

Preface

Considered by many retailers to be the most important holiday of the year, Christmas is often bemoaned as having become too commercialized. Many, in our culture, max-out their credit cards in a flurry of buying for those whom they feel the need to impress, appease, or to whom they feel a sense of obligation. The cry is often that we need to pause for a moment in the midst of the bedlam, and return to the old-fashioned traditions that were about family and enjoying time together. Perhaps you can relate to these feelings.

However, we must pause for just a moment longer and consider whether we really know what this season is all about. Many who profess to be Christians raise the cry, “Jesus is the reason for the season,” or “put Christ back into Christmas,” which I’m sure we’ve all heard at one time or another, or maybe even voiced. Is He really the reason for the season? Was Christ ever a part of the celebration, or have we simply lost sight of where this season of celebration began? Perhaps we might even acknowledge that some pagan traditions have had an influence, but, like so many today, are we willing to overlook a little paganism – after all, we don’t celebrate that, do we?

If we call ourselves Christians, then we must be prepared to measure all that we do according to the standard of God’s Word. The fact that the majority of Christians are participating in the celebrations of this season does not automatically render them acceptable to God. God’s standards do not vary – if something was Biblically wrong a thousand years ago, then it is still wrong today. To put it another way, a long history of involvement in a practice may well make it a tradition, but that does nothing to sanctify it before God. The question that we must ask ourselves is this: Am I willing to change my conduct in order to be obedient to the teachings of the Word of God? If not, then I must ask myself whether I have been born-again by the Spirit of God. That is not an unbiblical exercise, for Paul issued the command: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ...” (2 Corinthians 13:5).

The challenge that I humbly lay before you, the reader, is this: read on with a mind prepared to accept what is supported by the Word of God. God’s heart-desire for us is that we would live according to His calling; “... put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). Let us strive to live in obedience to God’s Word, for then we will exemplify the righteousness of walking with the Spirit of God (Romans 8:4), and, thereby, we will demonstrate our love for the Lord Jesus Christ, Who purchased us out of sin to Himself (John 14:15). God bless you to that end!

All Scriptures are taken from the King James Version.

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Introduction

Many will acknowledge that the celebration of Christmas is without explicit Biblical authority. Nowhere in Scripture will you find anything that would indicate that we are to celebrate the birth of Jesus, which many readily proclaim to be the “reason for the season.” As a matter of interest, the *Encyclopedia Judaica* states that “the celebration of birthdays is unknown in traditional Jewish ritual.”¹ However, on the other hand, the *Jewish Encyclopedia* states that for “the second or third birthday of a child whose coming into the world was very much desired by his parents was usually made the occasion of a feast, because the child was then weaned, and had consequently passed the dangerous and uncertain stage of infancy.”² In Genesis we read of Abraham making a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned, which, accordingly, could have been held on his birthday (Genesis 21:8). However, we find no Biblical record of anyone celebrating their birthday on a regular basis; the only birthday celebrations mentioned in Scripture are for two godless kings: Pharaoh (Genesis 40:20) and Herod (Mark 6:21). It is clear that everyone marked the passage of the years, but there is no evidence that the saints of God made celebrations for the annual occasion. From this we could conclude that it was very unlikely that Joseph and Mary held birthday parties for Jesus as He was growing up, but it is equally clear that they marked the passage of time in His life (Luke 2:42). You might wonder why I have included this information, but, as incredible as it might seem, I have faced the serious argument that, since Joseph and Mary probably celebrated Jesus’ birthday as He was growing up, we should, therefore, celebrate His birth on December 25! Clearly, this is based on nothing more than wild, subjective speculation, and a determination to hold onto a tradition that has been deemed to be important.

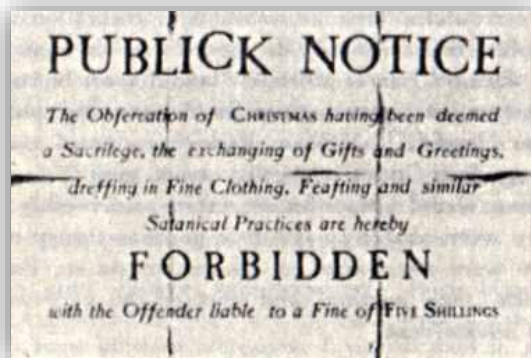
Nevertheless, this does not make remembering Christ’s birth wrong, but, in a world that is rife with rationalism, we must be very careful as to how we remember His birth. In the Scriptures (Matthew 1-2; Luke 2) we have the narration of the events surrounding His birth, but the date is carefully excluded. Therefore, we can freely celebrate His coming to earth, for He left the splendor of heaven for the express purpose of purchasing our redemption from sin – what could be a better reason for celebration! However, our reflection on the sacrifice that He made by coming to earth must not be looked upon as a “birthday” celebration once a year, but, rather, daily heartfelt gratitude that He was willing to leave heaven’s glory to become Immanuel, “God with us.” The best way to celebrate His birth is to live in obedience to the Scriptures, His Word; Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Unfortunately, Christians today seem determined to mix their

¹ *Encyclopedia Judaica*, “birthday.”

² <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3322-birthday>

“remembering Jesus’ birth” with the hugely popular festivities of the world – even if it is to show that we celebrate His birth in a different manner than the rest of society (yes, I’ve heard that excuse as well). Objectively, we must recognize that our ability to rationalize has led to many “reasons” for keeping the tradition with which we have all become familiar. This is a matter for great concern, as we will discover.

Something that we may not be aware of is that it was the pagan and Catholic origins of this December festival season that led John Calvin to object to the celebrations,³ why the Puritans (following Calvin’s Reformed position) refused to



even acknowledge them, and the reason that the holiday was, at one time, outlawed altogether in Boston.⁴ It seems that the majority of today’s Christians blindly claim this season as being rightfully theirs, ignorant (whether deliberately or naively) of the fact that many, in by-gone days, have condemned it because it was pagan.

