

# Everything You Think You Know ABOUT CHRISTMAS IS WRONG!

YEAR & DATE - ANGEL HERALD - STAR & MAGI - MANGER SCENE - 3 GIFTS - PAGANISM - RELIGIOUS HOLIDAY

by **David L. Burris**

## SECULAR SETTING: SURROUNDINGS OF THE IMPERIAL CENSUS

**Who was “Quirinius” (Luke 2:2)?**

Publius Sulpicius Quirinius (“Quirinius”) was a Roman general and governor who subdued at least two troubled regions in the Roman Empire for [Caesar Augustus](#). To cap off his career, Quirinius returned to Syria in 6 AD as the resident Imperial Legate, oversaw a second census, this time just for the region, which is mentioned in Acts 5:37 (see [Gamaliel](#)), and governed the province for six years before retiring to Rome in 12 AD at 63 years of age. This is why Luke 2:2 specifies the census as the “first” one “that took place while Quirinius was governing Syria.” – Internet

**““There went out a decree from Caesar Augustus,’ says St. Luke on why Mary and Joseph found themselves in Bethlehem, ‘that all the world should be taxed.’ Joseph had to go to his own city because the tyrannical Roman government was conducting a census. But the information may have been used for more than just taxation. The Roman government’s local ruler later decided he wanted to find the Christ child and kill Him. Did the government make use of census data to find out where the members of the House of David were? We can’t know for sure, although a later Roman despot did. But we can know that Joseph made a huge error in obeying the census takers in the first place.” – Lew Rockwell**

## Gregorian Calendar

- Created by **Pope Gregory XIII** in 1582
- Goal was to update the **Julian Calendar** to have **Easter** fall on the **Vernal Equinox** (March 21, see appendix for details).



**JESUS' BIRTHYEAR: NO YEAR "0" IN JULIAN OR GREGORIAN CALENDARS**

**BC / AD**

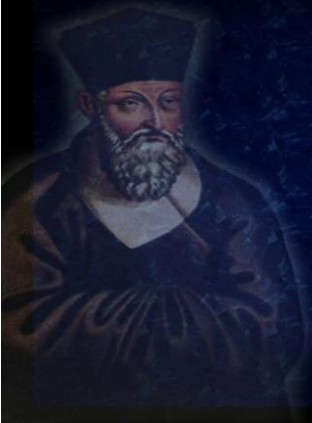
BC- BEFORE CHRIST  
AD- ANNO DOMINI

DIONYSIUS EXIGUSS - A 6th CENTURY MONK

CALENDAR SYSTEM INVENTED IN 525 AD  
MISCALCULATED THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

CALENDAR NOT WIDELY USED UNTIL AFTER 800 AD

THE LIFE & MINISTRY OF  
**JESUS**

A portrait of Dionysius Exiguus, a 6th-century monk, depicted with a long white beard and wearing a dark, ornate robe with a white collar. He is shown from the chest up, looking slightly to the right.

## Gregorian calendar

- ❖ The Gregorian calendar, also called the Western calendar and the Christian calendar
- ❖ The calendar was a refinement in 1582 to the Julian calendar amounting to a 0.002% correction in the length of the year.
- ❖ It has been the unofficial global standard for decades, recognized by international institutions such as the United Nations and the Universal Postal Union
- ❖ The reform was a modification of a proposal made by Aloysius Lilius. His proposal included reducing the number of leap years in four centuries from 100 to 97, by making 3 out of 4 centurial years common instead of leap years.
- ❖ In addition to the change in the mean length of the calendar year from 365.25 days (365 days 6 hours) to 365.2425 days (365 days 5 hours 49 minutes 12 seconds), a reduction of 10 minutes 48 seconds per year.

A portrait of Pope Gregory XIII, depicted in a red and white papal robe, sitting in a chair. He has a long white beard and is looking towards the viewer.

The *Anno Domini* era was introduced in 525 by [Dionysius Exiguus](#) (c.470–c.544), who used it to identify the years on his [Easter table](#). He introduced the new era to avoid using the *Diocletian era*, based on the accession of Emperor [Diocletian](#), as he did not wish to continue the memory of a persecutor of Christians. In the preface to his Easter table, Dionysius stated that the "present year" was "the [consulship](#) of Probus Junior [Flavius Probus]" which was also 525 years "since the incarnation of our Lord [Jesus Christ](#)".<sup>[2]</sup> How he arrived at that number is unknown. Dionysius did not use AD years to date any historical event. This began with the English cleric [Bede](#) (c. 672–735), who used AD years in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (731), popularizing the era. Bede also used a term similar to the English [before Christ](#) once, but that practice did not catch on until very much later. Bede did not sequentially number [days of the month](#), weeks of the year, or months of the year, however, he did number many of the [days of the week](#) using a counting origin of one in [Ecclesiastical Latin](#). Previous Christian histories used *anno mundi* ("in the year of the world") beginning on the first day of [creation](#), or *anno Adami* ("in the year of [Adam](#)") beginning at the creation of Adam five days later (the sixth day of creation according to the [Genesis creation narrative](#)), used by Africanus, or *anno Abrahami* ("in the year of [Abraham](#)") beginning 3,412 years after Creation according to the [Septuagint](#), used by [Eusebius of Caesarea](#), all of which assigned "one" to the year beginning at Creation, or the creation of Adam, or the birth of Abraham, respectively. Bede continued this earlier tradition relative to the AD era. In chapter II of book I of *Ecclesiastical history*, Bede stated that [Julius Caesar](#) invaded Britain "in the year 693 after the building of Rome, but the sixtieth year before the incarnation of our Lord", while stating in chapter III, "in the year of Rome 798, [Claudius](#)" also invaded Britain and "within a very few days concluded the war in the forty-sixth [year] from the incarnation of our Lord".<sup>[3]</sup> Although both dates are wrong, they are sufficient to conclude that Bede did not include a year zero between BC and AD:  $798 - 693 + 1$  (because the years are inclusive) = 106, but  $60 + 46 = 106$ , which leaves no room for a year zero. The modern English term "before Christ" (BC) is only a rough equivalent, *not* a direct translation, of Bede's Latin phrase *ante incarnationis dominicae tempus* ("before the time of the lord's incarnation"), which was itself never abbreviated. Bede's singular use of 'BC' continued to be used sporadically throughout the [Middle Ages](#). It is often incorrectly needed stated that Bede did not use a year zero because he did not know about the number zero. Although the [Arabic numeral](#) for zero (0) did not enter Europe until the eleventh century, and [Roman numerals](#) had no symbol for zero, Bede and Dionysius Exiguus did use a [Latin word](#), *nulla* meaning "nothing", alongside Roman numerals or Latin number words wherever a modern zero would have been used.<sup>[2][4][5]</sup>

Historians have never included a year zero. This means that between, for example, 1 January 500 BC and 1 January AD 500, there are 999 years: 500 years BC, and 499 years AD preceding 500. In common usage *anno Domini* 1 is preceded by the year 1 [BC](#), without an intervening year zero.<sup>[7]</sup> Thus the year 2006 actually signifies "the 2006th year". Neither the choice of calendar system (whether [Julian](#) or [Gregorian](#)) nor the era (*Anno Domini* or [Common Era](#)) determines whether a year zero will be used.

If writers do not use the convention of their group (historians or astronomers), they must explicitly state whether they include a year zero in their count of years, otherwise their historical dates will be misunderstood. No historian includes a year zero when numbering in the standard era.<sup>[8]</sup>

**Astronomers.** To simplify calculations, astronomers have used a defined leap year zero equal to 1 BC of the traditional Christian era since the 17th century. Modern astronomers do not use years for intervals because years do not distinguish between common years and leap years, causing the resulting interval to be inaccurate.

In astronomy, the numbering of all years labeled *Anno Domini* remain unchanged. However, the numerical value of years labeled *Before Christ* are reduced by one by the insertion of a year 0 before 1 AD. Thus, astronomical BC years & historical BC years are not equivalent. To avoid this confusion, modern astronomers label years as positive or negative, instead of BC or AD.

The current method was created by Jacques Cassini, who explained:

“The year 0 is that in which one supposes that Jesus Christ was born, which several chronologists mark 1 before the birth of Jesus Christ and which we marked 0, so that the sum of the years before and after Jesus Christ gives the interval which is between these years, and where numbers divisible by 4 mark the leap years as so many before or after Jesus Christ.”

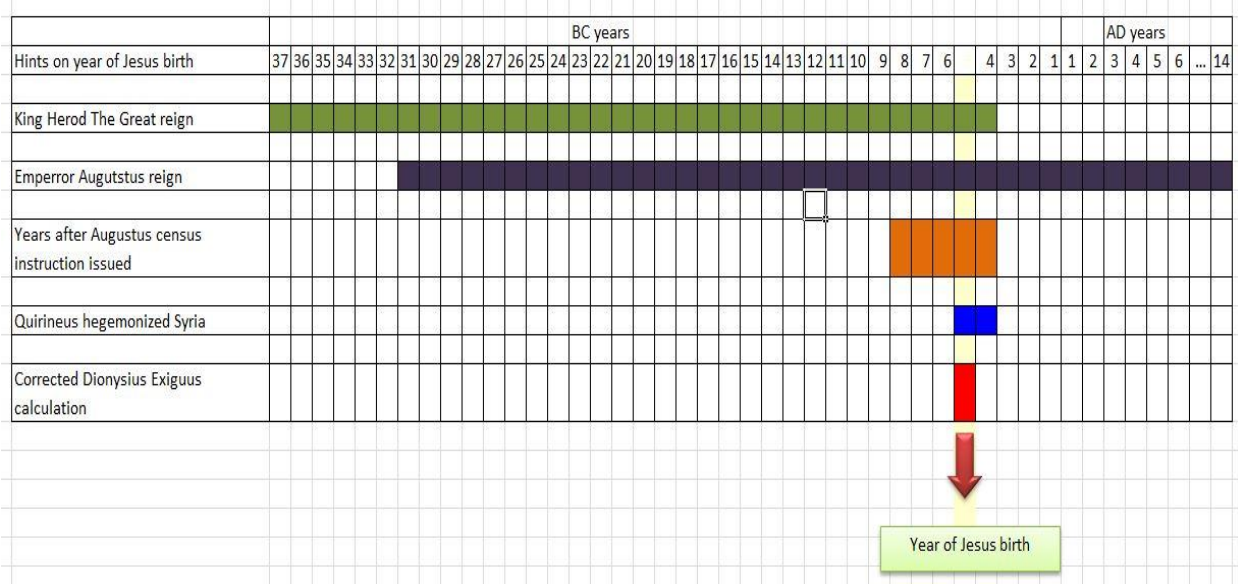
—Jacques Cassini, *Tables astronomiques, 5, translated from French*

In this quote, Cassini used "year" as both a calendar year and as an instant before a year. He identified the calendar year 0 as the year during which Jesus Christ was born (on the traditional date of 25 December), and as calendar leap years divisible by 4 (having an extra day in February). But "the sum of years before and after Jesus Christ" referred to the years between a number of instants at the beginning of those years, including the beginning of year 0, identified by Cassini as "Jesus Christ", virtually identical to Kepler's "Christi". Consider the three instants ('years') labeled 1 *avant Jesus-Christ*, 0, 1 *après Jesus-Christ* by Cassini, which modern astronomers would label  $-1.0$ ,  $0.0$ ,  $+1.0$ . Cassini specified that his end years must be added, so the interval between the instants (noon 1 January) 1 *avant Jesus-Christ* and 1 *après Jesus-Christ* is  $1 + 1 = 2$ , but modern astronomers would subtract their 'years',  $+1.0 - (-1.0) = 2.0$ , which agrees with Cassini. The calendar years between these two instants would be 2 BC and 1 BC, leaving the calendar year 1 AD beginning at  $+1.0$  outside the interval. – *Internet Website*



## The Year of Christ's Birth

- Tertullian (born about 160 A.D.) stated that Augustus began to rule 41 years before the birth of Jesus and died 15 years after that event  
*Tert. adv. Judaeos c.8.*
  - Augustus died on August 19, 14 A.D., placing Jesus' birth at 2 B.C. (Note: no year 0)

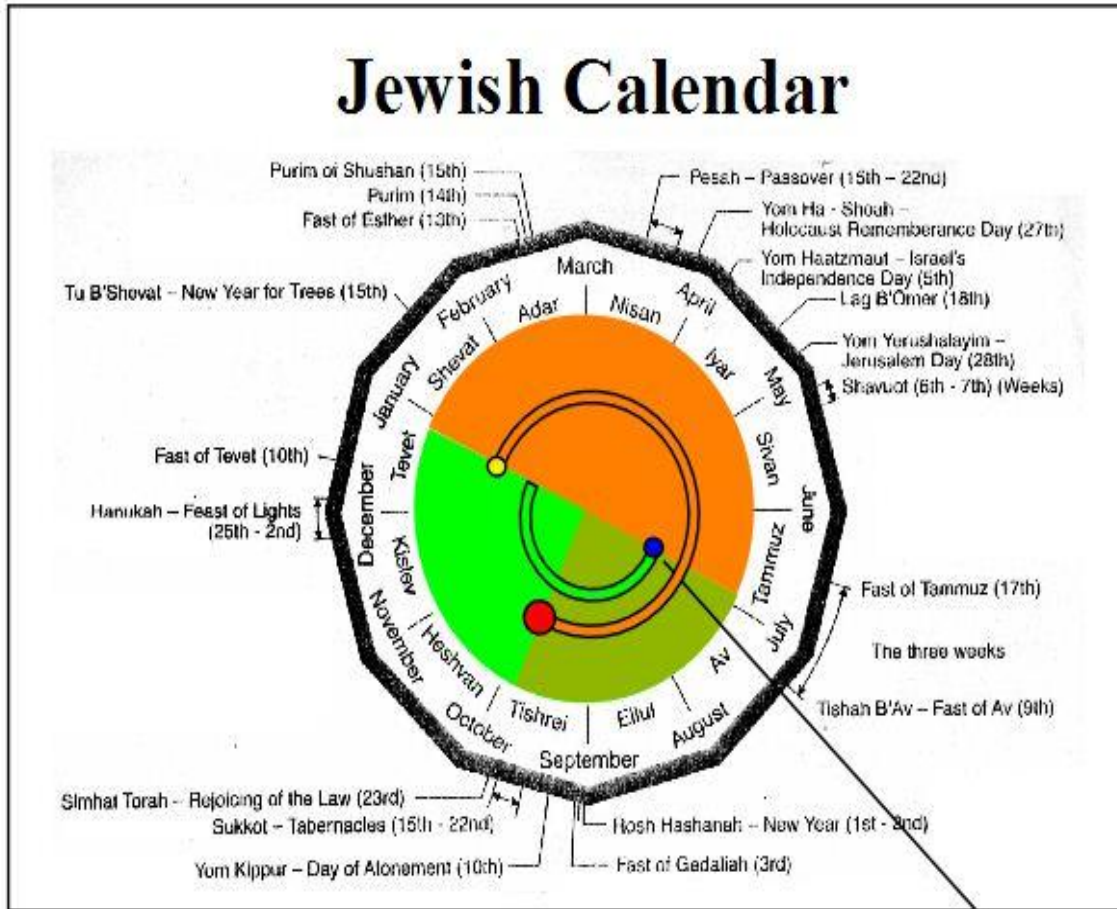


In which year was Jesus born?

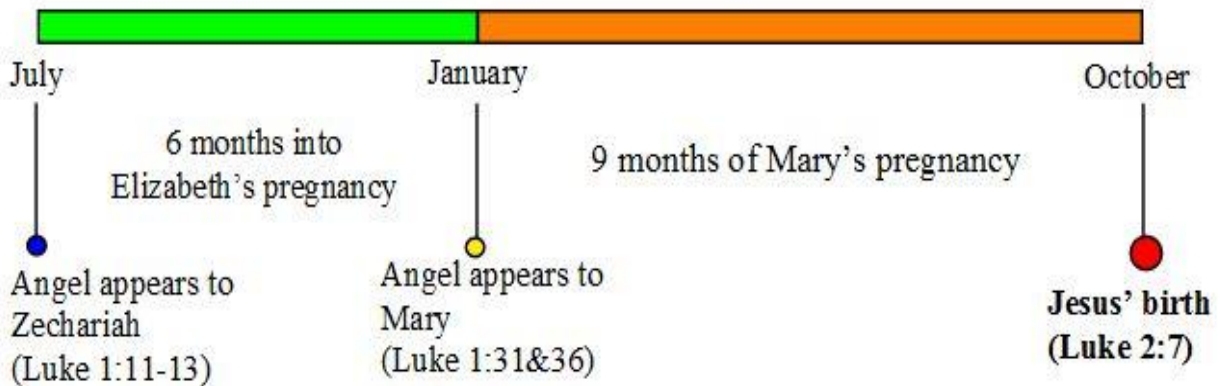
While this is sometimes debated, the majority of New Testament scholars place Jesus' birth in 4 B.C. or before. This is because [most date the death of King Herod the Great to 4 B.C.](#) Since [Herod](#) played a major role in the narrative of [Jesus' birth](#) (see Matthew 2), Jesus would have had to be born before Herod died.

The Alogoi	4 B.C. <i>or</i> A.D. 9
Cassiodorus Senator	3 B.C.
St. Irenaeus of Lyon	3 B.C. <i>or</i> 2 B.C.
St. Clement of Alexandria	3 B.C. <i>or</i> 2 B.C.
Tertullian of Carthage	3 B.C. <i>or</i> 2 B.C.
Julius Africanus	3 B.C. <i>or</i> 2 B.C.
St. Hippolytus of Rome	3 B.C. <i>or</i> 2 B.C.
“Hippolytus of Thebes”	3 B.C. <i>or</i> 2 B.C.
Origen of Alexandria	3 B.C. <i>or</i> 2 B.C.
Eusebius of Caesarea	3 B.C. <i>or</i> 2 B.C.
Epiphanius of Salamis	3 B.C. <i>or</i> 2 B.C.
Orosius	2 B.C.
Dionysius Exiguus	1 B.C.
The Chronographer of the Year 354	A.D. 1

**JESUS' BIRTHMONTH: RELIGIOUS CALENDAR ELIMINATES DECEMBER**



Zechariah was on duty in weeks 3&4 during Tammuz (beginning of July) (1 Chron 24:10) when it was revealed to him that his wife Elizabeth was to bear a child.



## DECEMBER 25: WHAT TIME OF YEAR WAS JESUS BORN?



To understand when Jesus was born, we have to go back ABOUT 18 months to the beginning of a Jewish New Year. Add up the weeks 2(for the passover and pentecost weeks)+8(Zachariah served the 8th division of Abijah)+1(Lk 1:23 Elizabeth conceived immediately?)+40(gestation of John)+27 (6 final months of Jesus gestation)=78 weeks later or early October.

