on this day: the Mesopotamians, the ancient Greeks, and the Persians. Winter solstice traditions stretch back long before [Jesus Christ](#) entered into [the world](#).

Fifth, Christmas is all about commercialism. Many people struggle with low wages and debt, yet they spend hundreds of dollars to buy Christmas gifts. The average American family will spend \$882 this year on Christmas presents. An article in *US News and World Report*, "Commercialism Only Adds to [Joy](#) of the Holidays," avers that Christmas is a spiritual holiday whose main theme is personal, selfish pleasure and joy, claiming that the season's commercialism is integral to it. The article cites Ayn Rand, who said that Christmas' best aspect has been its commercialization: "The Christmas trees, the winking lights, the glittering colors . . . provide the city with a spectacular display, which only 'commercial greed' could afford to give us. One would have to be terribly depressed to resist the wonderful gaiety of that spectacle."

Lastly, and in summary, the supposed worship of Christ is based on falsehoods. From rebranding pagan sun worship as worship of the Son of God to people telling their children that Santa will withhold their presents if they are not good, everything is a fabrication. Try as they might, people cannot make the unclean clean or the unholy holy.

As we drive along and see the beautiful lights and decorations, consider the way that John Ritenbaugh defines *worldliness*, "the love of beauty . . . without a corresponding love of righteousness" (see "The World, the Church, and [Laodiceanism](#)"). It fits in this case, as there is absolutely *nothing* righteous about Christmas.

- John Reiss

## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

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### [Christmas, Syncretism, and Presumption](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Many who consider themselves Christians believe celebrating Christmas honors Jesus Christ, even though the holiday has no biblical support. While it is attractive and appealing, Christmas is actually a spiritual trap because it is not true. John Ritenbaugh explains that it is highly presumptuous to believe that such a syncretized holiday, blended liberally with heathen customs, could please God.

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