

Syncretismas!

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Forerunner, December 1995

No "Christian" holiday is as misleading as Christmas—unless it is Easter. What do evergreen trees, Yule logs, holly wreaths, mistletoe, and Santa Claus have to do with our relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ? Does the Nativity scene with its mother-and-child motif teach us anything about the relationship between God the Father and His Son?

Does Christmas teach us the truth? With so many falsehoods and deceptions surrounding and embedded in this holiday, we would be foolish to believe that God would approve of its celebration. Truth is very important to God. It is one of the names of Jesus Christ (John 14:6) and one of His ministry's themes: "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32; 18:37). Conversely, lies bind us in spiritual slavery.

Let's reflect for a moment on the origins and history of Christmas, which flourishes today in the materialistic Western world. From its non-Christian background, we can see that it is a syncretistic blend of pagan rites and Christian themes that is abhorrent to God (Deuteronomy 12:29-32; see Exodus 32). Christmas is a quagmire of deceptive traditions.

Origins in Babylon

Two key figures in the origin of Christmas are Nimrod, a great grandson of Noah, and his mother and wife, Semiramis, also known as Ishtar and Isis. Nimrod, known in Egypt as Osiris, was the founder of the first world empire at Babel, later known as Babylon (Genesis 10:8-12; 11:1-9). From ancient sources such as the "Epic of Gilgamesh" and records unearthed by archeologists from long-ruined Mesopotamian and Egyptian cities, we can reconstruct subsequent events.

After Nimrod's death (c. 2167 BC), Semiramis promoted the belief that he was a god. She claimed that she saw a full-grown evergreen tree spring out of the roots of a dead tree stump, symbolizing the springing forth of new life for Nimrod. On the anniversary of his birth, she said, Nimrod would visit the evergreen tree and leave gifts under it. His birthday fell on the winter solstice at the end of December.

A few years later, Semiramis bore a son, Horus or Gilgamesh. She declared that she had been visited by the spirit of Nimrod, who left her pregnant with the boy. Horus, she maintained, was Nimrod reincarnated. With a father, mother and son deified, a deceptive, perverted trinity was formed.

Semiramis and Horus were worshipped as "Madonna and child." As the generations passed, they were worshipped under other names in different countries and languages. Many of these are recognizable: Fortuna and Jupiter in Rome; Aphrodite and Adonis in Greece and Ashtoreth/Astarte and Molech/Baal in Canaan.

During the time between Babel and Christ, pagans developed the belief that the days grew shorter in early winter because their sun-god was leaving them. When they saw the length of the day increasing, they celebrated by riotous, unrestrained feasting and orgies. This celebration, known as *Saturnalia*, was named after Saturn, another name for Nimrod.

Blended into "Christianity"

Many historical sources show that Christmas was not observed by Christians from Christ's time to about AD 300. *Saturnalia* (December 17-24) and *Brumalia* (December 25) continued as a pagan celebration by the Romans well into the fourth century. *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1911 edition, in the article "Natal Day," records that the early Catholic church father, Origen, acknowledged:

In the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners like Pharaoh and Herod who make great rejoicings over the day in which they were born into this world.

During the fourth century, the emperor Constantine "converted" to "Christianity" and changed Sabbath keeping from the seventh to the first day of the week. Sunday was the day he had worshipped the sun as his god. This made it easier for the Romans to call their pagan December 25th winter solstice festival, in which they had celebrated the birth of the sun god, the birthday of the "Son of God."

The New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, says:

According to the hypothesis . . . accepted by most scholars today, the birth of Christ was assigned the date of the winter solstice (December 25 in the Julian calendar, January 6 in the Egyptian), because on this day, as the sun began its return to northern skies, the pagan devotees of Mithra celebrated the *dies natalis Solis Invicti* (birthday of the Invincible Sun). On Dec. 25, 274, Aurelian had proclaimed the sun-god principal patron of the empire and dedicated a temple to him in the Campus Martius. Christmas originated at a time when the cult of the sun was particularly strong at Rome.

Only in the fifth century did the Roman Catholic Church order that the birth of Christ be observed on December 25, the day of the old Roman feast of the birth of Sol, the sun god. They renamed this day "Christmas."

Christmas in England

In AD 596, Pope Gregory I dispatched the monk Augustine to England as a missionary. The Pope had decreed that whatever pagan practices were not of themselves "evil" should be blended with Christianity. According to the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Christmas":

In Britain, the 25th of December was a festival long before the conversion to Christianity, for Bede relates that "the ancient peoples of the Angli began the year on the 25th of December . . . ; and [Christmas eve] they called in their tongue "*modranecht*" (*môdra niht*), that is, the mother night, by reason we suspect of the ceremony which in that night-long vigil they performed."