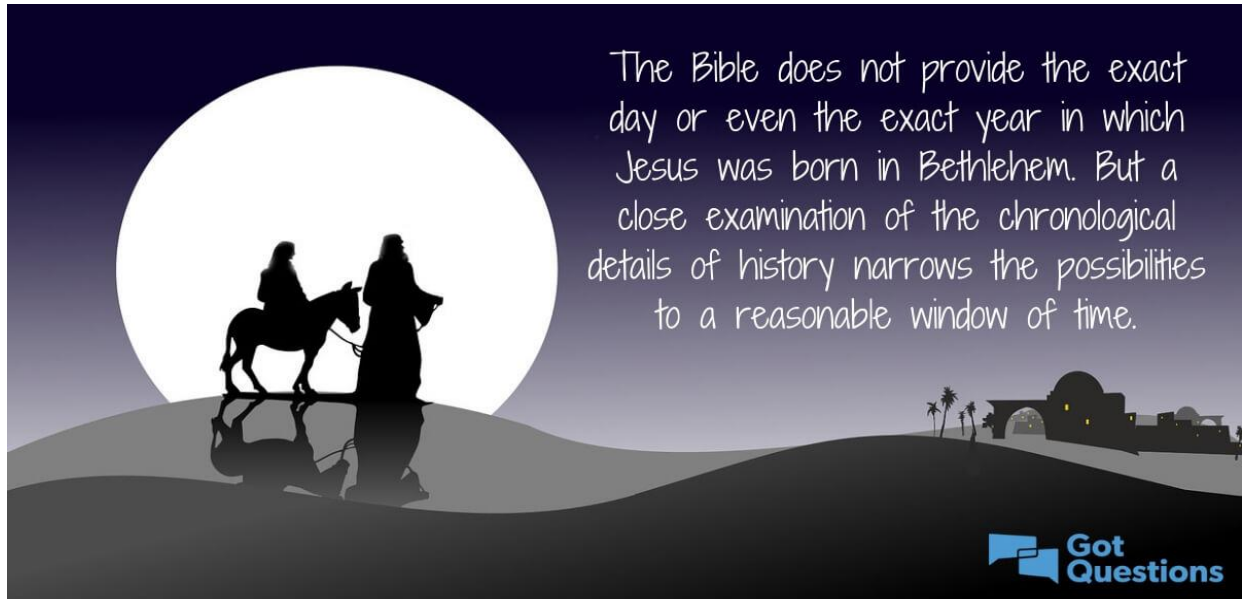
One of the difficulties of breaking this down is that we are dealing with Jewish calendar (starts on the spring new moon) and Gregorian calendar (starts January 1 since Julius Caesar time). The Jewish calendar year is measured by lunar cycles which makes the Jewish year of 12 lunar months to be 11 days shorter than the 365 day year measured by a circle of sun on our modern calendar. The Jewish year of 12 lunar months is a week and a half or 11 days (unless it's the leap year with an added month which happened every few years when it's still too cold to plant) shorter than the modern calendar. So, the 78 weeks on my chart is about 2 weeks shorter than the "18 months" on the chart. 18 months is general and intended to give a snapshot that we are talking about the season of the year that's the opposite season of the Spring time and Passover.

The Jewish Passover "holiday" called Pesach is in 2017 dated for April 11-18. The Passover starts two weeks after the new moon (see chart below that the spring new moon is at the end of March). Though the Jews went by a lunar calendar, the week was still a week and hence the same number of days regardless the calendar being used. So, we are definitely looking at a starting point of beginning of April thereabout (since the new moon for spring varies from year to year). Therefore, the weeks are pretty much fixed (if Elizabeth conceived quickly after Zachariah finished his service in the temple). So, count those weeks from the beginning of April, the 78 I have counted up, and it's the end of September. Just an estimate.

The chart is somewhat difficult to follow. Suffice it to say that IF John the Baptist was conceived immediately after the promise made by the angel, their age & the "fulness of the times" in Galatians 4:4 suggest immediacy to me, THEN there are only about 18 months to deal with. That 18 months begins 2 weeks begins on the New Year/New Moon of Spring. That puts you in the fall, not the Spring, for the birth of Jesus. For Jesus to be born in the Spring, you have to come up with another six months. That is my final explanation.

One person asked me does it matter? My answer is, sure, it matters. In the course of studying about Jesus's birth, it is asked if the date was December 25? How do you know? The question begins the investigation so that things like new possible dates come up. I'm not fighting with anyone over it. It's just good discussion. I don't believe it's merely academic. Knowing more about Jesus should be rewarding as it adds to what is true and what is not. – *Internet Blogsite*





With the schedule for temple duty fixed in Scripture, **Zechariah – in the line of Abijah (Luke 1:5)** and allocated the 8th 2-week period of the Jewish year at the end of Tammuz (1 Chron 24:10) – would have been on temple duty around the end of June/beginning of July. (Nisan is the first month in the Jewish calendar.)

It was then that he received divine revelation concerning his wife Elizabeth becoming pregnant (Luke 1:11-13). Six months into that pregnancy (Luke 1:36) Mary was similarly shown that she was to 'be with child' (Luke 1:31).

It is therefore quite probable that Jesus was born in the Autumn rather than at the end of the year. **In fact the shepherds wouldn't have been 'in their fields at night' in mid-Winter, nor would Caesar have been likely to have called a census which involved mass travel at that time of year.**

## When was the Birth?

- Date of Christmas is based on a pagan winter festival, the birth probably happened in the Autumn
- Shepherd not in the fields in winter!
- Could not have happened later than 4BC - Herod dead.
- December 25 was made popular by Pope Liberius in 354 and became the rule in the West in 435 when the first "Christ mass" was officiated by Pope Sixtus III



7

**The major reason Christians have doubted that December 25th was the day of Jesus' birth is that they do not believe the shepherds were out in the cold watching their sheep at night. Luke 2:8 says that the shepherds were watching at night. Temperatures in Jerusalem can range from the low 30 degrees F° (-1.1 C°) into the lower 40 degrees F° (4.4 C°).**



So, what about December 25th? So, if Christ was born during the Feast of Tabernacles in late September, possibly even on September 29th, then that means that He was conceived in Mary nine months earlier. More specifically, medical records tell us that the median human gestation period is 278 days, with a standard deviation of 12 days. Many babies, of course, are born earlier or later than this, but 278 days is the median, give or take 12 days. What this means is that if Jesus was born on or near September 29th, then **the day of His conception was about 278 days earlier, on or near December 25th. While December 25th may not be the day of Jesus' birth, it still could be the day He was conceived in Mary by the Holy Spirit.** This would fit right in with the numerous pagan holidays which take place at this time of year, and which celebrate the end of the days of gloom and darkness, and with the use of lights and songs and presents, look forward to days of increasing light. Even the Jews celebrated a festival of lights at this time, the festival of Hanukkah, which is not mentioned in the Bible but was a tradition started before the birth of Jesus. It celebrates a miracle that took place around 164 BC. Nine years earlier, Antiochus IV had killed a pig on the altar in the temple in Jerusalem. His actions incited the Jewish Maccabean revolt, and in 164 BD they were victorious. The first thing they attempted to do was purify and cleanse the temple, and for this, they needed to burn oil. But they soon found that only one container of oil was usable, and it would only burn for a single day, and it would take eight days to make more. Nevertheless, they lit the Menorah in the temple to begin the purification process, and the light continued to burn for the entire eight days. It was *considered a miracle*, and instituted Hanukkah, the Jewish festival of lights. During this time, they remember how God miraculously brought light to a dark and difficult situation. And once again, it appears that on or around this holiday, God sent His Son into the womb of Mary, to bring forth light into a darkened world. So, although December 25th may not be the birth date of Jesus, it may very well be the day on which Jesus was conceived. Interestingly, John describes Jesus as the "light of men... the light [that] shines in the darkness" (John 1:4-5). He goes on to write that Jesus is "the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world" (John 1:9). Could it be that in speaking of Jesus as the light in the darkness, that John was alluding to the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah? This seems quite likely, especially if John 1:1-28 is chronological. John 1:1-5 would be a reference to the conception of Jesus. John 1:6-13 would then be the birth of John, the one who prepared the way for the Light. Following this, John 1:14-18 points to the birth of Jesus, and Him dwelling, or "tabernacling" among us. Then John 1:19-28 speaks of the ministry of John, before finally getting to the beginning of ministry of Jesus in John 1:29. So both in the symbolism of the holiday itself, and even from the Gospel of John, it appears that Hanukkah also symbolizes & is fulfilled by Jesus Christ. It is important to remember that Hanukkah is not a biblical holiday. That is, it is not mentioned or commanded anywhere in the Old Testament. It is not one of the feasts instituted by God in the Torah. Many have correctly noted the holiday is mentioned one time in the New Testament, in John 10:22, which says that *Jesus went to Jerusalem for the "Feast of Dedication," which is another name for Hanukkah.*

Hanukkah celebrates the time when the Temple was purified and rededicated for service to the Lord. On this day, the golden vessel in the Temple was filled with water, and another vessel was filled with wine, and then both were mixed together and poured into the brook Kidron which flowed near the Temple. It was on this day that "Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water'" (John 7:37-38). Shortly thereafter, the Jewish people participated in the Illumination of the Temple, in which four giant golden menorahs in the temple courtyard were lit. Historians say these menorahs were 75 feet tall, and their light could be seen from anywhere in Jerusalem and for miles around. This adds great significance to the words that Jesus said in John 8:12: "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life." Jesus indicated the light of the menorahs on the Temple Mount symbolized Himself, and how He is the light of the world. So, it seems then that though Hanukkah was not a feast commanded by God, or mentioned anywhere in prophetic literature, Jesus fulfilled it anyway. It was part of Jewish culture and tradition. Jesus pointed the Jewish Festival of Lights to Himself, calling Himself the Light of the World (cf. also John 9:5). Hanukkah was not a biblical holiday, but Jesus used it to point people to Himself anyway.

## BUREAUCRATIC INVESTIGATION: ANGEL HERALDING AWAKENS A VALLEY

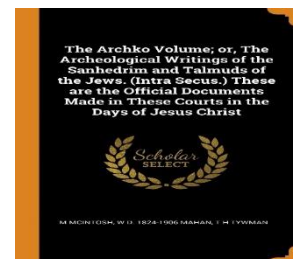


### "Jonathan to the Masters of Israel, Servants of the True God:

In obedience to your order, I met with two men, who said they were shepherds, and were watching their flocks near Bethlehem. They told me that while attending to their sheep, the night being cold and chilly, some of them had made fires to warm themselves, and some of them had laid down and were asleep; that they were awakened by those who were keeping watch with the questions: "What does all this mean? Behold, how light it is; that when they were aroused it was light as day. But they knew it was not daylight, for it was only the third watch.

All at once the air seemed to be filled with human voices, saying, "Glory! Glory! Glory to the most high God!" and "Happy are thou, Bethlehem, for God hath fulfilled His promise to the fathers; for in thy chambers is born the King that shall rule in righteousness." Their shoutings would rise up in the heavens, and then would sink down in mellow strains & roll along at the foot of the mountains, and die away in the most soft and musical manner they had ever heard; then it would begin again high up in the heavens, in the very vaults of the sky, and descend in sweet and melodious strains, so that they could not refrain from shouting and weeping at the same time. The light would seem to burst forth high up in the heavens, and then descend in softer rays and light up the hills and valleys, making everything more visible than the light of the sun, though it was not so brilliant, but clearer, like the brightest moon. I asked them how they felt--if they were not afraid; and they said at first they were; but after a while it seemed to calm their spirits, and so fill their hearts with love and tranquility that they felt more like giving thanks than anything else. They said it was around the whole city, and some of the people were almost scared to death.

Some said the world was on fire; some said the gods were coming down to destroy them; others said a star had fallen; until Melker the priest came out shouting and clapping his hands, seeming to be frantic with joy. The people all came crowding around him, and he told them that it was the sign that God was coming to fulfill His promise made to their father Abraham. He told us that fourteen hundred years before God had appeared to Abraham & told him to put all Israel under bonds--sacred bonds of obedience; and if they would be faithful, He would give them a Savior to redeem them from sin, and that he would give them eternal life, and that they should hunger no more; that the time of their suffering should cease forever; and that the sign of his coming would be that light would shine from on high, and the angels would announce his coming, and their voices should be heard in the city, and the people should rejoice: and a virgin that was pure should travail in pain and bring forth her firstborn, and he should rule all flesh by sanctifying it and making it obedient. After Melker had addressed the people in a loud voice, he and all the old Jews went into the synagogue and remained there praising God and giving thanks."



# THE MAGIAN MEDE-PERSIAN PRIEST- ASTRONOMER ZOROASTRIAN ORDER



## The Magian Fellowship

Around Christmas, we hear about the "Wise Men of the East," also known as the Magi or Magians, who followed a star to Bethlehem to pay their respects to infant Jesus. They brought with them gold, frankincense, and myrrh as presents.

Let us look up the dictionary.

"Magus, plural Magi, [Latin from Greek Magos -- more at magic] 1 a: a member of a hereditary priestly class among the ancient Medes and Persians b: often capital: one of the traditionally three wise men from the East paying homage to the infant Jesus 2: Magician, sorcerer" (Webster New College Dictionary). An encyclopedia has more: "followers of Zoroaster, the Persian teacher and prophet. Gradually, the religion of the magi incorporated Babylonian elements, including astrology & magic." (Funk & Wagnalls Encyclopedia) The word "Magi" is thus linked with Zoroastrianism.





Magi first appear in the historical record in the seventh century BC, not in Persia but in the kingdom of the Medes. Herodotus listed the “Magoi” as one of the six tribes of the Medes. They were described as a priestly class, but their main task appears to have been the interpretation of the king’s dreams. In this respect they were like similar “wise men” kept at the courts of various Near Eastern monarchs. Dream interpretation would be the Median Magi’s downfall. According to Herodotus’ semi-legendary account, the Median king Astyages had a series of dreams which the Magi interpreted as meaning that his grandson from his daughter’s marriage to a Persian would eventually rule all of Asia. He ordered his infant grandson to be murdered. However, the man assigned to kill the child did not do so but gave away the child, who was raised by a cowherd and his wife in the Median hills. The boy was later summoned before Astyages, who recognized his facial features. Astyages again consulted his Magi, who told him that there was now nothing to fear, because “some of our prophecies come to very little significance” and suggested because the boy had been playing “king” with other children, this was fulfillment of the prophecy that he would be king. The Magi reminded Astyages they had every reason to seek to keep him in power, as their own power and status depended on it.

The boy later gained the name Cyrus, and led a revolt of Persians against Astyages. After Astyages suffered a defeat, he had the Magi who advised him to let Cyrus live impaled in the capital city of Ecbatana. Nonetheless, Astyages’ army was defeated again and Astyages was captured by Cyrus in 550 BC. This ended Media’s independence and inaugurated the era of the Persian Empire. Cyrus would go on to capture Babylon in 539 and rule the largest empire the world had yet seen, stretching from Judea to Anatolia to the Hindu Kush. The next mention we find of the Magi was their institution by Cyrus as Zoroastrian priests. According to the Greek writer Xenophon, who sought to portray Cyrus as ideal Persian king, the government under Cyrus was inextricably linked to Zoroastrianism. Cyrus himself sang a hymn every day and made sacrifices as the Magi dictated. Magi accompanied Cyrus from his earliest campaigns onwards. They were present at the capture of Babylon and were given the authority to select first-fruits offerings from the plunder of the city.

The Magi also directed Cyrus to make sacrifices to the local gods after capturing Babylon. Zoroastrians believe Ahura Mazda (God) created all religions and chose to manifest himself to different peoples in different ways, and therefore all religions are equal, and the righteous from all religions go to heaven. One can see the effect of this belief in the Persian Empire’s policies of religious toleration. Cyrus is famous for issuing the Edict of Restoration allowing Jews to return to their homeland, but everywhere Persians conquered they allowed the locals to worship in the manner which they thought best.

The Magi also had a powerful political role. They observed the stars and interpreted dreams, signs and omens for kings. As such, the Magi became known as fortune-tellers in the classical world, and their practices collective referred to as “magic.” The Roman Pliny the Elder later described magic as attempts at divination and necromancy. Pliny saw two schools of such magic, one which originated with Zoroaster in Persia and the other, much younger strains which “derive their origin from Moses, Jannes, Lotapea, Jews by birth.” Pliny viewed all magic as “detestable” & an “utter falsity.” How accurately Pliny is describing the practices of Magi can be questioned. One can detect some of the traditional Roman prejudice against monotheistic religions in his writing. At worst the practices described were no different than Roman priests’ attempts to tell the future with sacred chickens and sheep livers.





*Magi appears in a Persian relief.*



*A sacred flame burns inside a modern Zoroastrian Fire Temple.*

When Cyrus died in 530 BC, the Magi were firmly established as a powerful element in Persian politics. However, Cyrus was succeeded as *Shahanshah* by his son Cambyses, who had few of his father's admirable qualities. Cambyses invaded and conquered Egypt in 525 BC, but then according to Herodotus he began to slip into madness. Afflicted with epilepsy from birth, he became prone to fits of violent rage.

It is still debated how much of Cambyses' reputation was deserved & how much was the product of people who hated him. According to Herodotus the Magi were part of the latter group. They were appalled at Cambyses' behavior, and the people were becoming hostile. While Cambyses campaigned in Egypt, the Magi were left in charge of the royal palace and estates. They decided that something had to be done to remove Cambyses from power before the empire was doomed. The plan was to replace Cambyses with another monarch. Patizeithes, the Magus (singular of Magi) in charge of managing Cambyses' household in the winter capital of Susa had a brother named Gaumata who was a Magus. More importantly, Gaumata bore a striking resemblance to Cambyses' dead brother Bardiya. Patizeithes came up with a plan by which Gaumata would pretend to be Bardiya, seize the throne of Persia and then rally the army to himself. In the era before news footage, photography or accurate portrait painting, few people knew what famous people looked like unless they saw them in person, so a *doppelgänger* could potentially get away with such a deception for some time. The only drawback to this plan was that Gaumata had no ears, as Cyrus had ordered his ears cut off as punishment for an unspecified grave offense. But Persian noblemen favored a hairstyle with long curls & beard which hid the ears from view anyways, so this was less of a problem than it would seem.

On March 11, 522 BC Gaumata was dressed in royal robes and proclaimed to be the brother of Cambyses seizing the throne to free Persia from its mad king. Messengers were sent throughout the realm to inform everyone of the new development. One of the messengers found Cambyses and his army at the city of Ecbatana in Syria. Cambyses was initially shocked to learn that his brother was still alive, and sharply questioned Prexaspes, the man he had ordered to carry out the execution. Prexaspes, who had truly killed Bardiya, insisted that Bardiya was really and truly dead and that "I have buried him with my own hands." At Prexaspes' suggestion, Cambyses questioned the messenger again. He discovered that the messenger was not given the message by Bardiya in person, but by Patizeithes. Cambyses deduced from this information that the Magi had revolted and seized the kingdom.

Cambyses prepared to march on Susa to re-take the government, but while mounting his horse he accidentally stabbed himself in the thigh with his own sword. Twenty days later, the seriously injured king gave a speech to his troops where he called on the Persians to not allow the Magi to rule the kingdom and “allow sovereignty to pass to the Medes again.” But infection and gangrene soon set in on Cambyses’ wounds, and on July 1, 522 BC he died in Syria. His court did not act on his deathbed statements. They had been subjected to diatribes & rambling conspiracy theories fueled by his paranoia for some time, and were skeptical of the idea that the Magi had taken control of the state. As soon as Cambyses had died, Prexaspes reversed course and claimed he had never killed Bardiya at all, after all, there was no telling who was in charge now and what view they might take of Prexaspes’ actions. Gaumata was really a puppet of the main body of Magi, he was placed on the throne only due to his physical likeness to allow the Magi to rule from behind the scenes.

A fateful last minute addition was made to the conspiracy when Darius arrived in Susa and was invited to join the conspiracy. There was soon a conspiracy bonded by a conviction that their country needed to be saved from a Median usurper whose very presence on the throne was an insult to national pride. As Gobryas put it, “although we are Persians, we are now ruled by a Mede, a Magus no less, and one with no ears!” A fateful last minute addition was made to the conspiracy when Darius arrived in Susa and was invited to join the conspiracy. The conspiracy of seven held a meeting to plot their next course of action. Darius advocated immediate action before others could become aware of the plot. Otanes advocated waiting until they could recruit more members to the conspiracy, but Darius countered that this would leave them open to being infiltrated and betrayed. Becoming impatient, Darius threatened to denounce the entire group to Gaumata if they did not act quickly. Backing down, Otanes asked Darius what his plan was. Darius then sketched out a plan where the seven of them would enter the palace grounds on the pretense that Darius had just arrived carrying important news from the provinces and needed an audience with the king.

While the would-be assassins were laying out their plans, events began to overtake them. Rumors appeared to be sweeping the city that the king’s identity was in question. To quiet the rumors, the Magi requested that Prexaspes address an assembly of the people from the wall of the palace and announce publicly that he had not killed Bardiya and that Bardiya was currently ruling the kingdom. On September 29<sup>th</sup>, 522 BC the crowds were gathered for Prexaspes’ big announcement. But instead of sticking to the script, Prexaspes began to explain how he had killed Bardiya on Cambyses’ orders & how the current ruler was merely a puppet of the Magi. He then called for the Persian people to rise up & overthrow the government, and then jumped off the tower to his death. Darius’ own royal inscription records that the coup took place in the royal Nisaia residence of Sikayauvatiš, in northwestern Iran, while Herodotus says it took place in Susa. The conspirators had decided to act that day and were halfway to the palace when they heard the commotion from the crowds and learned what had happened. Otanes argued in favor of scrubbing the plan, but Darius urged them to press on. Darius’ urging carried the day, and group pressed on. All of the men were of high standing, so guards outside the palace waved them through without searching them or even questioning why they were there. When they reached the inner courtyard, several of the king’s eunuchs shouted at them and asked what they were doing inside of the courtyard, and shouted threats at the guards for allowing them to pass. The eunuchs then tried to restrain the conspirators from advancing any further, when one of the conspirators gave a shout & all seven drew daggers and stabbed the eunuchs.

The men rushed into the men's quarters in the palace, where they found Patizeithes and Gaumata discussing the situation in the streets. As the conspirators rushed in, the two Magi jumped up and grabbed weapons. One grabbed a spear, and as attackers rushed forward he stabbed Intaphrenes in the eye and Ardumanis in the thigh before being overwhelmed. The other grabbed a bow, but before he could draw it Darius and Gobryas were almost on top of him. He threw down the bow and fled into an interior bedroom, but before he could shut the door Gobryas tackled him onto the floor. In the dark room, Darius stood over them with a dagger as they grappled, but hesitated for fear of stabbing Gobryas. Gobryas shouted for him to strike anyways & he did, but managed to stab only the Magus. The conspirators cut off the heads of both Magi and leaving the injured Intaphrenes and Ardumanis in the palace, the remaining five ran into the streets shouting what had happened. What followed was a general pogrom against Magi found in the city. Many Magi were hacked to death in the streets until nightfall ended the slaughter. For long afterwards **the event was remembered as "the Slaughter of the Magi."**

The young Darius politically outmaneuvered the other six and ultimately became king, but ensured that the other six conspirators were honored for the rest of their lives. The important details of Herodotus' story match Darius' own account which he had carved into the side of a mountain in three different languages at Behistun and also translated into Aramaic, written on papyrus, and distributed throughout the empire.



*The Behistun Relief, in which Darius described his lineage, the plot to overthrow the Magi, and the revolts he faced after assuming power. Darius can be seen on his throne, reviewing captured enemies.*

It is not known how long the break in relations between the king, the Magi & the people lasted in the Persian Empire. By the time of Xerxes' invasion of Greece in 480 BC, Magi were traveling with the army and providing counsel. Magi poured libations to the heroes at Troy, calmed storms by offering sacrifices and interpreted an eclipse as a good omen. When Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire, he found Magi guarding the tomb of Cyrus the Great. Later, he was led in ritual by Magi acting alongside Greek seers.





*Tomb of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadae, Iran. His tomb had a regular guard of Magi until the time of Alexander the Great.*

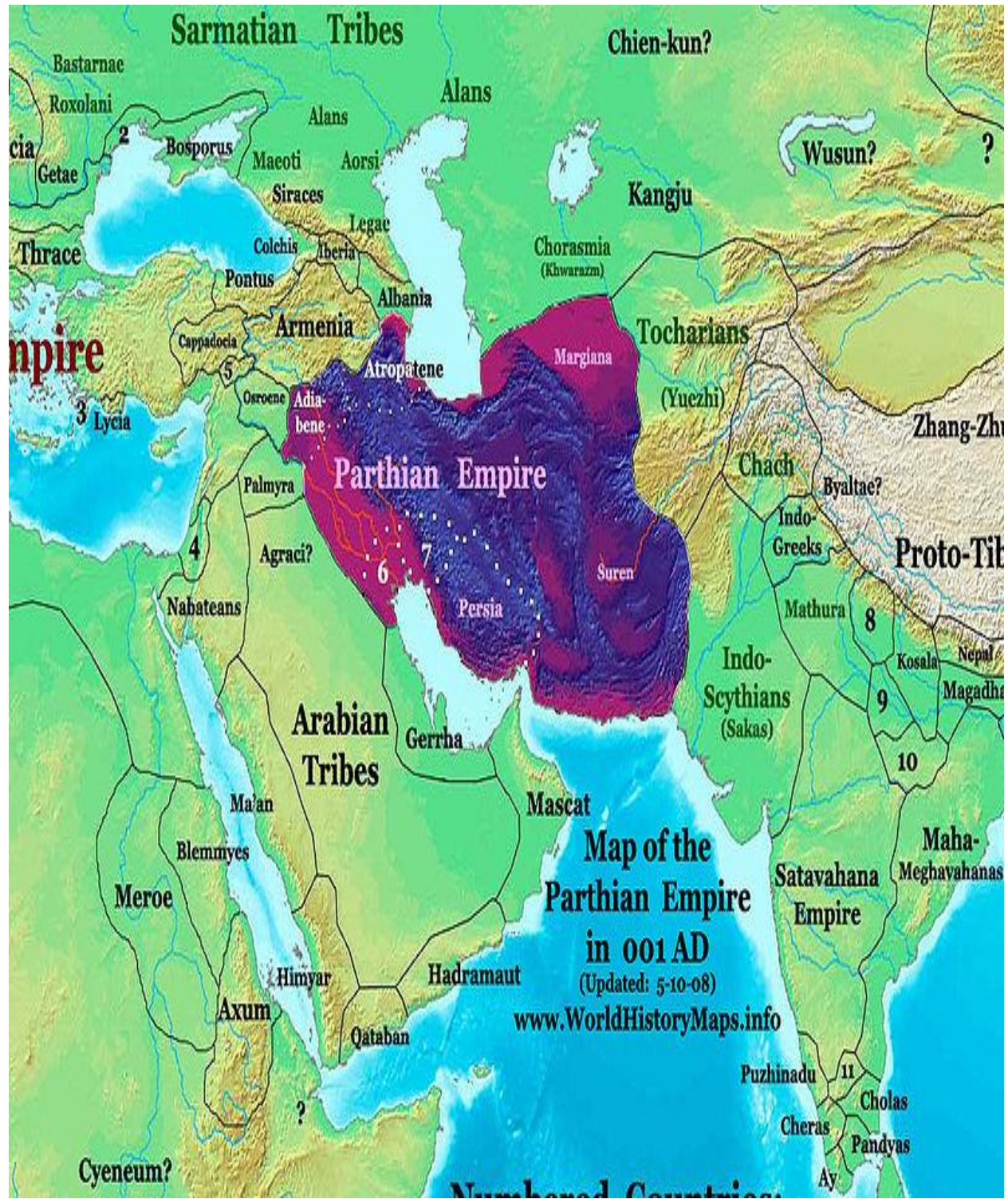
Once Alexander's Greek successor states had been swept aside by the Parthian Empire, the Magi regained positions of prominence and political power. Poseidonius reported that the Council of the Parthians was made up of two groups, one of kinsmen of the monarch and the other of the Magi, and that both groups had a say in appointing the next king. Strabo wrote that the Magi "follow with zeal a kind of august life" and offer sacrifices to "fire and earth and winds and water."

Strabo wrote in the first century BC, which brings us to the time of the birth of Jesus. At sometime around 4 BC, the gospel of Matthew states that some Magi observed some sort of celestial phenomena predicting a birth of a king. What the star was isn't clear, although many theories have been proposed. A comet is oft-cited hypothesis, as the appearance of comets was often thought to signal the birth of kings. However, no records of comets appearing at that time exist in any extant Roman, Babylonian or Chinese astronomical records. 12 BC Halley's Comet appeared, but is generally thought to be outside the time frame for Jesus' birth. Jupiter and Saturn made an unusual conjunction in 7 BC which may have had significance to ancient astronomers. Chinese astronomers observed a supernova in 5 BC.

What were the Magi looking for? One possibility lies in Zoroastrian theology. The Gathas, the sacred hymns attributed to Zoroaster, speak of a future figure called the *Saoshyant* or "future benefactor" which will be sent by Ahura Mazda to lead righteousness to triumph over wickedness. Later, in the Sassanid period after 300 AD, this developed into a tradition of three expected prophets who would arrive in predictable cycles (time of the cycles varied, from 1,000 to 6,000 years). During the Parthian period much of this had not yet developed, but the Parthian era Magi were expecting the coming of *Saoshyant* and diligently watching the skies for a sign of his appearance.

How they linked the star to Judea is not clear. A comet's long tail could have been interpreted as pointing towards a specific country. Alternatively, the Magi likely have had access to the Hebrew Bible and the prophecies it contained, as there were thriving communities of Jews in Persia and Mesopotamia at this time. After seeing the star, they could have made inquiries to various religious books in search of prophecies about the birth of kings, found the prophecies in the Hebrew Bible, and decided Judea was the most likely place to find the king.

Regardless, the Magi traveled to Jerusalem, likely traveling town trading routes through the Syrian desert to Aleppo or Palmyra, and then south to Judea. They sought an audience with King Herod, asking "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."





In the previous fifty years, Judea had been a pawn in a long-running proxy war between Rome and Parthia for control of the Near East. When Pompey entered Judea and took sides in Judea's civil war in 63 BC, he left with Hyrcanus II established in power as a Roman client state. While Rome was otherwise preoccupied by civil war, in 40 BC the Parthians overthrew Hyrcanus and replaced him with the anti-Roman Antigonus. **Antigonus only ruled for a short time before Herod the Great received sponsorship from Mark Antony to seize control of Judea. With Antony's support, Herod took over the country and Judea again became a Roman client. Rome and Parthia had made a peace treaty delineating spheres of influence in 20 BC, temporarily ending the conflict, but the tension persisted.**

By the time the Magi arrived, Herod was seventy years old, in poor health and well known to possess extreme paranoia and psychotic tendencies. In his later years, convinced that everyone was plotting against him, he had several members of his close family executed. The effect on the aging and paranoid Herod of the arrival of Magi (who were members of the Parthian ruling class) proclaiming that a prophecy foretold the birth of a new king in Judea, can only be imagined. Likely suspecting a Parthian plot to overthrow him and place some pretender on the throne, Herod asked Jewish religious leaders to search the books of the prophets to find out the location where the Messiah was to be born. They found a passage in the book of Micah which read:

*But you, O Bethlehem Eph'rathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.*

Herod then requested a second interview with the Magi to find out when the star had first appeared. He told them that a prophecy said that a king would be born in Bethlehem, and that they should go there in search of the child. When they found him, they were to report back to him that he could go and worship the child as well. All except that Herod's plan was not to worship the child but to eliminate another perceived rival.

The Magi proceeded to Bethlehem. Here the most problematic part of the passage occurs, as Matthew says "the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed." Marking a specific place on earth is a difficult task for any celestial object to accomplish, and this remains unexplained.



*One of the earliest representations of the Magi at the birth of Jesus, from a 3rd century AD sarcophagus in Rome. Note that only two Magi are shown, Matthew never mentions how many Magi were there & the number three wasn't tradition until much later.*

Although Jesus had been born in a stable, he was in a house by the time the Magi arrived. They delivered expensive gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Much symbolism has been read into these gifts by later authors, but none is explicitly stated in Matthew. All of these gifts were very expensive, in fact, the gold was probably the least valuable of the three. Both frankincense and myrrh came from Arabia and the far east, and were only available in extremely limited quantities in the Mediterranean world.

The Magi were, according to Matthew, warned by a dream not to go back to Herod. Dream interpretation was a duty of the Magi, and this presumably applied to interpreting the mental misgivings which were manifested in their own dreams as well. They chose to return to Parthia by a route that avoided Herod & Jerusalem. When Herod heard of this, he ordered all the boys of Bethlehem two years old and under massacred. Unable to kill only the child the Magi identified, he hoped that by killing every child in Bethlehem he would succeed in eliminating the threat.

When Marco Polo visited Persia in 1270, he reported seeing the tombs of the three Magi with their mummies lying in state. Like many of the intriguing lesser known figures of the Bible, the Magi were the subject of early attempts at historical fiction. A Syriac document entitled “The Revelation of the Magi” purports to be adventure account written by the Magi of their journey, describing how they kept books of prophecy which predicted the appearance of a star, and then the **twelve Magi** followed a supernatural apparition to Bethlehem. Later in life, according to the document, they were baptized by the Apostle Thomas.

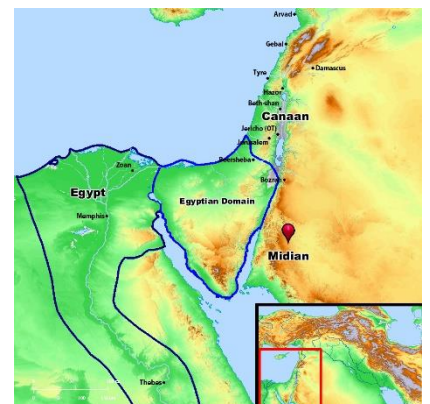
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**NOTE:** The Parthian Empire extended east and north of Bethlehem including the old Persian Empire located east and south. Magian court advisors from Arabian vassal kingdoms southeast of Bethlehem may have traveled there at the same time.

**The Bible speaks to *three* type gifts not *three* kings nor *three* magi.**

*"Arise! Shine, for your light has come, the glory of the Lord has dawned on you  
... Nations shall walk by your light, kings by the radiance of your dawning  
Raise your eyes and look about; they all gather and come to you —  
Your sons from afar  
... Then you shall see and be radiant  
... For the riches of the sea shall be poured out before you,  
the wealth of nations shall come to you.*

*Caravans of camels shall cover you,  
dromedaries of Midian and Ephah;  
All from Sheba(Yemen) shall come..." (Isaiah 60)*



But how did these wise men know about the coming King? The answer is easy: Daniel. Daniel was (and is even now) respected in Persia as a prophet from God. His book, written in Iran, was available and revered by Persians. Not many people know that for centuries, many who lived in Iran were true believers in the God of the Bible. This was not just because of Daniel, but also because of Nehemiah, Habakkuk, and Esther. At the end of the book of Esther, we read that many Persians came to know the God of Israel.

Daniel 5:11 is particularly significant. There the queen or queen-mother tells King Belshazzar that King Nebuchadnezzar had appointed Daniel as "chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and diviners." As noted above, Theodotion uses the word *magi* in this verse for the Aramaic word translated as *enchanters* in the NIV. Recall also that at the end of the account of Daniel in the lions' den, King Darius of Persia issued a decree "that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Daniel" (6:26).

Daniel provides some of the most specific prophecies in the Bible concerning when the Messiah would appear (e.g. 9:24-26). Therefore, if Daniel was in charge of the Babylonian wise men (and possibly also the Persian magi), it stands to reason that he would have instructed them about the Messiah, with regard to both his saving work & when he would appear. Thus, the magi from the East would have been looking for a sign in the sky to mark Christ's birth precisely around the time when Christ was born.

The Bible also says that when Persian King Cyrus set the captive Jews free, only a small number went back to their land. They returned at several stages, and the total number of those who returned are estimated to be only around 50,000 people. Therefore, millions of Jews stayed in Persia and lived there for centuries.

It is probable that the high priests of the Persian kings were required to know the Old Testament and especially the prophecies of Daniel. That is the reason these Magi were so knowledgeable about who Jesus was and the timing of his birth.



# STAR OF BETHLEHEM: A SPECIAL CREATION FOR A SPECIAL PURPOSE



## Three Theories on the Star of Bethlehem:

In addition to the chronological problems with dating the birth of Jesus, we then must determine whether there are historical records of any astronomical events that meet the requirements. Also, no one is sure exactly what sort of celestial event would have signified the birth of the "King of the Jews" to "wise men from the east," traditionally regarded as Persian astrologers.

Over the years, people have tried to say that the Star of Bethlehem was a *supernova*, a *comet*, or the latest popular notion — a *triple conjunction* of Jupiter and the star Regulus. Let's consider each of these:

### The Star was a Supernova

From time to time in history, a *nova* was seen in the night sky, a "new star," from the Latin word for "new." Modern science defines a *supernova* as an exploding star, which shines very brightly for a short time and then goes away. Throughout history, a number of novae have been observed in the night sky. Ancient Chinese astronomers kept a careful record of such new stars, though no such records survive in any Greek, Roman, or other western sources.

It would be very tempting to suppose the Star of Bethlehem would have been a supernova. Such a unique occurrence is very rare and would be a very conspicuous sign in the sky that would attract a lot of attention. The problem is, there is no historical or scientific evidence of such a supernova. The Chinese did not record any new stars within a suitable period of time.



Also, supernovae leave behind a remnant in the form of a *nebula* that can be seen through telescopes on the Earth. The most famous example is the *Crab Nebula* in the constellation Taurus, the remnant of a supernova that the Chinese observed in A.D. 1054. If there were a supernova that was visible over the latitude of Bethlehem in or around 4 B.C., a remnant nebula should be visible in a certain region of the sky. However, no such object can be found.

## The Star was the Triple Conjunction of Jupiter and Regulus

One theory that has been popular in recent years is the notion that the Star of Bethlehem was a very rare triple conjunction of the bright planet Jupiter with the star Regulus in the constellation Leo. In this astronomical event, Jupiter would have had a retrogradation in Leo such that it would have passed this bright star three times. This theory is compelling in that it is full of astrological symbolism that might indicate to a Persian magus that a king was born in Judaea.