When the Normans invaded England in 1066, they introduced other pagan ceremonies into the English celebration of Christmas. During the Reformation, the undisguised pagan elements in Christmas had often provoked criticism from conservative Protestants, but the festival was not really affected by their beliefs until the Puritans came to power in the early 1600's. Christmas was attacked as "the old heathens' feasting day to Saturn their god" and singing carols was forbidden.

In 1644, in protest against Christmas, the Church of England proclaimed December 25th as a fast day, and Parliament banned celebrating the festival. The new rule was enforced by the English army, which spent much of its time pulling down the greenery that festive "pagans" had attached to their doors. In Scotland, the prohibition was enforced with great rigor as well.

By the early nineteenth century, however, its popularity increased. Queen Caroline erected a tree at a royal Christmas celebration in 1821, and twenty years later, Albert, prince consort of Queen Victoria, provided one for a children's party at Windsor.

Christmas in America

In the seventeenth century, the English anti-Christmas attitude spread to her Puritan territories in America. In defiance of the Puritan attitude, the Catholic church established special Christmas services in Boston, Massachusetts, in the 1690s, but many civil authorities strongly opposed them.

By the early 1700s, German and Dutch settlers had brought the pagan custom of the gift-bringing St. Nicholas and the Christmas tree with them. Christmas was primarily celebrated in their settlements. German mercenaries, fighting on the British side in the War of Independence, raised Christmas trees in their camps.

In 1823 Santa Claus acquired national fame in the United States as a result of a poem. According to *Man, Myth and Magic Encyclopedia*:

St. Nicholas had become famous as a result of Clarke Moore's poem "The Night Before Christmas," published in 1823. By the 1890s the English Father Christmas, originally a minor character in a mummer's play, had been absorbed into the personality of his American counterpart, and become the jovial figure that he is today.

In 1836, Christmas first became an American legal holiday in the state of Alabama. Soon, one state after another legalized this pagan festival. Today, the U.S. celebrates this 4000-year-old festival as a national holiday with gift-giving and riotous, unrestrained feasting and drinking, in a manner similar to the celebrations in the ancient world.

Not of God

This general history of Christmas should be enough to send shivers of revulsion down our spine. The origin of Christmas and the traditional perversions surrounding this holiday should be an obvious reason to avoid this epitome of paganism. However, there is much more to it than origin and history.

What human being has the right to decide what God wants? If we were to celebrate Christ's birth, the Bible, God's instruction book to mankind, would command us to do so. Yet nowhere in the Bible are we told to celebrate the birth of Christ! It does not even tell us when it was! (For further information on the birth of Christ, see our article, "When Was Jesus Born?")

In John 13:15, Christ Himself gives us an important principle, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you." We have no example of Christ celebrating birthdays in connection with holy days or feasts—or at all. In fact, He says, "In vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9).

The Christmas holiday is spiritually misleading. The emphasis on the "mother and child" distracts from the Father-Son relationship that God's Word focuses on (John 10:30). Christ is reduced to a helpless baby, while Mary is deified and revered. Even Joseph is given more attention than Christ's real Father, the great God of heaven and earth!

Christmas keepers claim that they give gifts on that day because Christ received gifts. The truth is that the wise men brought gifts to the *King of the Jews*—not when he was born, or when He was an infant, but later when He was a young child (Matthew 2:1-2, 7-11). The gifts were not given to honor His birth, but to show esteem to a king as was the custom in the Middle East.

Further, the wise men did not exchange gifts with each other. So why do people today exchange gifts? Because the origins of these customs are based in paganism! It is interesting to note that offerings to churches decline at this time of year because people are spending their money on each other. How hypocritical!

The worst part of this holiday is that it turns people's hearts away from God. By receiving gifts and by drunkenness and gluttony, individuals are self-gratified, which inevitably leads to sin and crime. Police forces work rigorously to cope with the increased murders, suicides, robberies and domestic disturbances.

The fruit of this revelry should of itself show us that this holiday is in no way related to the Father and Son of Righteousness. Their holy days lead to peace, joy, hope and spiritual growth. That is why God instructed the Israelites not to follow pagan customs or worship Him as the heathen do. He says in Deuteronomy 12:31-32, "You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way. . . . Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it."

God knows that ungodly practices like these will not produce the purity of character He desires to see in each of us. James writes, expounding how something pure cannot originate from what is impure: "Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring can yield both salt water and fresh" (James 3:11-12).

Why meddle with the paganisms in Christmas when we can enjoy the purity of God's real holy days revealed in His Word? In following God's instruction, we will grow in developing the true and godly character that God expects in us.