Such a triple conjunction event did actually occur over a span from September, 3 B.C. through May, 2 B.C. Blazingly bright Jupiter, which signifies kingship, passed three times very close to the brightest star of Leo, which might signify Judah. No doubt this was at least a spectacular sight to anyone who saw it at the time.

Though a compelling case is made, this triple conjunction event is not a "star" per se (*astera*, as stated in the Greek text of [Matthew 2:2](#)) but rather an alignment of a well-known star and planet. This triple conjunction is a series of close approaches of these objects spread out over an eight-month period. For these reasons, I personally find this to be an unsatisfying explanation to account for the Star of Bethlehem.

Also, this conjunction series occurs after the traditionally accepted date of the death of Herod in 4 B.C. as suggested by Josephus. However, scholars are constantly debating over the skimpy facts, so a strong element of guesswork is involved in any of these chronologies or Star theories.

## The Star was a Comet

Over the years, one popular idea is that the Star of Bethlehem was a comet, a celestial object with a long tail that passes through the solar system for a short time. This theory has been around since at least about A.D. 250, with the Christian writer [Origen](#), who wrote:

*The star that was seen in the east we consider to have been a new star, unlike any of the other well-known planetary bodies, either those in the firmament above or among the lower orbs, but partaking of the nature of those celestial bodies which appear at times, such as **comets**, or those meteors which resemble beams of wood, or beards, or wine jars, or any of those other names by which the Greeks are accustomed to describe their varying appearances.*

One popular notion that made the rounds for a while was that the Star of Bethlehem was an appearance of *Halley's Comet*. It was the astronomer Edmund Halley who, in A.D. 1715, discovered that a number of the famous comets of history were actually reappearances of the same comet. One such reappearance was in A.D. 1305. This reappearance might have been observed by the Italian artist Giotto di Bondone. That very year, Giotto painted a famous fresco entitled *Adoration of the Magi*, which included a very comet-like depiction of the Star of Bethlehem. However, the arithmetic of the cycle of Comet Halley indicates that it would have revisited the Earth in A.D. 12, much too late to have been within the lifetime of King Herod.

Another comet theory is explained by astronomer [Colin Humphreys](#) who considers a number of historical sources and scientific data, including Chinese observations of comets from the period, concluding that the Star of Bethlehem might indeed have been a comet.

## So, What Really Was the Star of Bethlehem Anyway?

In my opinion, all the above theories are in category of "maybe, maybe not." They all have their compelling arguments and yet none fit all the available facts of science, history, and Scripture. However, as far as I'm concerned, all rationalistic, all naturalistic theories to locate a celestial object as the Star of Bethlehem suffer from one major problem: the Star of Bethlehem as described in Scripture does not behave like a natural celestial object. The text of [Matthew 2:9](#) states:

*When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.*

So, after their audience with Herod in Jerusalem, the star "went before" the wise men, and "stood over" the place where Jesus was. The distance from Jerusalem and Bethlehem is about six miles, maybe a three or four-hour walk. So, the wise men could have reached Bethlehem the same night.

**However, natural celestial bodies rise in the east, reach their highest at the meridian & set toward the west. However, Bethlehem is nearly due south of Jerusalem. Any natural star would pass to their left or right as the wise men headed south from Jerusalem, and would not have "went before" as Scripture indicates.**

Also, for a star to have "stood over" a place, it would have to pass through the zenith, otherwise it would appear off to the north or south. There are no visible supernova remnants that pass through the zenith at the latitude of Bethlehem, and neither Jupiter nor Regulus pass overhead at Bethlehem's latitude. A comet could have passed overhead at the latitude of Bethlehem, but there's still a Scriptural problem that every natural celestial body cannot overcome . . .



Even if a star passes overhead at the latitude of Bethlehem, the text clearly states that the Star of Bethlehem "*stood over where the child was.*" After talking to Herod, the wise men knew they were going to Bethlehem, but the text suggests that the Star led them to the actual location of Jesus, not just the city.

The text of [Matthew 2:9](#) clearly describes an object that "went before" the wise men and "stood over" a precise location. This is not a description of a natural celestial body. Also, any natural object would pass briefly through the zenith, but would not "stand over" a place, at least not for longer than a moment. A "star" as described in Scripture would have to move around in space and hold a geosynchronous position in the sky against the apparent motion of the sky due to Earth's rotation.

Scholars and other modern "wise men" can sort all this out by bogging down with semantics or creatively interpreting the passage. Either way, as we've seen, Scripture doesn't supply very much detail, secular history does not offer much support, and science does not offer a plausible naturalistic explanation.

Given all the above, I just choose to stick with a simple acceptance of the Biblical text and don't attempt to reconcile it with naturalistic speculations. As for me and my house, we choose to understand the Bible's Star of Bethlehem to be a supernatural event that guided the wise men, like the angelic hosts that directed the shepherds to the manger.\* – Jay Ryan

\* This theory suggest the star was an angel (harkening back to the double potential meaning of "aster"), or that the star was in fact a manifestation of God's [Shekinah Glory](#), like the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the desert ([Exodus 13:21](#)).

**Natural Law.** Of course, God can use natural law to accomplish His will. In fact, a biblical definition of natural law is the way that God normally upholds the universe and accomplishes His will, but God is not bound by the laws He created; He may (and does on occasion) temporarily suspend those laws when He has an important reason to do so.

The Virgin Birth itself was a supernatural event; it cannot be explained within the context of known natural laws. And it should not be surprising that the birth of the Son of God would be accompanied by a supernatural sign in the heavens. The star that led the magi seems to be one of those incredible acts of God—specially designed and created for a unique purpose.

Let us examine what this star did according to Matthew 2.

# A Western Rising Star

The position of the star when the magi first saw it is disputed. The Bible says that they “saw His star in the east” ([Matthew 2:2](#)). Does this mean that the *star* was in the eastward heavens when they first saw it, or does it mean that the *magi* were “in the East” (i.e., Persia) when they saw the star?<sup>7</sup> If the star was in the East, why did the magi travel west? Recall that the Bible does not say that the star guided the magi to Jerusalem (though it may have); we only know for certain that it went before them on the journey from Jerusalem to the house of Christ. It is possible that the star initially acted only as a sign, rather than as a guide. The magi may have headed to Jerusalem only because this would have seemed a logical place to begin their search for the King of the Jews.

But there is another possibility. The Greek term translated *in the East* (εν ανατολη) can also be translated *at its rising*. The expression can be used to refer to the east since all normal stars rise in the east (due to earth’s rotation). But the Christmas star may have been a supernatural exception—rising in the *west* over Bethlehem (which from the distance of Persia would have been indistinguishable from Jerusalem). The wise men would have recognized such a unique rising. Perhaps they took it as a sign that the prophecy of [Numbers 24:17](#) was fulfilled since the star **quite literally rose from Israel.** – *Answers In Genesis*



# Ethereal or Physical

Curiously, the magi seem to have been the only ones who saw the star—or at least the only ones who understood its meaning. Israel's King Herod had to ask the magi when the star had appeared ([Matthew 2:7](#)). If the magi alone saw the star, this further supports the notion that the star of Bethlehem was a supernatural manifestation from God rather than a common star, which would have been visible to all.

([Matthew 2:16](#)). It may be that the star first appeared over Bethlehem when the magi were in the East (Persia). From that distance, they would not have been able to distinguish the exact location but would certainly have known to head west. They went to Israel's capital city Jerusalem, a likely place to begin searching for the King of the Jews. It seems that the star may have disappeared by the time the group reached Jerusalem but then reappeared when they began their (much shorter) trip from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, about six miles (10 km) away. This view is supported by the fact that first, the magi had to ask King Herod where the King of the Jews was born, which means the star was not guiding them at that time ([Matthew 2:2](#)).

And second, they rejoiced exceedingly when they saw the star (again) as they began their journey to Bethlehem ([Matthew 2:10](#)).

After the magi had met with Herod, the star went on before them to Bethlehem and stood over the location of Jesus. It seems to have led them to the very house that Jesus was in—not just the city. The magi already knew that Christ was in Bethlehem. This they had learned from Herod, who had learned it from the priests and the scribes ([Matthew 2:4–5, 8](#)). For a normal star, it would have been impossible to determine which house was directly beneath it. The star over Christ may have been relatively near the surface of earth (an “atmospheric” manifestation of God’s power) so that the magi could discern the precise location of the Child.

Whatever the exact mechanism, the fact that the star led the magi to Christ is evidence that the star was uniquely designed, made by God for a very special purpose. God can use extraordinary means for extraordinary purposes. Certainly, the birth of our Lord was deserving of honor in the heavens. It is fitting that God used a celestial object to announce the birth of Christ since “the heavens declare the glory of God...” ([Psalm 19:1](#)). – *Answers In Genesis*

## THE TRADITIONAL MANGER SCENE IS WAY OFF!

# Did The Wise Men (Magi) Arrive Twelve Days After Jesus' Birth? Or Was It Much Later?

*There's a popular Christmas song that many sing during the holidays, but few know the meaning behind the song. "The Twelve Days of Christmas" tells of 12 cumulative days of gifts. With each day, new gifts are added to the first day's gift. The number of gifts added is based upon the number of the day. "The Twelve Days of Christmas" is a fun song to sing, but most people have never given much thought to the significance of the 12 days. The Catholic church has traditionally suggested that the 12 days start on Christmas day and culminate with the feast of Epiphany observed on January 6th.*

## The Feast of Epiphany

*This feast day is meant to commemorate the day in which the wise man arrived to see the baby Jesus. The liturgical calendar calls this day, "The Three Kings' Day." But are these things so? What does the Bible say?*

According to the gospel of Matthew, we know these Wise Men came from the Persian Empire. They traveled first to Jerusalem seeking the Christ child, and inquired of King Herod where they might find Him. Then, led by the star again, they eventually found the child where the star came to rest. While tradition says that the Wise Men arrived twelve days after the birth of Jesus, Scripture suggests that is not so.

According to **Luke 2:2** Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem to register for the census when Quirinius was the governor. He ruled from 6-4 BC. Herod died and was replaced by his son Archelaus in 4 BC. **Matt. 2:19-23** says that Joseph Mary and Jesus returned from Egypt around that same time. So, the Lord's birth, the visit by the Magi, the flight to Egypt and the return to Nazareth all had to take place between 6 and 4 BC.

In **Luke 2:21** we read that the Lord was circumcised on the eighth day, but this didn't require them to go to the Temple. It could have been done in the Bethlehem home. In verse 22 it says that His parents took Him to Jerusalem to present Him at the time of Mary's purification. This would have taken place at least 41 days after the birth (**Leviticus 12:3-4**) and explains why they stayed in Bethlehem after Jesus was born. Bethlehem is only five miles from Jerusalem while Nazareth was a journey of several days.



*Given all this, it's most likely that the Magi arrived sometime shortly after Mary's purification. Otherwise, the family probably would have gone back to Nazareth.*

## **Arrival After The Dedication of Jesus?**

In accordance with the Law, Mary and Joseph took their child to the temple to be dedicated to the Lord. [Luke 2:22](#) *And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord;* The time when this dedication was to be done was clearly prescribed in Levitical law ([Lev 12:2-4](#)). The days of Mary's purification were at least 40 days after the birth of Jesus. For 7 days, a woman having given birth was deemed to be unclean. On the eighth day, a man child was to be circumcised. Then, 33 days were to pass for a woman's purification to be fulfilled. After that, the young couple was to take their baby for dedication in the Temple, along with an animal sacrifice to offer to the Lord for the mother's purification.

[Lev 12:6](#) *And when the days of her purifying are fulfilled, for a son, or for a daughter, she shall bring a lamb of the first year for a burnt offering, and a young pigeon, or a turtledove, for a sin offering, unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, unto the priest:*

This offering was to be made before the Lord to make atonement for the woman and to cleanse her from the issue of blood. How fitting that it was to be "a lamb of the first year" and a bird (a young pigeon or a turtledove). Symbolically, this seems to represent Jesus, the Lamb of God, and the Holy Spirit who appeared as a dove. A provision was also made for those who could not afford to offer a lamb. In such a case, the woman was able to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Since we are told in [Luke 2:24](#) that Mary made an offering of birds (plural), this is an indication that Mary and Joseph did not have the necessary funds to purchase a lamb for their burnt offering. Had the Wise Men arrived in 12 days, as suggested by tradition, Mary and Joseph would have received the precious gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Had that been the case, Mary would have been able to provide a blood offering in the form of a lamb for her purification. This Bible tells that the dedication of Jesus, and the purification of Mary, would have been at least 40 days after his birth. Therefore, we can reason that the Wise Men could not have arrived before this time.

## **Arrival When Jesus was Two Years Old?**

Some suggest that the Wise Men did not arrive to the place where Jesus was until he was two years of age, and living in a house in Nazareth. This is based on [Matthew 2:1-11](#). In this passage, we are told that the Wise Men "came into the house and saw the young child." Couple that with the decree of Herod that all children two years old and under should be put to death, it's easy to understand why some think Jesus was near two years of age when the Wise Men arrived.

Questionable is the translation of “young child.” The Greek word used by Matthew is *paidion*, and it means a childling (of either sex), or a half-grown boy or girl. Similarly problematic, is assuming the age of Jesus based on Herod’s decree. Herod could have been “covering his bases,” and going well beyond the age that Jesus was at the time. Remember, the Wise Men were to report back to Herod ([Matthew 2:8](#)). If six months, a year, or longer had passed when Herod realized they never returned, he might have decreed “two and under” to make sure Jesus would be killed.

## The Wise Men “Came Into the House”

From Reggie Braziel of Christian Hope Church of Christ: “The word ‘INN’ in Luke 2: 7 is actually translated ‘Guest Room.’ Because caravanserais or larger Inns were few and far between, most Jewish people in those days welcomed travelers into their own homes. In fact, many Jews built an ‘inn’ or ‘guest room’ on the lower level of their homes and just outside the ‘inn’ or ‘guest room’ there was some sort of stable or cave for the guests to board their animals during their stay. You notice in verse 7 there is no mention whatsoever of ‘an Innkeeper.’ So, here is probably a more accurate picture of what happened. Joseph and Mary made that 5-6 day, 100 mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem a number of days before Jesus was born. Their intentions were to stay in ‘the inn’ or ‘guest room’ in the home of a family member or friend in town. But when they arrived in Bethlehem they found out ‘the guest room’ had already been taken by other out-of-town relatives or friends who had returned to Bethlehem to register for the census.



We know that Jesus was born in a place where animals were kept. Perhaps it was a stable or a cave, but it's most likely it was the lower level of the house of a relative where animals were kept in cold weather. It is, therefore, thought that Mary and Joseph stayed at the Bethlehem house and once all the guests who were there for the census departed, the relatives invited Mary & Joseph to the upper rooms. They would have stayed there until after they went to the Temple and until she was able to make the return trip to Nazareth.

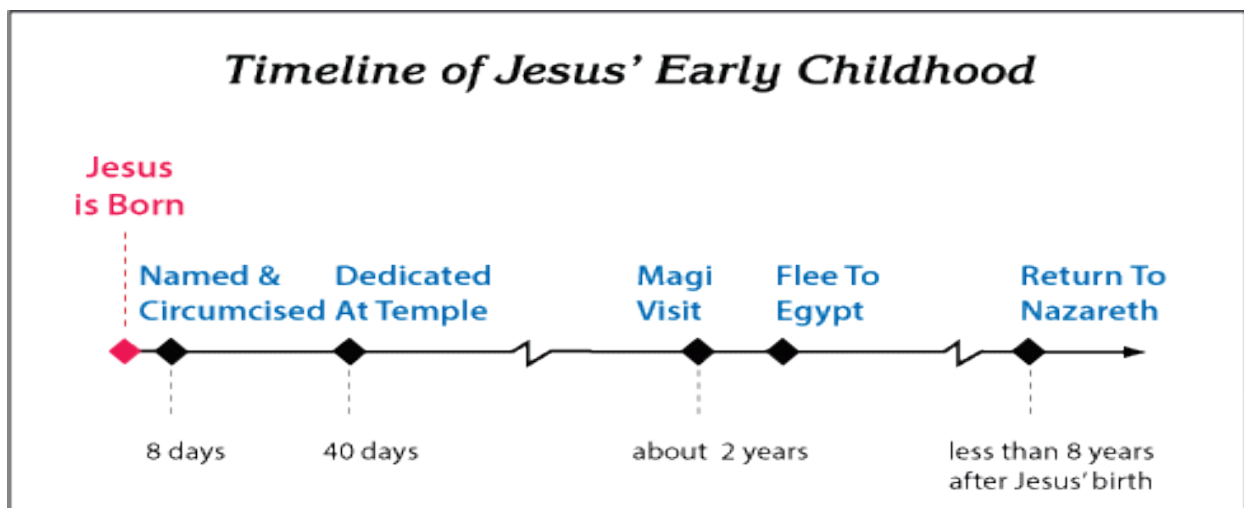
It is also possible that the Wise Men were led by the star to Nazareth after they had made the trip home. We are told in Luke that following the dedication of Jesus in the Temple (40 days or more after His birth), Mary and Joseph returned to their home in Nazareth ([Luke 2:39](#)). But it's still unlikely that this journey would have taken close to two years.

## The Timing

It's clear that the Wise Men arriving 12 days after Jesus' birth is incorrect. The timing does not fit because had the Wise Men arrived prior to the dedication at the Temple, Mary & Joseph would have offered a lamb, not the alternative offering of a bird (which was the offering for those who could not afford a lamb). Mary and Joseph were devout Jews and had they been given the precious gifts of great value from the Wise Men, they would have been able to sell the gold, frankincense, or myrrh and had the money to purchase a lamb to offer to God. It does, however, make sense that it was from these precious gifts that Mary and Joseph had the means to flee into Egypt with Jesus. The Bible clearly supports that their flight into Egypt was after the Wise Men came.

*Matthew 2:13* And when they [the Wise Men] were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt...

So, how long was it after Jesus' birth that the Wise Men arrived? We simply do not know. But there is sufficient reasoning to think it was more than 40 days and before His second birthday.



## **KING HEROD'S ATTENTION WAS DISTRACTED IN REAL TIME DURING THIS MOMENTOUS PERIOD**

*Historical backdrop.* Herod had been endowed with the title King of the Jews by the Roman Senate. As the reigning king in his final years, Herod was utterly obsessed with securing his dynasty by choosing from his sons a worthy successor or successors. Herod had ten wives and many sons. His important children as regards the succession were Alexander and Aristobulus (sons of Mariamne I); Antipater (son of Doris); Archelaus and Antipas (sons of Malthrace); Philip I (son of Mariamne II); and Philip II (son of Cleopatra of Jerusalem). In 7 BC rumors began to circulate to the effect that Alexander and Aristobulus were plotting to assassinate Herod; whether these rumors had a basis in fact or were merely manufactured by Antipater we do not know. Certainly, Herod believed them, and he responded with fury and had the two siblings tried and executed. The king decided that Antipater should be the sole king, although now he specified that Philip I would be Antipater's successor. Then, in 6 BC, Philip I was removed from the will, because Herod suspected that his mother guilty of conspiracy against him, leaving Antipater as the sole specified heir. It is around this time, in 6 or 5 BC, when Herod was acutely paranoid and focused on the succession, and perhaps thinking that he had finally sorted out the whole messy business, that the Magi entered Jerusalem asking the whereabouts of the newborn King of the Jews and declaring that they had seen his star in the eastern sky.

*Herod's Response to the Magi.* Herod was "troubled" by the announcement of the Magi concerning the birth of the newborn King of the Jews. The historical context helps us make sense of this. As we have seen, during the last four years of Herod's life he was extremely paranoid, and with some justification. He had already killed two of his sons and 300 military officers supposedly conspiring with them in 7 BC and, within a few years, would have cause to have another son tried for conspiracy and executed. Consequently, Herod was unlikely to take kindly to any threat to his dynasty.

At the same time, Herod clearly believed that the one who had just been born was the actual Messiah. Later, Matthew tells us of how Herod assembled the chief priests and scribes to determine where the Messiah had been born, based on the Hebrew Scriptures, and passed this information on to the Magi, anticipating that they would find the new-born King of the Jews there ([Matthew 2:4-8](#)). So convinced was Herod that the real Messiah had been born that he slaughtered every baby boy in the region of Bethlehem in their first or second year of life in a desperate attempt to assassinate him (v. 16). His fear therefore probably reflects his belief that the prophesied Messiah would pose a formidable threat to his dynasty.



Herod was part Jewish and has been generously described by one biographer as a man of “piety” who adhered to “simple and uncluttered” Judaism. Certainly he was, at the very time when the Magi visited, overseeing the reconstruction and beautification of the Jerusalem temple. And yet Herod, though persuaded by the Magi that the Messiah had been born, didn’t rejoice, but recoiled with horror, because this momentous event did not accord with his succession plans.

*The People of Jerusalem.* Surprisingly, “all of Jerusalem” was also “troubled” (v. 3) by the Magi’s announcement. Although some scholars have argued that the city’s religious leaders are in view here, that is too narrow a reading of the phrase. The more natural interpretation is that it refers to the general population of the city. However, we might well wonder why the people of Jerusalem responded so negatively to the Magi’s proclamation. It can’t be that the Jerusalemites preferred Herod to the Messiah. More likely the people in Jerusalem were troubled because they liked the status quo and were certain that Herod would respond with brutality to any serious threat to his dynasty. They may also have been afraid that Judea could degenerate into civil war. While some degree of fear might be expected, the lack of any positive rejoicing at the news that the long-awaited Messiah has finally been born is disturbing and anticipates the city’s rejection of Jesus at his trial ([Matt. 27:16-26](#)).

*Had Herod and the Jerusalemites Seen the Star?* The response of Herod and the people of Jerusalem has sometimes been taken to indicate that they had not seen the Star themselves. However, this is most unlikely. It would be very surprising if the people of Judea would have accepted as a celestial sign of the Messiah’s birth any phenomenon capable of being observed only by pagan Gentiles in Babylon and not by the Messiah’s own people in Judea. Moreover, the strength of the reaction of the king and people to the arrival of the Magi’s entourage and their query makes better sense if they had seen for themselves and been deeply impressed by the Star but had not perceived its momentous messianic significance. Had they not seen the Star for themselves, they would hardly have been so shaken by the Magi’s enquiry. What was new to the people of Jerusalem was not that there was a Star or that the Star had done something unusual in connection with its heliacal rising, but rather that the Star had categorically signaled that the Messiah had recently been born. Exposed to that startling and evidently compelling interpretive key by some of the world’s most respected astronomers and astrologers, who were so certain of their interpretation that they had just traveled hundreds of miles to welcome the newborn Messiah, suddenly Herod and the Jerusalemites became disturbed concerning the Star. Of course, it is possible that not everything the Star did was detected by those in Jerusalem, whether because of inclement weather, a lack of dedicated observation, or an inopportune time of occurrence.

## Herod's Meeting with the Jewish Teachers

*Herod's Ignorance.* It is clear that Herod did not know where the Messiah was to be born.

Apparently [Micah 5:2](#), with its disclosure of the location of the Messiah's birth, was not widely known or, at any rate, not widely understood. The Magi, Herod, and the population in Jerusalem as a whole were, it would seem, unaware that this verse held the key to identifying the place of the Messiah's birth. The king therefore assembled "all the chief priests and scribes of the people" ([Matt. 2:4](#)), which may perhaps mean that he summoned the whole Sanhedrin or simply that he gathered a sizable group of respected [Bible](#) scholars.

*The Teachers' Response.* Herod presented the religious experts with his simple question: Where was the Messiah to be born? This half-Jewish king of Judea was clearly intent on assassinating the Messiah while he was still a baby. Completely devoid of any fear of God, he was prepared to use the revelation God had given concerning his plan of salvation in the Hebrew Scriptures—to thwart the divine plan! The audacity of this man who had made the Second Temple one of the most glorious structures in the ancient world is mind-boggling. So self-deluded is this king of Judea that he actually imagines that he can take on God and win! According to [Matthew 2:5-6](#), the chief priests and scribes told [Herod], 'In Bethlehem of Judea.' The response of the Jewish religious leadership to Herod's question reveals a lot. Their answer reflects a high view of the Hebrew Scriptures. They regard Micah's oracle as the word of God channeled thru a prophetic agent ("it is written by the prophet"), and they interpret it in a literal and straightforward manner to refer to the Davidic Messiah. The chief priests and scribes manifestly do have a basic grasp of God's plan of salvation through the Messiah. It is striking that Matthew is content to let these Jewish leaders introduce [Micah 5:2](#) into the narrative of the birth of Jesus. Matthew does not explicitly state that the religious leadership was aware of the report of the Magi from the east. However, word concerning the Magi had spread like wildfire throughout the city, so that "all Jerusalem" heard it, and it is hard to justify excluding the Jewish religious leaders from this, particularly because Jerusalem was oriented around the temple. Accordingly, when they then answered Herod's question concerning the birthplace of the Messiah by appealing to Micah's prophecy, they were effectively testifying that, if what the Magi had seen was the Messiah's natal sign, the Messiah was at that moment a newborn baby in Bethlehem.

**Remarkably, however, the Jewish religious leaders, despite having a knowledge of the Word of God considerably greater than that of the Gentile Magi, made no effort to travel the five or six miles south to Bethlehem to see if indeed the Messiah had been born in the fulfillment of the Prophets. They evidently despised the report, and perhaps those who brought it, and so they remained in Jerusalem. They seemed content with the status quo and did not crave the promised salvation of God. – Colin Nicholl**

## The Significance of the Three Gifts of the Perhaps Dozen Magi Wise Men



# The Gifts of the Wise Men

*"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; **gold, and frankincense and myrrh.**" ([Matthew 2:11](#))*

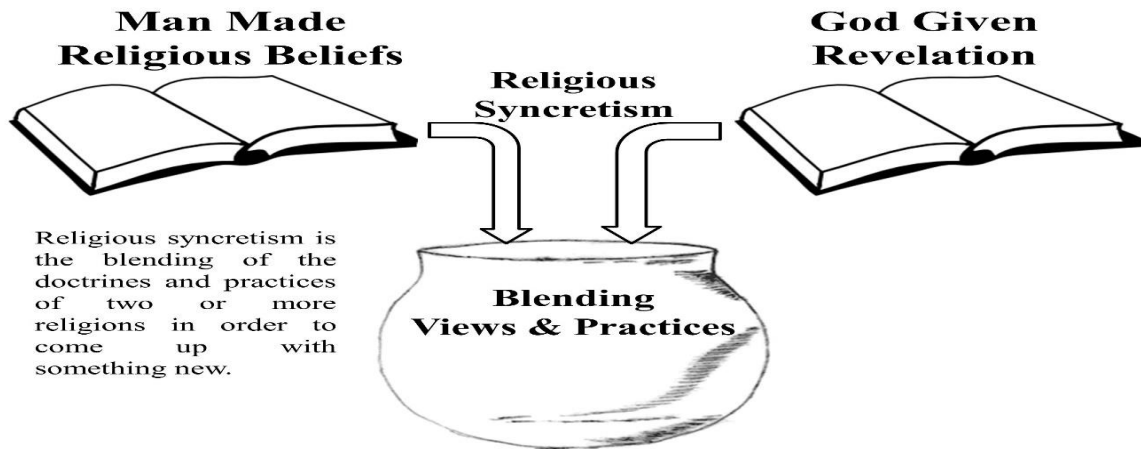
**These wise men (or Magi) were of great eminence in the Parthian Empire at that time, and it is unlikely that the caravan from the East consisted of only three men. They more likely had a large entourage as they came searching for the future King of Israel, so it was small wonder that "all Jerusalem" was "troubled," along with King Herod ([Matthew 2:3](#)). The Parthian Persians had never been conquered by the Romans and at that very time were posing a significant threat along the eastern boundary of the extended Roman Empire.**

**When they found the young child and His mother in Bethlehem, the Magi "fell down, and worshipped him" ([Matthew 2:11](#)). But why did they offer Him just three gifts--and why these three gifts? Somehow they seemed to have sensed, possibly from meditating deeply on the ancient prophecies of Balaam ([Numbers 24:17](#)), Daniel (in [Daniel 9:24-26](#)), and David, concerning the priesthood order of Melchizedek ([Psalm 110:4](#)) that this young child whose birth had been announced by a star was destined not only to be the King but would also become the Messianic Sacrifice to "make reconciliation for iniquity" ([Daniel 9:24, 26](#)) and then become our eternal High Priest who "ever liveth to make intercession for us" ([Hebrews 7:25](#)). The gold would acknowledge His right to reign, the frankincense would speak of the incense to be offered in the heavenly tabernacle & the myrrh ([John 19:39](#)) would testify that His crucified body would be so anointed as it entered the tomb for a very temporary burial.**

	JESUS' BIRTH AND EVENTS AFTERWARD
Jesus is born	Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-7
Shepherds in the field	Luke 2:8-20
Jesus circumcised	Luke 2:21
Jesus dedicated	Luke 2:22-38
Magi arrive and worship Jesus	Matt. 2:1-12
Jesus' parents' flee	Matt. 2:13-18
Herod dies	Matt. 2:19-20
(returned to Nazareth)	
Parents return to Nazareth	Matt. 2:21-23; Luke 2:39



# RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS IN SYNC WITH PAGAN OBSERVANCE



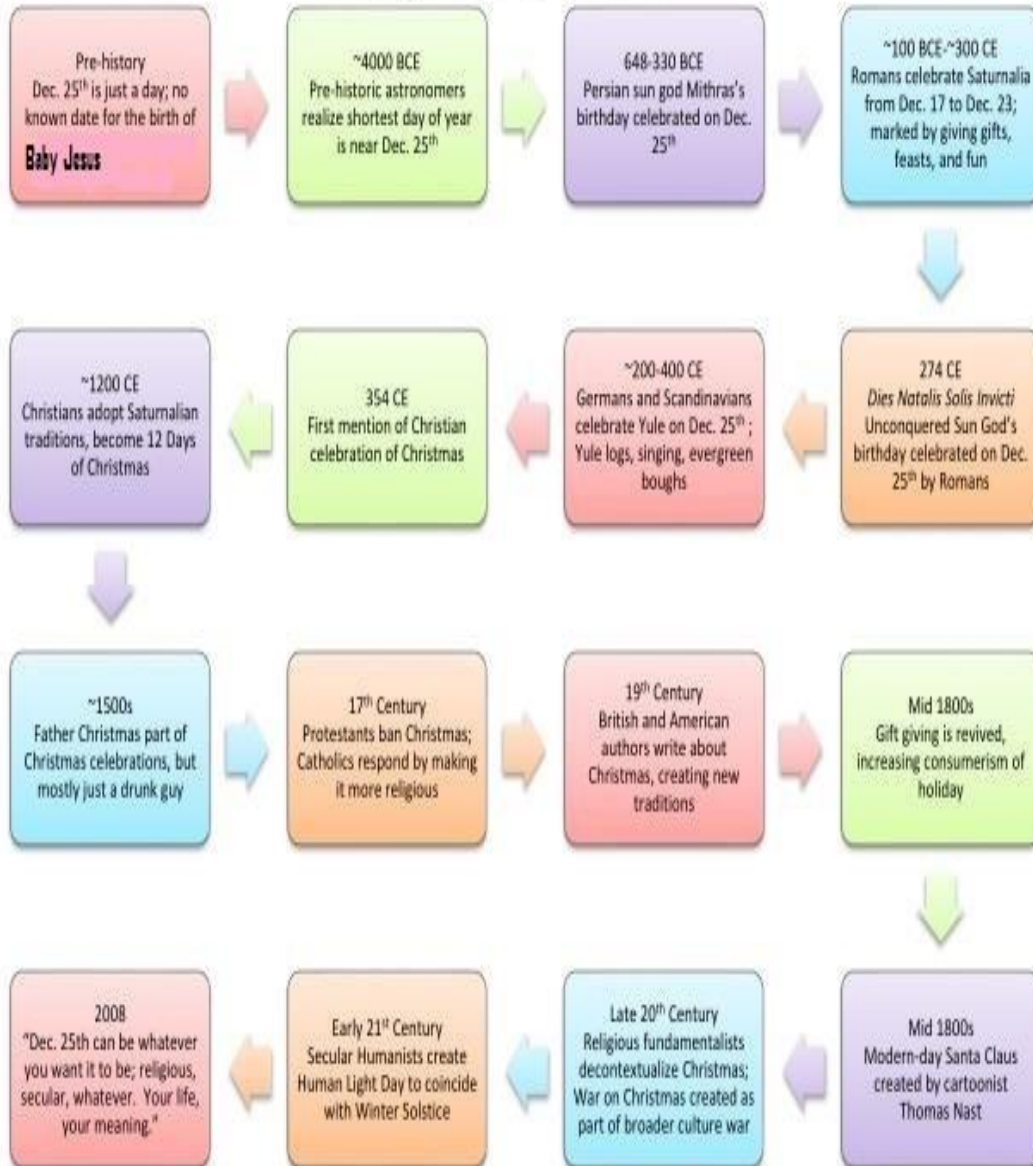
[www.thinkingonscripture.com](http://www.thinkingonscripture.com)

### 3. Religious Syncretism

- Roman religion was a mix of different religions, and as they expanded they added gods of places they conquered.
- Because of this, religion was pretty personal in Rome. Many beliefs coexisted, and people in the same family didn't even always worship the same deities.

**syncretism:** the merging of different belief systems, cultures, schools of thought

# The True Meaning of Christmas = Syncretism





# DAILY NEWSFLASH

www.yahweh.house

Yahweh's House Ministries

Since 2015

## Christmas not found in Bible!



Man reports that after 26 years being a Christian, he finally decided to read the Bible for himself, goes into SHOCK, and learns that Christmas and Christmas trees have PAGAN origins!!!

Jeremiah 10:2-4 "Thus saith Yahweh, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not."

Another report just in: Lady faints in Church, when she reads Bible and learns that celebrating Christmas is an abomination to our Father in heaven! She regains consciousness, grabs her children, yells at the Christian Pastor, and leaves the Pagan Christian Church in disgust!!!

*Thought for the day: Where did Santa come from? Is Santa based on myth or reality? Is Santa based on a character from the Bible?*

From Grimm's account, in the early 1100's, the transformation of St. Nicholas into Santa Claus from the devil Knecht Ruprecht was in full throttle. We learn that Santa represents the Devil!

There was much influence and inspiration of the medieval plays into the making of Santa, but let us examine Santa's trademark "Ho! Ho! Ho!". Most people have no idea where this came from, and more important *whom* it came from. . .

In *The Drama Before Shakespeare – A Sketch*, author Frank Ireson, describes the popular Miracle Play. Notice the description of the devil as "shaggy, hairy," etc. (as Santa), and notice the devil's trademark "exclamation on entering was ho, ho, ho!":

Siefker also collaborates the Devil's trademark "ho, ho, ho."

In these plays, **the devil's common entry line, known as the "devil's bluster," was "Ho! Ho! Ho!"** (Siefker, Phyllis. *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men: The Origins and Evolution of Saint Nicholas*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997, p. 69)



NEWS FLASH: The Messiah was NOT born anywhere near December 25, however a Pagan sun God Tammuz was born December 25, and after Tammuz was killed by a pig, the people wanted to eat ham as a tradition and honour to the Pagan god as they believed the pig was some sort of god being able to kill their Pagan god Tammuz!

Repent of Christmas, it's an abomination to Yahweh!

Editor: Yeremyah & Michaiyah

[www.facebook.com/yahwehhouse](http://www.facebook.com/yahwehhouse)



# The Mystery Of The Pagan Origin Of Christmas: Jesus Was Not Born On December 25th But A Whole Bunch Of Pagan Gods Were

By Michael, on December 10th, 2009



Why is Christmas celebrated on December 25th? Most people assume that it has always been a Christian holiday and that it is a celebration of the birth of Jesus. But it turns out that Jesus was not born on December 25th. However, a whole bunch of pagan gods were born on that day. In fact, pagans celebrated a festival involving a heroic supernatural figure that visits an evergreen tree and leaves gifts on December 25th long before Jesus was ever born. From its early Babylonian roots, the celebration of the birth or "rebirth" of the sun god on December 25th came to be celebrated under various names all over the ancient world. You see, the winter solstice occurs a few days before December 25th each year. The winter solstice is the day of the year when daylight is the shortest. In ancient times, December 25th was the day each year when the day started to become noticeably longer. Thus it was

fitting for the early pagans to designate December 25th as the date of the birth or the "rebirth" of the sun.

The truth is that thousands of years before there was a "Santa Claus", there was another supernatural figure who would supposedly visit a tree and leave gifts every December 25th.

His name was Nimrod.

The celebration of December 25th goes all the way back to ancient Babylon.

According to ancient Babylonian tradition, Semiramis (who eventually became known as the goddess Astarte/Asherah/Ashtoreth/Isis/Ishtar/Easter in other pagan religions) claimed that after the untimely death of her son/husband Nimrod (yes she was married to her own son), a full grown evergreen tree sprang up overnight from a dead tree stump. Semiramis claimed that Nimrod would visit that evergreen tree and leave gifts each year on the anniversary of his birth, which just happened to be on December 25th.





You don't need to believe in **Yule**, the Scandinavian fertility god, to enjoy the tradition of Yuletide carols and greetings.



You don't need to be a **Wiccan** to enjoy the tradition of wreaths or decking the halls with holly.



You don't need to be a **Druid** to enjoy the tradition of hoping for a kiss under the mistletoe.



You don't need to believe in the god **Saturn** to enjoy the tradition of decorating a Saturnalia tree in your home.



You don't need to believe in **Thor, Odin, or St. Nicholas** to enjoy the tradition of a visitor bringing gifts at night.

You don't need to believe in **Sleipnir**, Odin's flying 8-legged horse, to enjoy the tradition of listening for the sound of hooves on your roof top.



You don't need to believe in **Mithras** to enjoy the tradition of celebrating the sun's rebirth on December 25th.



And you don't need to believe in **Jesus Christ** to enjoy the tradition of renaming this ancient holiday to Christ's Mass.



All you need to enjoy these winter festivities is to be merry.

# Merry Christmas





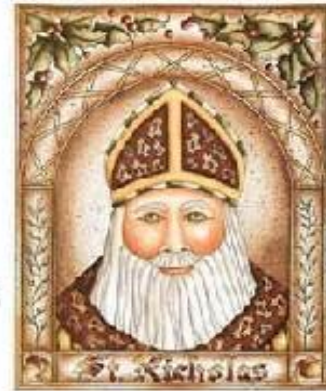
You don't need to believe in **The Divine Mothers**, female deities venerated in North-West Europe from 1 CE onwards, to enjoy the tradition of Yuletide feasts.



You don't need to be a **Heathen** to believe in **Odin**, or **Jólnir** (Old Norse for "yule figure") as he is also called, to enjoy other Yuletide favorites such as the Yule log, Yule boar (Christmas ham), Yule tree (Christmas tree), and Yule singing (Christmas caroling).



You don't need to believe in **Saturn** to celebrate **Saturnalia** with a school holiday, with the giving of presents, and with feasts.

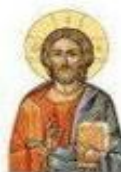


You don't need to be a believer in the cult of **Nicholas** (who morphed with the Germanic deity **Odin** and shed his Mediterranean appearance, grew a beard, mounted a flying horse, rescheduled his flight for December, and donned heavy winter clothing) to enjoy the tradition of a visitor bringing gifts at night.



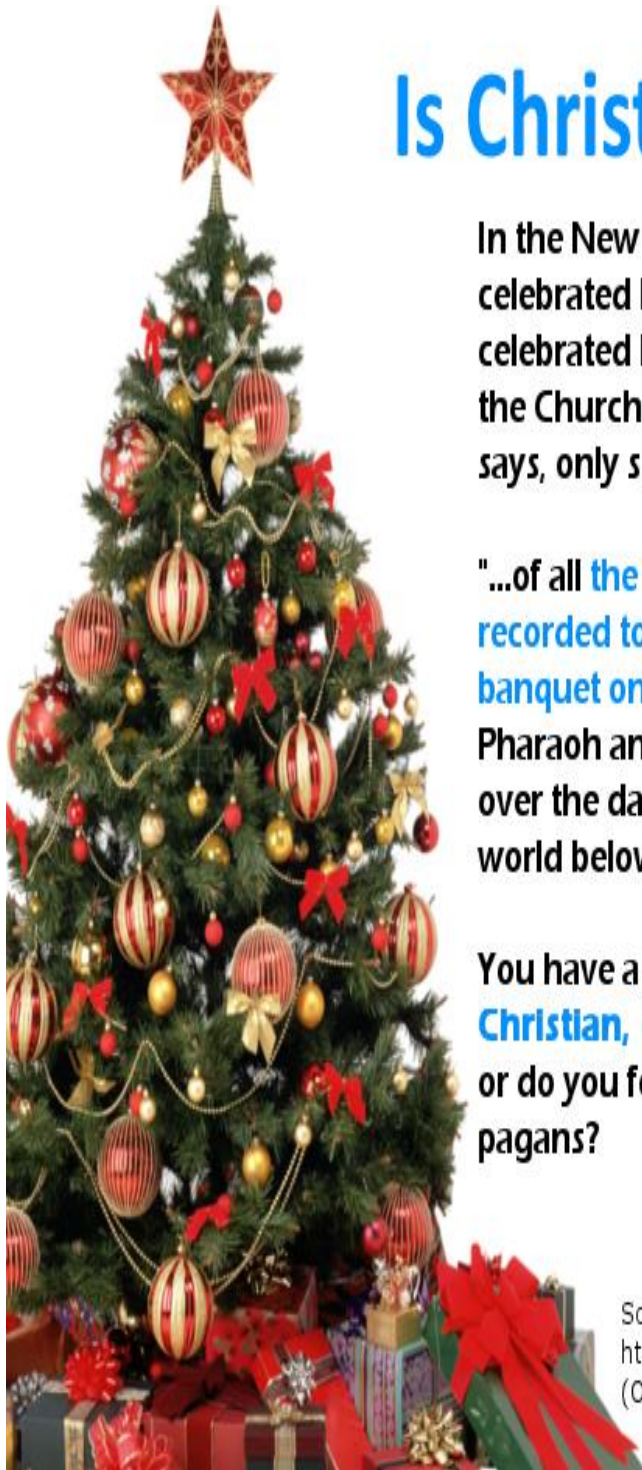
You don't have to believe in **Pasqua Epiphania**, the Italian female deity also called The Grandmother, to fill children's stocking with gifts.

You don't have need to think that **The Sun** might not come back and celebrate its rebirth after the winter solstice.



And you don't need to believe in **Jesus Christ** to enjoy the tradition of renaming this ancient holiday to Christ's Mass.

**All you need to do in order to celebrate and enjoy these ancient winter festivities is to be merry!**



## Is Christmas Biblical?

In the New Testament, Jesus nor his disciples celebrated his birthday. None of the early Christians celebrated his birthday. This holiday, according to the Church Father Origen is pagan in nature. As he says, only sinners celebrate coming into this world:

"...of all the holy people 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 on which they were born into this world below..."

You have a choice to make. Are you a **Biblical Christian, do you follow Christ and the disciples** or do you follow the feasts of Herod and other pagans?

Sources:

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10709a.htm>  
(Origen, in Levit., Hom. VIII, in Migne P.G., XII, 495)





# PUBLIC NOTICE

*The Observance of CHRISTMAS having been deemed  
a Sacrilege, the exchanging of Gifts and Greetings,  
Dressing in Fine Clothing, Feasting and similar  
Satanical Practices are hereby*

## FORBIDDEN

*with the Offender liable to a Fine of FIVE SHILLINGS*

**CHRISTMAS WAS ILLEGAL  
IN THE U.S. UNTIL 1836 AS  
IT WAS CONSIDERED AN  
ANCIENT PAGAN HOLIDAY.**



# RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM



- Through time a culture's religious beliefs and practices persist, but also change through incorporating new elements.
- Religions are adopted and transformed.
- FOR EXAMPLE: Early Christianity incorporated European paganism so that "Christ's Mass" became integrated with pre Christian symbols and practices.



# PAGAN ROOTS OF CHRISTMAS

For the customs of the people are **vain**: for one cutteth a **tree** out of the forest

They deck it with silver and with gold: they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.  
Jeremiah 10:1-8



DECEMBER 25TH = BIRTHDAY OF SUN GOD.



# MISSIONARY TO THE PAGANS & THE FIRST CHRISTMAS TREE



**“Located in the very heart of modern-day Germany, in the province of Hesse, is a small humble town of only 15,000 inhabitants. In the middle of that town stands an imposing old cathedral built in the 12th-14th centuries of reddish stone. Situated in front of that cathedral is the statue of a man in a monk’s garb on a stump of a freshly felled oak, with a huge Saxon ax in his hand. The humble town is Fritzlar, called Gaesmere in ancient times. It is known in Germany as the birthplace of two beginnings: Here began the Christianization of Germany, and here’s where the German Empire was born as a political entity. The statue is that of the Anglo-Saxon monk and missionary Wynfrith, also known as St. Boniface, the patron saint of Germany and the Netherlands. And the stump is the remains of the tree that belonged to the highest German god, the Oak of Thor. The Oak of Thor was the center of the pagan religion of the local tribe of the Hessians, and the most pagan Germans at the time. In 723, on his way to Thüringia, St. Boniface stopped at Gaesmere. He had worked for five years as a missionary in Frisia, Hesse, and Thüringia, and he had some limited success. Unfortunately, as his biographer Willibald relates, those Germans that converted were never too stable in the faith; while giving lip service to Christ, they would secretly go back to their pagan ways, bringing sacrifices to the pagan gods, practicing divination and incantations, etc. Boniface decided to deal with the problem once and for all by attacking at the very center of their pagan religion. One morning he appeared at the Oak of Thor with an ax in his hand, surrounded by a pagan crowd who cursed him and expected the gods to intervene and kill him. He raised his hand against Thor and delivered the first blow. According to Willibald, immediately a strong wind came and blew the ancient oak over. Seeing that Thor failed to protect his holy tree and to kill Boniface, the Hessians converted to Christ. This event is considered the beginning of the Christianization of Germany. From Hesse, word spread, and other German tribes turned to Christianity. Boniface went to many places, destroying the altars and high places of the pagans, proving the superiority of the risen Christ over the blood-thirsty German deities. Until 754, when he was martyred by a group of pagan Frisian warriors, all German tribes with the exception of the Saxons and the Frisians were converted to Christ.” – Internet Site**



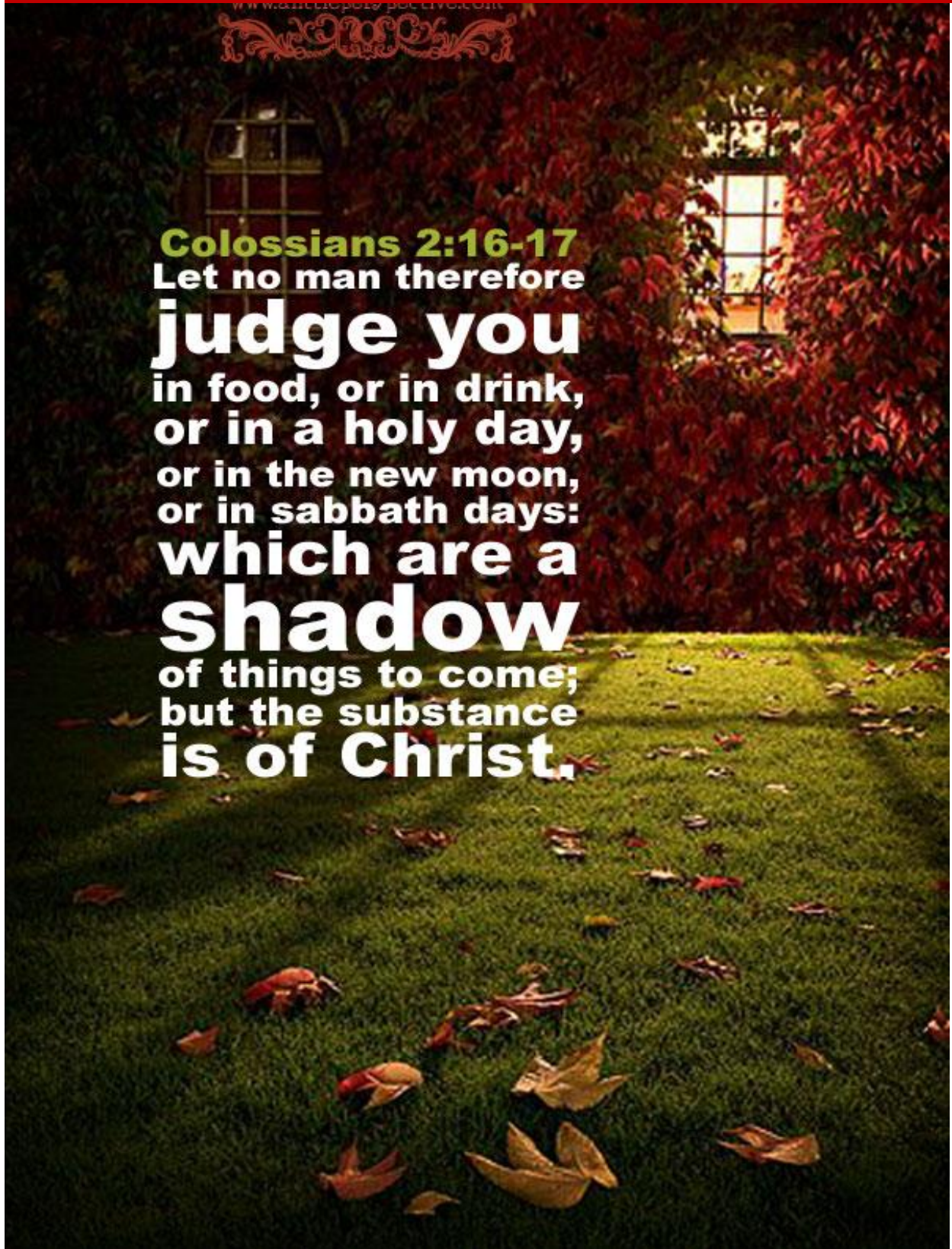
## CHRIST IN CHRISTMAS IS A COMMINGLING WITH IDOLATRY

Constantine chose to attempt to teach and train people about Christianity by using their pagan traditions and rituals. In essence, he allowed the people throughout the Empire to continue going to their temples, singing their songs, practicing their rituals, observing their holidays, but he changed the reasons and purposes for these pagan traditions so that they reflected the key people, events, and ideas of Christianity rather than paganism. The pagan day of Ishtar, the fertility goddess worshipped in spring & which was accompanied by flowers, bunnies, and sweets, became the time to recognize the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and the beginning of all new life in Him. **Today we call it Easter.** A day in the late fall which was time to honor dead ancestors became a day to remember Christian saints of the past. We now call it All Saints Day. Constantine did this with nearly all holidays, including Saturnalia. He **turned this holiday [Saturnalia] into a time to remember Christ's birth, and changed the name to "Christmas," which means "Christ Sent."**

All of the pagan symbols of Saturnalia were "baptized" with Christian meaning. The tree became a symbol of the fact that Christ never dies, and is the Light of the world. The holly—with the thorns and red berries—reminds us of the thorns on Jesus' brow and his blood spilt for us. People took some of the pagan Saturnalia songs and changed the names to make them songs about Jesus. They encouraged people to give gifts to one another and to decorate as they always had, as reminders of the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ and the promise that the new age of Christ's Kingdom was at hand. *And that is how Saturnalia became Christmas.*

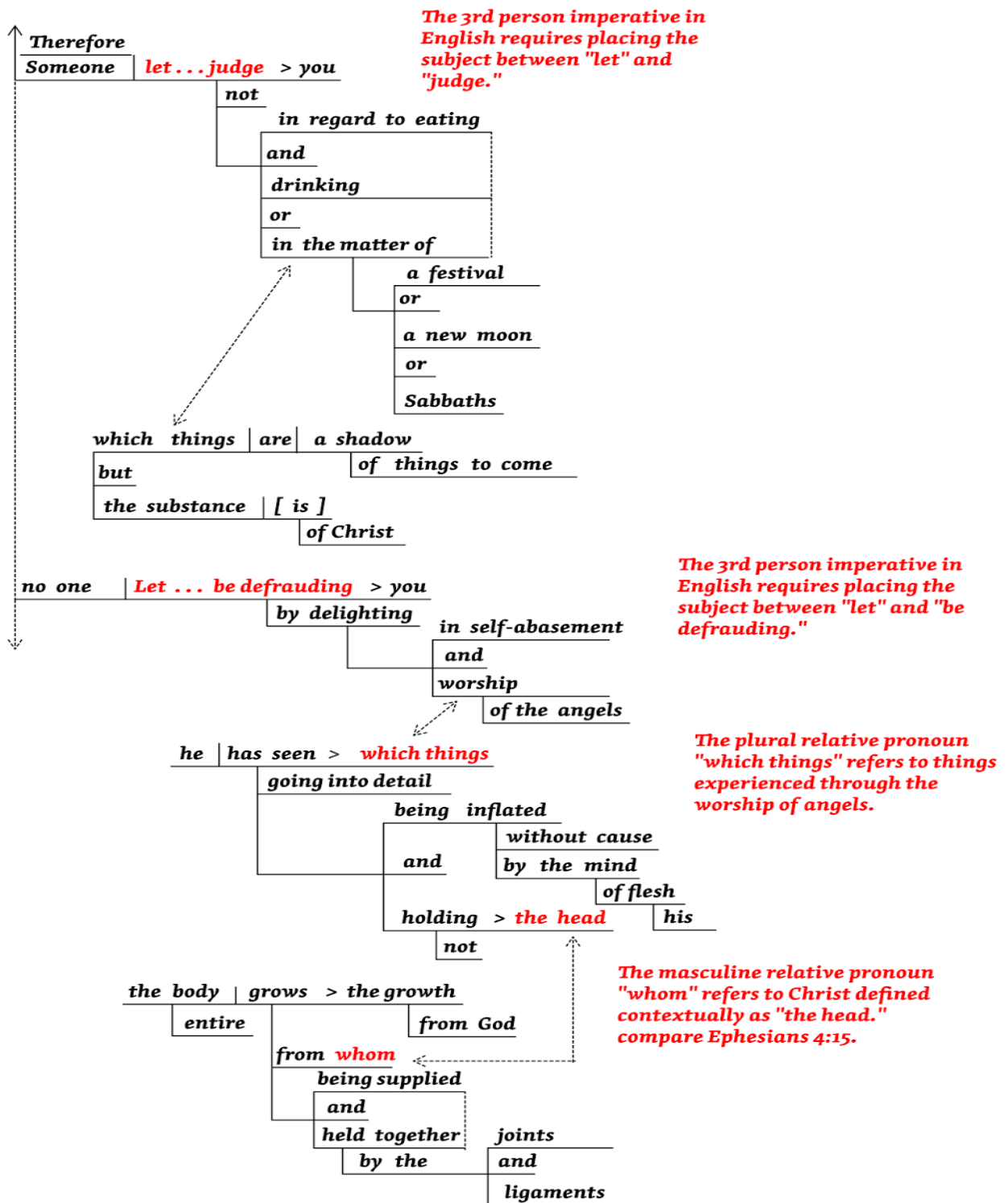
## COLOSSAE BRETHREN TO ESCHEW EXTREME ASCETICISM

**Colossians 2:16-17**  
Let no man therefore  
**judge you**  
in food, or in drink,  
or in a holy day,  
or in the new moon,  
or in sabbath days:  
**which are a**  
**shadow**  
of things to come;  
but the substance  
**is of Christ.**



Colossians 2:16-19 (NASB95 Modified)

To 2:6





## BIBLE VERSES THAT LINK OBSERVING RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS TO A SPIRITUAL IMMATURTY & WEAKNESS OF FAITH

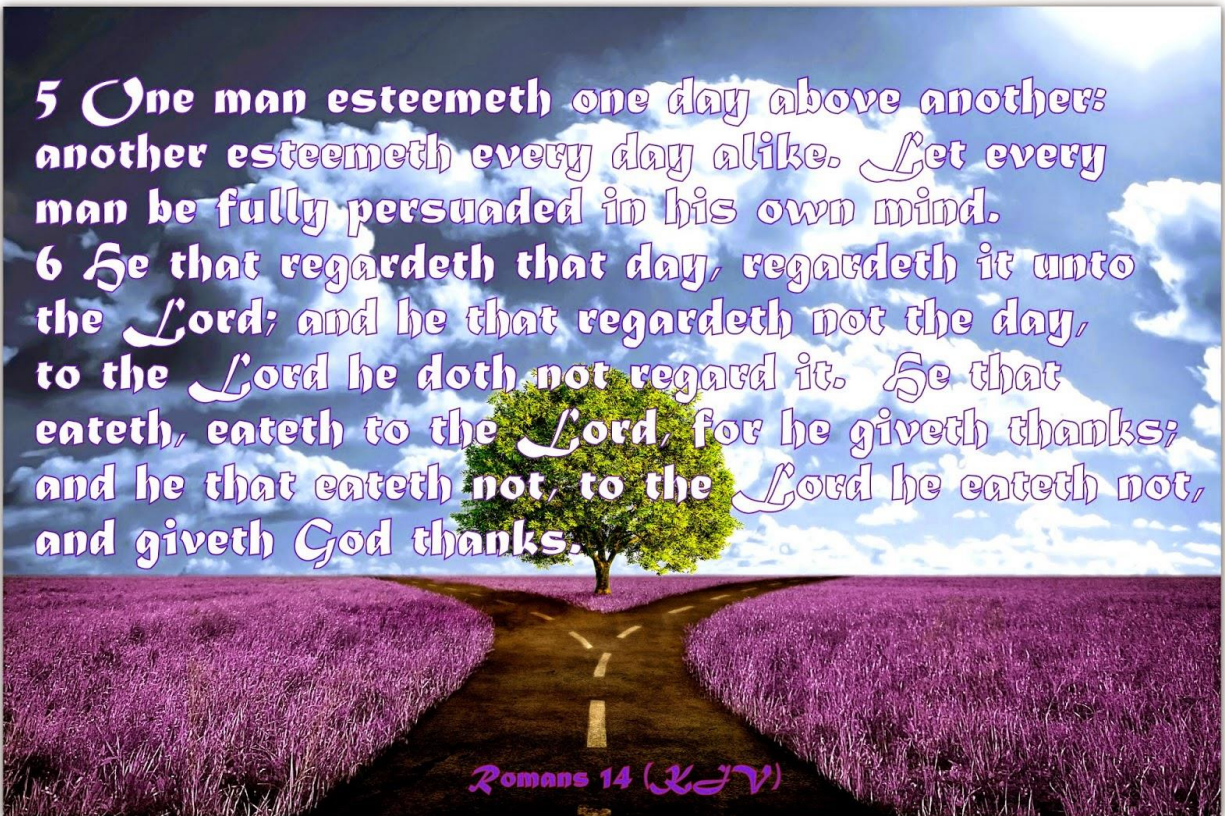
Lesson 15 - Romans 14:1-23

**The Gospel** - God's Power To Save Man

### Romans 14 - Matters of Liberty - NOT Matters of Faith

- ◆ Matters of Indifference are those beliefs or practices which are not specifically regulated by Scripture:
- ◆ They are things that are neither commanded nor forbidden, - 1 Cor. 9:5
- ◆ They are things that are authorized and allowed - Rom 14:5,6, (Matters Clean, Good, Pure v. 14, 16, 20)
- ◆ To engage in an authorized liberty one is neither the better or worse - 1 Cor. 8:8
- ◆ Just because a thing is an authorized liberty doesn't mean that it is always expedient - 1 Cor. 11:17





## Romans 14:5, Celebrating The Feasts

- **Q.** The real reason that Christians do not celebrate feasts and holidays of the Lord is because years ago, Roman Christians sought to remove all the Jewishness from Christianity. It had nothing to do with what Jesus said because he celebrated all the feasts and holidays of his Father and we need to do the same.
- **A.** Jesus observed the feasts because He was a Jewish man living in Israel in the time before the Church was born.
- After the Church was born Paul wrote, *"One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind"* (**Romans 14:5**). And in **Colossians 2:16-17** he added, *"Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ."*
- I agree that the Roman church tried to distance itself from our Jewish roots, and I support your choice to observe the feasts if you believe it's the right thing for you to do. But telling others they need to do the same is not Biblically correct.







# Christmas

## The True Story

### #1 Christmas Is A False Tradition Of Man



We need to be careful not to be involved with idolatry (Ex. 20:4-5) and the keeping of certain days religiously that are not found in the law of Christ (Gal. 4:10-11)



While we have the freedom to esteem one day above another, we should not allow our liberty to cause us to sin, or cause others to stumble (Col. 2:16; Rom. 14:5-10)

# Pulpit Commentary

Verse 10. - **Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years** (ἡμέρας παρατηρεῖσθε, καὶ μῆνας καὶ καιροῦς καὶ ἐνιαυτούς); **days ye are intent on observing, and months, and seasons, and years.** In the compound verb παρατηρεῖν, the prepositional prefix, which often denotes "amiss," seems rather, from the sense of "at one's side," to give the verb the shade of close, intent observation. This may be shown by the circumstances to be of an insidious character; thus the active παρατηρεῖν in [Mark 3:2](#); [Luke 6:7](#); [Luke 14:1](#); [Acts 9:24](#), and the middle παρατηροῦμαι, with no apparent difference of sense, in [Luke 20:20](#). Josephus uses the verb of "keeping the sabbath days" ('Ant.,' 3:05, 8), and the noun παρατήρησις τῶν νομίμων, for "observance of the things which are according to the laws" ('Ant.,' 8:03, 9). The accumulation of nouns with the reiterated "and," furnishing another example of the δεινότης of St. Paul's style, betokens a scornfully impatient mimesis. These reactionaries were full of festival-observing pedantry - "days," "new moons," "festivals," "holy years," being always on their lips. The meaning of the first three of the nouns is partially suggested by [Colossians 2:16](#), "Let no man judge you... in respect of a feast day, or a new moon, or a sabbath day (ἑορτῆς νομιμίας, σαββάτων)," in which passage, we may observe, there is a similar tone of half-mocking mimesis; where the same ideas are apparently presented, but in a reverse order. Comp. also [2 Chronicles 8:13](#), Offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the solemn feasts, three times in the year, even in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles." The "days," then, in the present passage, we may suppose, are the sabbath days, together perhaps with the two fast days every week which the Jewish tradition prescribed ([Luke 18:12](#)). The "months" point to the new moons, the observance of which might occasion to these Gentiles considerable scope for discussion in adjusting themselves to the Jewish calendar, different no doubt from the calendar they had been hitherto used to. The "seasons" would be the annual festivals and fasts of the Jews, not only the three prescribed by the Levitical Law, but also certain others added by tradition, as the Feasts of Purim and of Dedication. So far we appear to be on tolerably sure ground. The fourth item, "years," may refer either to the sabbatical year ([Leviticus 25:2-7](#)), which at any rate latterly the Jews had got to pay much attention to (1 Macc. 6:49, 53; Josephus, 'Ant.,' 14:10, 6; also 14:16, 2; Tacitus, 'Hist.,' 5:4); or possibly the jubilee years, one such fiftieth year, it might be, falling about this time due. Bengel ('Gnomon') supposes that a sabbatical year might be being held A.D. , to which date he assigns this Epistle; while Wieseler ('Chronicles Synops.,' p. 204, etc., referred to by Bishop Lightfoot) offers a similar conjecture for the year A.D. autumn to A.D. autumn. Very striking is the impatience which the apostle manifests in overhearing as it were the eager discussions occupying the attention of these foolish Galatian Judaizers. Their interest, he perceived, was absorbed by matters which were properly for them things of no concern at all, but which, with ostentatious zeal as such persons do, they were **making** their concern. The cause of their doing so lay, we may believe, in the feeling which was growing up in their minds that such like outward observances would of themselves make their life acceptable to God; this general sentiment habiting itself, in the choice of the particular form of outward ceremonies to be adopted, in the observance of the celebrations given by God to his people for the season of their nonage. The principle itself was no doubt repugnant to the apostle's mind, even apart from the Judaizing form which it was assuming, and which threatened a defection from Christ. Curious regard to such matters he evidently on its own account regards with scorn and impatience. But therewith also the old venerable religion, localized at Jerusalem as its chief seat, would under the impulse of such sentiments be sure to perilously attract their minds away from the "reformation" (διόρθωσις, [Hebrews 9:10](#)) to which it had now been subjected; and they were in danger of losing, nay, had in great degree at least already lost, the zest which they once had felt in embracing the exceeding great and precious gifts which Christ had brought to them. What was there here but the "evil heart of unbelief" spoken of in [Hebrews 3:12](#), "in departing from the living God," now manifesting himself to his people in his Son? It is this animus characterizing the behaviour of the Galatian Churchmen which marks its essential difference as compared with that observance of "days" and "meats" which in [Romans 14](#), the apostle treats as a matter, relative to which Christians were to live in mutual tolerance. As long as a Christian continued to feel his relation to the Lord Jesus ([Romans 14:6-9](#)), it mattered not much if he thought it desirable to observe the Jewish sabbath or to abstain from eating animal food. He might, indeed, make himself thereby chargeable with spiritual unwisdom; the apostle clearly thought he would; but if he still held fast by Christ as the sole and all-sufficing Source to him of righteousness before God and of spiritual life, he was to be received and welcomed as a brother, without being vexed by interference with these foolish tenets of his. It became different when his care for such really indifferent externals took his heart away from a satisfied adherence to the Lord; then his ceremonialism or asceticism became rank and even fatal heresy. And this was what the apostle was fearing on behalf of his once so greatly cherished disciples in Galatia.



# Meyer's NT Commentary

[Galatians 4:10](#). Facts which vouch the ἐπιστρέφετε πάλιν κ.τ.λ. just expressed.

The *interrogative* view, which Griesbach, Koppe, Lachmann, Tischendorf, Hilgenfeld, following Battier (*Bibl. Brem.* VI. p. 104), take, has been again abandoned by Usteri, Schott, and Wieseler; and Hofmann prefers the sense of sorrowful *exclamation*. But the continuance of the reproachful interrogative form ([Galatians 4:9](#)) corresponds better to the increasing pitch of surprise and amazement, and makes [Galatians 4:11](#) come in with greater weight.

παρατηρεῖσθε] Do ye already so far realize your θέλετε? Ye take care, *sedulo vobis observatis*, namely, to neglect nothing which is prescribed in the law for certain days and seasons. Comp. Joseph. *Antt.* iii. 5. Galatians 5 : παρατηρεῖν τὰς ἐβδομάδας; also Dio Cass. liii. 10 (of the observance of a law). The idea *superstitiose* (Winer, Bretschneider, Olshausen, and others) is not implied in παρα, nor the *praeter fidem* which Bengel finds in it.

ἡμέρας] Sabbaths, fast and feast days. Comp. [Romans 14:5-6](#) μῆνας] is usually referred to the *new moons*. But these, the feast-days at the beginning of each month, come under the previous category of ἡμέρας. In keeping with the other points, παρατηρεῖσθαι μῆνας must be the *observance of certain months as pre-eminently sacred months*. Thus the *seventh* month (*Tisri*), as the proper sabbatical month, was specially sacred (see Ewald, *Alterth.* p. 469 f.; Keil, *Archäol.* I. p. 368 ff.); and the fourth, fifth, seventh, and tenth months were distinguished by special fasts.

καιρούς] מועדים, [Leviticus 23:4](#). The holy festal seasons, such as those of the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles, are meant; "quibus hoc aut illud fas erat aut nefas," Erasmus.

ἐνιαυτούς] applies to the sabbatical years (see, as to these, Ewald, p. 488 ff.; Keil, p. 371 ff.), which occurred every seventh year, but not to the jubilee years, which had, at least after the time of Solomon, fallen into abeyance (Ewald, p. 501). But that the Galatians were at that time in some way actually celebrating a sabbatical year (Wieseler), cannot be certainly inferred from ἐνιαυτ., which has in reality its due warrant as belonging to the consistency and completeness of the theory. On the whole passage, comp. [Colossians 2:16](#), and Philo, de septenar. p. 286. From our passage, moreover, we see how far, and within what limits, the Galatians had already been led astray.[190] They had not yet adopted *circumcision*, but were only in danger of being brought to it ([Galatians 5:2-3](#); [Galatians 5:12](#), [Galatians 6:12-13](#)). Nothing at all is said in the epistle as to any *distinction of meats* (comp. Col. *I.c*), except so far as it was implied in the observance of days, etc. Usteri (comp. Rückert) is of opinion that Paul did not mention circumcision and the distinction of meats, because he desired to represent the present religious attitude of his readers as analogous to their *heathen* condition. But, according to the comprehensive idea of the στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, even the mention of circumcision and the distinctions of meats would have been in no way inappropriate to the πάλιν ἄνωθεν. Olshausen quite arbitrarily asserts that the usages mentioned stand *by synecdoche for all*. [190] De Wette very arbitrarily considers that the present tense denotes, not the *reality* then present, but only the necessary consequence of the ἐπιετορ. and δουλ. θέλετε, *conceived* as being already present.

## Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

(10) **Ye observe.**—A compound word, signifying not only “to observe,” but “to observe *scrupulously*.” The word is used by Josephus in his paraphrase of the fourth commandment: “Remember the sabbath day to *keep* it holy” (*Ant. iii. 5, § 5*).

**Days**—*i.e.*, in the first instance and especially, the Jewish sabbaths; but other fasts or festivals which occupied a single day may be included.

**Months.**—The description mounts in an ascending scale—days, months, seasons, years. The “months,” however, mean really “the first day of the month,” the “new moon.” (See [Leviticus 23:24](#); [Numbers 28:11](#); [Psalm 81:3](#).)

**Times.**—*Seasons*: such as the Passover, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles.

**Years.**—Such as the sabbatical year and the year of jubilee. The Apostle is giving a list which is intended to be exhaustive of all Jewish observances, so that it would not necessarily follow that the Galatians had actually kept the year of jubilee, or even that it was kept literally by the Jews at this time.

As to the bearing of this passage on the general question of the observance of seasons, it is to be noticed that the reference is here to the adoption by the Galatians of the *Jewish* seasons as a mark of the extent to which they were prepared to take on themselves the burden of the Mosaic law. It does not necessarily follow that the observance of Christian seasons is condemned. At the same time, it is quite clear that St. Paul places all such matters under the head of “elements” or “rudiments.” They belong to the lowest section of Christian practice, and the more advanced a Christian is the less he needs to be bound by them. This, again, is qualified by the consideration that it is dangerous for any one individual to assume his own advanced condition, and to think himself able to dispense with the safeguards which his brother-Christians require. It is safest to follow the general rule of the Church, so long as it is done *intelligently*—*i.e.*, with a consciousness of the reason and expediency of what is done, and not in a spirit of mere mechanical routine. The comparison between the literal and the spiritual observance of seasons, and the superiority of the latter as the more excellent way, is well brought out by Origen in some comments upon this passage: “If it be objected to us on this subject that we are accustomed to observe certain days—as, for example, the Lord’s Day, the Preparation, the Passover, or Pentecost—I have to answer that, to the perfect Christian—who is ever in his thoughts, words, and deeds serving his natural Lord, God the Word—all his days are the Lord’s, and he is always keeping the Lord’s Day. He, also, who is unceasingly preparing himself for the true life, and abstaining from the pleasures of this life which lead astray so many, such a one is always keeping the Preparation Day. Again, he who considers that ‘Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us,’ and that it is his duty to keep the feast by eating of the flesh of the Word, never ceases to keep the Paschal Feast. And, finally, he who can truly say: ‘We are risen with Christ,’ and ‘He hath exalted us, and made us sit with Him in heavenly places in Christ,’ is always living in the season of Pentecost . . . But the majority of those who are accounted believers are not of this advanced class; but from being either unable or unwilling to keep every day in this manner, they require some sensible memorial to prevent spiritual things from passing away altogether from their minds” (*Against Celsus*, viii. 22, 23).

# May Christians Observe Holidays?

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

**Is it wrong for Christians to celebrate some of the holidays popular in our society—like giving gifts at Christmas time, allowing children to go trick-or-treating at Halloween, or hunting eggs at Easter?**

In considering this issue, several things should be kept in view.

A practice may have originated under certain circumstances but, eventually, have lost that significance—either in whole or at least significantly. There is Bible precedent for dealing with this principle.

Consider the practice of eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols previously—a lively issue in the first century. Here is the background: A meat sacrifice would be made to an idol. After a certain portion was consumed in sacrificial flames (or by the priests), the balance would be sold as common food in the market. The controversy, therefore, arose: is this meat contaminated simply because it had some connection with an idol?

Paul's answer is no (see 1 Corinthians 8:1-13). If one has "knowledge"—i.e., that an idol is "nothing"—and his conscience is not offended, he may eat of that meat. It is not contaminated merely by its former association.

Yet, there is this caution: if one is in an environment wherein some "weak" (i.e., without mature knowledge) brother is liable to be damaged, then it would be best to refrain in that instance, lest the weak brother's conscience be wounded.

It would be wrong to partake religiously of a practice that compromises one's fidelity to the truth. The apostle deals with such a matter in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10. If in a service where sacrifices were being offered to "demons" the Christian were to partake or have "communion" (koinonia—participation, fellowship), with those involved in the illicit worship, such clearly would be sinful (10:20-21).



To practice Christmas, Halloween, or Easter religiously would be unwarranted. **To do so merely as a cultural custom would be a matter of personal judgment.**

In Romans 14, Paul argues the general proposition that there will be different levels of knowledge among brethren and that, to a certain extent, these must be accommodated for the sake of Christian unity. For example, some, out of conviction, choose not to eat meats; others see nothing wrong with such a practice.

The apostle instructs that neither individual is to “set at naught” the other. No man is to create a law in areas of expediency and then demand that all others submit. If an overt act of transgression is not the issue, peace must prevail.


Most folks who are rather sensitive about these cultural practices are not consistent entirely in their own conduct. Consider, for example, the celebration of birthdays. In ancient Egypt, the birthdays of the Pharaohs were considered as “holy” days, with no work being done (McClintock and Strong 1969, 817). Moreover, as John Lightfoot noted: “The Jewish schools esteem the keeping of birthdays a part of idolatrous worship” (1979, 217).

Does this mean that if a man in this era gives his wife a birthday present or if we have a birthday party for a child we have compromised our faith? Surely no one will so allege.

What about the man who takes his wife out for dinner and gives her flowers on Valentine’s Day? Has he yielded to the Romish dogma regarding “Saint Valentine”? When we place flowers on the graves of our loved ones, is this the same as the Hindu practice of putting food on the graves of one’s ancestors? Does having a wedding ceremony in a church building imply that we endorse the Catholic notion that marriage is a “church sacrament”? Surely these queries must be answered negatively.

**Practices can change with time and mean different things to different people. We must not compromise the truth, but neither are we permitted to make spiritual laws for others.**

## *Why Churches of Christ Don't Perform an X-Mas Nativity*



**The Americana Encyclopedia states: “The [Christmas] celebration was not observed in the first centuries of the Christian church, since the Christian usage in general was to celebrate the death of remarkable persons rather than the birth.” The Bible teaches us that the death of Christ is the important thing and not the birth. we are taught to observe the three following memorials: (1) Baptism, a form of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:1-2), (2) The first day of the week, a memorial of Christ’s resurrection, and (3) The Lord’s Supper each first day of the week (Acts 20:7). This is a memorial of the death of Christ.**

AMERICANA

Every year around Christmas time, the newspaper calls and asks if our congregation has scheduled any kind of special service or religious observance for Christmas. I always tell them “No. We have nothing planned.” As Christians, we love to embrace the “Christmas spirit” but not as any kind of religious observance. Even though the “Christian world” at large embraces this holiday as the most sacred and holy day of the year. Yet, members of the church of Christ do not observe it as such.

Why is that? Because, as Christians, everything we do in the name of religion must be in accordance with the teachings and doctrines of Christ. Col. 3:17 “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.” All religious practices, especially worship, must be according to truth. Jn.4:24 “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” Truth derives itself from the Word of God. Jn.17:17 “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” Christ denounces any religious practice that does not originate with the Father as vain religion. Mat. 15:9 “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”

If “Christmas” didn’t originate with God, then what is the origin of the religious observance of “Christmas”? Before we begin, we need to notice that there is no mention of observing the birthday of Jesus as a religious holiday in the New Testament. Neither is there a record of it being observed by the early church during the first three Christian centuries. It was not ordained by Christ, not taught as doctrine by His apostles and not observed by the early Christians. If authorization to observe the birthday of Jesus did not come from God, from Jesus, or from the teachings of the Holy Spirit, given by inspiration through the apostles, then it can only be of men. There is no other conclusion that can be drawn – the religious observance of “Christmas” must originate with men and therefore it is a vain religious practice. The Word “Christmas” comes from “Christ Mass” or the “Mass of Christ”. A “mass” is a Catholic observance of the Eucharist, or “Lord’s Supper.” The “Christ Mass” is the religious observance of the Eucharist to honor the birth of Jesus. The “Christ Mass” is observed by the Catholic church on December 25th, regardless of what day of the week it falls upon. The “Christmas Holiday” originated with the Catholic church centuries after the apostolic era.

Our denominational friends say, with the best of intentions, “Let’s put Christ back into Christmas!” However, they need to realize that Christ was never in Christmas. And so it is that at this time of the year we must ask ourselves, “Do we want to be the church that one reads of in the New Testament? Do we want to be like that God-fearing, Bible believing, Bible teaching, speaking where the Bible speaks – silent where the Bible is silent – church that Jesus died to save? Or do we want to be like the rest of the world around us and celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday?” I believe that if we were to observe “Christmas” as a religious holiday, we would then be guilty of the same kind of vain religion that the Jesus spoke of in Mat. 15:7-9.

We must also ask ourselves, “Which is more important? Christ’s birth? Or, Christ’s Death?” His birth is mentioned in the gospel accounts; therefore, we ought to study those scriptures. However, we must also realize that Jesus was not simply born to live on this earth – perpetually the “Babe-in-the-Manger”. Jesus was born to die for our sins. 1Cor. 15:3-4 “...Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.” Jesus was born to live and set an example that we are to follow. 1Pet. 2:21 “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” His virgin birth fulfilled prophecy, provided proof that He is the Messiah, and began the final stage of the God’s plan to redeem man, which culminated with His death.

People love the “Babe-in-the-Manger” because He condemns no one, judges no one and teaches us only that God loved us enough to send His Only-Begotten Son. The man that the “Babe-in-the-Manger” grew into is not so popular because He condemns and judges all those who do not keep His commandments and all those who practice vain religion. – *Church of Christ Articles*



# Custer Church Road of Christ

## Articles

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### *Putting Christ Back Into Christmas?*

**Kyle Campbell**

**05/15/15 - Doctrinal Discussions**

This is the time of the year where millions celebrate the birth of Christ. Even the name implies its relation to Christ. “Christ’s Mass” was a special time to celebrate the birth of Jesus. The idea of the mass is that Christ is offered again in sacrifice each time the mass is said.

If you go by any denominational church building this time of year, you will probably see slogans on their outdoor signs like, “Let’s put Christ back into Christmas” or “Jesus is the reason for the season.” Some preachers really like to ring this message out. Some will even ask, “What are you going to give Christ on His birthday?” Even some liberal churches of Christ will have messages like these emblazoned on their buildings. A lot of groups will organize and hold Christmas programs for the community.

The term “holiday” comes from the Old English and it means “Holy Day.” Since Christmas is recognized by most people as a religious holiday, it would be good for us to study its meaning. Considering Christmas has the word “Christ” in it, it should have some connection with our Lord. If there is a connection with the Lord, then we should be able to turn to our Bibles and read of this observance. However, what you read today may shock you.

Most people probably think that people who do not celebrate Christmas in the fullest sense are atheists or anti-Christian because they choose not “to commemorate the birth of Christ.” But I want us to know the real facts. Some of you may be thinking, “What do you mean real facts? Isn’t it in the Bible?” No, it is not in the Bible. Many are shocked when they are told of this fact. Matthew and Luke are the only two gospels that deal with the birth of Jesus. Neither of these men give a date (year, month or day) for His birth.

In **1 Thessalonians 5:21** we are told to “prove all things.” We are never to accept something as truth unless we have first tested it in the light of the word of God. If this annual observance is really Christ’s birthday and if God wants us to render special service in memory of that day, then we ought to be able to find the necessary information in the Bible. On the other hand, if the Bible does not sanction this day, we should honestly accept the truth.

If there is no mention of Christmas in God’s word, then it is not from God; it is from man. God has given us “all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (**2 Peter 1:3**). Christ promised that the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all truth (**John 16:13**), but He did not tell them the month nor the day of the month to observe His birth. In fact, you will not find one apostle mentioning anything about the day of Christ’s birth. The first century Christians never celebrated any such day as Christmas.

In order to find Christmas, one must go outside of the Bible. If you will look in every major encyclopedia, you will find that no one can pinpoint the date of Christ's birth. In fact, chances are that Christ was born sometime between April and October because December 25th falls within the rainy season in Palestine; therefore, the shepherds would hardly have been in the fields at night as they were when Jesus was born (**Luke 2:8**).

Most encyclopedias and a host of religious scholars place the first Christmas observance somewhere between A.D. 300-350. It is believed that in A.D. 345, Bishop Liberius of Rome ordered the people to celebrate Christmas on December 25th. Christmas probably does not date earlier than A.D. 200. The most likely theory and most generally accepted one is that the birth of Christ was assigned to the date of the winter solstice. This date is December 21st in our Roman calendar, but was December 25th in the Julian calendar which predated our own. The solstice, when the days begin to lengthen in the northern hemisphere, was a time of rejoicing among many ancient cultures and was referred to by pagans as the "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun." During the third century, the Emperor Aurelian proclaimed December 25th as a special day dedicated to the sun-god, whose cult was very strong in Rome at that time. Even before this time, Christian writers already had begun to refer to Jesus as the "Sun of Justice."

It was logical that as the gospel began to dominate the religious scene in the Roman Empire, the date of the "newborn sun" should be chosen as the birthdate of Christ. Since December 25th was a familiar pagan feast day, it was not very difficult to change the purpose of celebrating the day and give it a religious significance with a supposedly "Christian" flavor. Furthermore, the date of Dec. 25th was undoubtedly chosen for its nearness to Epiphany, which, in the East, was celebrated on January 6th & originally included a commemoration of the nativity and the visit of the Magi. This has given rise in the west to the notion of a twelve-day festival, starting on December 25th, and ending on January 6th, called the twelve days of Christmas. In popular celebration, Epiphany is far more ancient than Christmas. Technically it is more important than Christmas, ranking after Easter and Pentecost.

The origins of "St. Nick" and the Christmas Tree are also Roman Catholic and pagan. In Asia Minor, there lived a Bishop whose name was Nicholas. He was said to be very liberal with his wealth. After he died, people are said to have paid tribute to him by exchanging gifts on December 6th. Later these gifts came to be given at Christmas and Bishop Nicholas, who had by then been "sainted," became the Christmas saint.

It was the practice of the Teuton pagans to worship a god called Odin during which the sacrificed a child before Odin's "sacred oak." In the eighth century, Boniface persuaded them to abandon this worship and to cut down a big fir tree, take it home and celebrate around it with their children. The big tree, with its evergreen leaves and its top branch pointing straight to heaven, was supposed to represent immortality. The ancient English used holly branches in their Druidic services on feast days. The "missionaries" under Pope Gregory in A.D. 601 spread the legend that the crown of thorns upon the head of Christ was wreathed with holly and that the berries turned from white to red on the day of the crucifixion. The long holly branches were then woven into fat "Christmas wreaths."

So, it is obvious from studying history that Catholicism and paganism, not the Bible, is responsible both for Christmas and much of the tradition surrounding it. The New Book of Knowledge says that Christmas came about by the "efforts of the early churchmen in Rome to change pagan customs into Christian rites." Therefore, a Christian will not attach any religious significance to Christmas. They will not have any "mass" for Christ, will send no religious cards, or engage in any religious services commemorating the birth of Christ or in any way indicate that anything they do is done because they consider the season to be honoring the birth of Christ.

God authorized no religious observances peculiar to December and January. But He does warn against the “doctrines and commandments of men” (**Matthew 15:9**). He said through the apostle Paul that those who “pervert the gospel of Christ,” “observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid for you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain” (**Colossians 2:2; Galatians 1:7; 4:10-11**). If we offer to God worship that He has not authorized, we are being presumptuous. **Psalm 19:13** says, “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression.”

**Christ cannot be put back into Christmas because He was never there in the first place! Christmas was conceived in an unauthorized, unscriptural Roman Catholic and pagan background. Maybe you know of people who are only “religious” (that is, they only think about God and Christ) around Christmas. It is such a shame to see people who zealously observe Christmas as Christ’s birth because this worship, according to the Bible, is vain.**

The emphasis in the New Testament is on the death of Christ, not His birth. God has left three memorials to Christ; all of which point to His death and resurrection: (1) God has commanded that unsaved people believe and be baptized in Christ’s name (**Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-5; 1 Peter 3:20-22**); (2) He has commanded that His people observe the death of Jesus every first day of the week (Sunday, the Lord’s day). By partaking of the Lord’s Supper together we “shew the Lord’s death till he come” (**1 Corinthians 11:23-29**) and (3) worship on the Lord’s day, the first day of the week, reminds us of His resurrection (**Matthew 28:1; Acts 20:7; Revelation 1:10**). **God does not want His Son remembered as a baby lying in a manger, but as the suffering Savior and resurrected Redeemer!**



# Should I Celebrate Christmas?

David A. Padfield

Christmas is just around the corner and already we can see signs telling us to "Put Christ back into Christmas." People everywhere are saying Christmas is too commercialized and that we are overlooking the real meaning of Christmas. Some preachers are asking, "What are you going to give Christ on his birthday?" Most churches are organizing Christmas plays, cantatas and programs.

Since Christmas is recognized by most people as a religious Holy Day, it would be good for us to study its meaning. Considering Christmas has the word Christ in it, it should have some connection with the Lord. If there is a connection with the Lord, we should be able to turn to the New Testament and read of this observance. However, upon a careful examination, we fail to find a single reference to this day in the word of God.

When did men first start observing this special day? To answer this question, we have to go outside the New Testament. Historians tell us it was nearly three centuries after the death of Christ before a day was set aside for a special observance for his birth. "Christmas was for the first time celebrated in Rome in 354, in Constantinople in 379, and in Antioch in 388" (Commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Noval Geldenhuys, p. 102). A commonly known preacher during this time mentioned the late origin of Christmas. "Chrysostom, in a Christmas sermon, A.D. 386, says, 'It is not ten years since this day was clearly known to us...' (Unger Bible Dictionary, p. 196). "Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the church, and before the fifth century there was no general consensus of opinion as to when it should come in the calendar, whether January 6th, March 25th, or December 25th" (Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 5, p. 641).

**When was Jesus born? It comes as a shock to many individuals that the Bible does not tell us when Christ was born; but we are reasonably certain he was not born in December.**

Nearly everyone remembers reading about the appearance of an angel to the shepherds. In [Luke 2:8](#) we read, "Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night." This rules out the birth of Christ as a winter event. "According to this statement, Jesus cannot have been born in December, in the middle of the rainy season, as has been since the fourth century supposed. . . According to the Rabbins, the driving forth of the flocks took place in March, the bringing in of them in November" (Critical and Exegetical Handbook To The Gospels of Mark and Luke, H.A.W. Meyer, p. 273).

Adam Clarke makes this observation: "It was a custom among the Jews to send out their sheep to the deserts, about the Passover, and bring them home at the commencement of the first rain; during the time they were out, the shepherds watched them night and day. As the Passover occurred in the spring, and the first rain began early in the month of Marchesvan, which answers to our part of October and November, we find that the sheep were kept out in the open county during the whole of the summer. And as these shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that, consequently, our Lord was not born on the 25th of December, when no flocks were out in the fields" (Adam Clarke's Commentary, p. 857).

What about the three wise men? In every city across America you can see the famous "nativity scene" with the shepherds, Mary and Joseph, baby Jesus and the "three wise men." I do not know how many wise men there were, but I am certain they were never at the manger! Matthew tells us when they found Jesus they went "into the house" ([Matt. 2:1-11](#)). No mention is made of the manger. "They came to Jerusalem after Jesus had been presented in the temple, and taken back to Bethlehem, and, therefore, when the infant Jesus was more than forty days old. They must have come at least forty days before the death of Herod, for he spent the last forty days of his life at Jericho and the baths of Callirrhoe; the wise men found him still at Jerusalem. Jesus must, therefore, have been at least 80 days old when Herod died" (Fourfold Gospel, J.W. MeGarvey, pp. 42, 43).

Who decided to make December 25 the birthday of Christ? This credit goes to the Roman Catholic Church. They explain it like this: "Numerous theories have been put forward through the last 2,000 years to explain December 25 as Christmas Day. The most likely one, however, the one most generally accepted by scholars now, is that the birth of Christ was assigned to the date of the winter solstice. This date is December 21 in our calendar, but was December 25 in the Julian calendar which predated our own. . . . The solstice, when days begin to lengthen in the northern hemisphere, was referred to by pagans as the 'Birthday of the Unconquered Sun.' During the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Emperor Aurelian proclaimed December 25 as a special day dedicated to the sun-god, whose cult was very strong in Rome at that time. Even before this time, Christian writers already had begun to refer to Jesus as the Sun of Justice. It seemed quite logical, therefore, that as Christianity began to dominate the religious scene in the Roman Empire, the date of the 'new-born sun' should be chosen as the birthdate of Christ. Apparently, it bothers some people that the date for Christmas has its roots in a pagan feast. Be that as it may, it's the best explanation we have for the choice of December 25 to celebrate the birth of Jesus" (The New Question Box, pp. 28-29).

This December observance originated with pagans as a feast day to their sun-god, Mithra. It was changed into a "Christian holy day" by the Roman Catholic Church.

Don't you think we need to observe the birth of Christ? People often ask this question, but I usually ask this in return, "Why should we?" [2 Peter 1:3](#) tells us that God has given us "all things that pertain to life and godliness." Everything I need to know of a religious nature has been revealed in the Bible. [1 Peter 4:11](#) says that if I speak, I must speak "as the oracles of God." If God would have wanted us to observe the birth of Christ, he most assuredly would have told us!

How should I remember Jesus? God has left three memorials to Christ – all of which point to his death and resurrection.

First, baptism in water reminds us of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus ([Rom. 6:3-4](#)).

Second, the Lord's supper is a constant reminder of his death. As we partake of the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, we "proclaim the Lord's death till he comes" ([1 Cor. 11:26](#)).

Third, our worship on the Lord's day, the first day of the week, reminds us of his resurrection ([Matt. 28:1](#); [Acts 20:7](#); [Rev. 1:10](#)).

**God does not want his Son remembered as a baby lying in a manger, but as the suffering Savior and now resurrected Redeemer.**

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Westside Church of Christ



# Christmas Is Idolatry

By Robert Wayne LaCoste

On one of the recent meetings, a family asked me to an evening meal in their home. Naturally, as any good red-blooded American who loves Italian food would, I accepted. I don't suppose I had been seated five minutes when I was asked, "Bob, how do you feel about Christmas? Do you observe it?"

My answer for the past 25 years has always been the same. "I surely do not observe it as the birth of Christ, since God's word says nothing about the birth of God's Son from a when standpoint. However, I have not any problem with observing it as any other national holiday in our country, paying notice to the folklore and festivities surrounding it, No Christian can attach any spiritual significance to it, though. A Christian can observe it non-religiously."

My brother in Christ seemed startled at my response, and I feel that he spoke before thinking, as the next comment surely got my attention. "Well, Bob, to me it's all idolatry." Now, I have been called a lot of things over the years, but being called an idolater (and by one of my own brethren in Christ!) was indeed an eyebrow raiser. Since this brother had a son, I asked, "Was your son ever circumcised?" "Yes, he was," came the response. "Why do you ask?" "Because Paul said 'that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing' (Gal. 5:2)." "Well, err, he was circumcised, but not for spiritual reasons." "Yes, I'm sure that's the case," I said. "But now, if you can take an act that was originally intended to be for spiritual reasons, and then observe it non-spiritually or non-religiously, then why can't I take a day that was originated for spiritual reasons & observe it non-religiously?" My brother's tone softened, his attitude changed remarkably, and he uttered, "I don't press my convictions on Christmas. I take note of my brethren's conscience and respect it." "Ah," I said, "Now there's something we both agree on. Surely, we must respect one another's feeling on Christmas and not allow that liberty we hold to be, a cause of offense or stumbling one to the other."

I wish more conversations about Christmas would end as this one. Dear reader, I have seen those professing to be children of God who will take something like Christmas and further divide God's people. Just what we needed right? Wrong! What we need is a respect for one another's conscience and allow that brother or sister their liberty as long as it isn't flaunted in our face. Surely this is why Paul wrote Romans 14. This non-religious observance of Christmas is like the eating of meats and observing of other days, as the Romans -did. Paul noted, "One man esteemeth one. day above another; another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5).

Some consider putting up a tree or decorating their house hypocritical. "How could you ever convince your neighbor, especially if he's Catholic, that you don't believe in Christmas?" Oh, but I do believe in Christmas – from a non-religious standpoint. I have also been known to put a skeleton oil my door at Halloween or put a pumpkin in the window; however, that doesn't mean I follow the pagan occult that originated that holiday, either! Dear reader, I know of Jews who put up lights and decorate things around Christmas time. Have you ever met a Jew who believed in the birth of Christ as being 12-25, or for that matter believed in Christ, period? Let's get serious! I may rest on Saturday, but no one has ever accused me of being a Seventh Day Adventist. I have had fish on Friday, but no one ever accused me of being a conservative Catholic. My, kids dress up and go trick-or-treating on Halloween, but none ever accused us of paganism. In the years and years of putting up my plastic Christmas tree no one has ever accused me of believing December 25 as the birth date of Jesus!

The issue again is: I will not flaunt my liberty. I will respect the feelings of my brethren opposed to an observation of this holiday, but as I respect theirs, I would appreciate not being branded as an idolater by them. Only when we make those teachings of Christ that are written in Scripture the standard for "righteous judgment" (John 7:24) and avoid any form of railing against a brother who chooses to exercise a liberty not regulated by God, shall we then, dwell together in the peace the Lord taught.

Have fun, this holiday season. Observe what God wants observed, not man; but at the same time, let's allow your brethren their rightful liberty in Christ Jesus. *Guardian of Truth*