Ever since Adam chose to violate God’s commandment, mankind’s propensity to sin has left no one out; we sin because that is who we are – we are born sinners, children of Adam. However, as Christians, those who have been truly born-again by the Spirit of God, we continually face an enemy who goes out of his way to snare us; there is nothing that gives Satan more torment than someone who is prepared to walk in obedience to the Lord’s commands. Before we consider anything about this season of celebration, we must reflect on what God would have of us; this will provide a foundation upon which we can then build a Biblical understanding of this subject.

What we face today (specifically regarding the season in question) is nothing new; Moses addressed the children of Israel about a similar matter. “When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor

³ <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/reformers-disagreement-on-christmas-yields-lessons/>.

⁴ <https://www.wbur.org/news/2022/12/24/mass-holiday-feasts-puritans-christmas-celebration-ban>.

diminish from it” (Deuteronomy 12:29-31). Moses proclaimed two things that the Lord wanted Israel to understand: 1) do not go after the gods of the inhabitants of the land, and 2) give diligence to do the Lord’s commands without variance. It was common at this time for the conquering nations to inquire as to how the defeated peoples served their gods; in their superstition, they were concerned that the gods, with which they were unfamiliar, would require particular rituals in order to be appeased. However, God’s instruction through Moses was that this pagan tradition was not to be followed; Israel was simply to enter the land, defeat the inhabitants, and do what the Lord had commanded. This instruction is timeless, and is as applicable to us today as it was to Israel of old. To the Philippians, Paul said, “Do all things without murmurings or disputing” (Philippians 2:14); the context of this establishes that we are to walk in obedience to God’s commands without complaining and without questioning what He asks of us. If we hold obedience to God’s commands as our focus, then the paganism around us will not be a distraction.

As we follow the history of Israel forward, we find this recorded of them at the time that the Lord was about to use the Assyrians to remove their northern tribes: “... the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God ... and had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes of the heathen And the children of Israel did secretly *those* things that *were* not right against the LORD their God, and they built them high places [a cultic platform – used in idol worship] in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fenced city. And they set them up images [monuments] and groves [the word is *asherah* – the name of a Canaanite goddess] in every high hill, and under every green tree [where they carried out pagan rituals]: And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as *did* the heathen whom the LORD carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke the LORD to anger: For they served idols, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing” (2 Kings 17:7-12).⁵ Despite Moses’ admonition to avoid the gods of the heathen, the Israelites embraced them. Although they were supposed to remove the heathen from the land, that isn’t what took place: they conquered some, made treaties with others, and lived among the rest. Temptation to depart from the Lord was close at hand, and, by allowing their eyes to turn away from the Lord and His commands, they fell prey to paganism.

Some year later, by the time of Jeremiah, not much had changed; we’ve seen that Israel did not heed the words of Moses, and so the problems that Jeremiah faced were nothing new. Consider the words of the Lord through this prophet: “Hear ye the word which the LORD speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven [taken as omens of favor or doom; astrology]; for the heathen are dismayed at them.

⁵ Strong’s Online; Brown Driver Briggs Lexicon.

For the customs of the people *are* vain [vanity, literally a vapor or breath] ...” (Jeremiah 10:1-3).⁶ The overarching principle that the Lord wanted Israel (and wants us) to learn is this: do not take on the life-style of the heathen! What is unmistakable in this is God’s call to separate from heathen practices! This is a “thus saith the Lord,” which we must heed for our spiritual wellbeing; this word is just as certain for us today – **we are not to learn the way of the heathen!** Paul reiterated this principle to the Corinthians: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers ... Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you ...” (2 Corinthians 6:14, 17). However, when viewed through the eyes of compromise, the *unclean* can often appear to be clean and pure. As Eve considered the forbidden fruit after listening to the smooth words of the devil, she saw something that was good for food, it was beautiful to look upon, and it would make the partaker wise (Genesis 3:6); the *unclean* (forbidden) took on the aura of all that was good. Through the years, the world (with all of its uncleanness) has steadily crept into the camp of Christianity (not unlike the experiences of Israel), so that, today, there often remains little difference between the two.

For those who are at all concerned about living in accordance with God’s Word (which must be every child of God), even a hint of pagan infiltration should be sufficient to make us step away. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Notice the conditional promise that the Lord extends: **if** we separate from the unclean, **then** He will receive us; do not miss the alternative – if we do not separate, then He will not receive us. Today’s Christians are like Israel of old; they have “followed ... the gods of the people that *were* round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger” (Judges 2:12). This is why it is good for us to examine the history of commonly accepted practices in order to determine if there is a relationship with paganism – if there is an element of uncleanness of which we might not be aware, at first glance. If there is, then God’s very clear message is that we must separate from them. Christmas, the tradition under scrutiny here, has been claimed by Christians as being their celebration (hence

⁶ Strong’s Online; BDB.

we hear, “Jesus is the reason for the season”), yet we must take heed lest we, too, become guilty of practicing paganism.

The Date

Oddly enough, it seems to be fairly widely acknowledged that Jesus’ birth did not take place on December 25, yet, for some reason, this does not seem to cause Christians to pause and wonder about the rest of the celebration. Rather, it seems to be tucked away as so much irrelevant information, another piece of trivia that really doesn’t change anything – let the festivities continue!

Even a superficial inquiry into the significance of December 25 will reveal that its roots are really quite ancient. Most pagan practices are fraught with superstition, and, as we trace the historical importance of this date, it is no exception. As the ancient pagans would observe the sun sinking lower and lower in the sky as the year approached the winter solstice, they instituted a celebration to encourage the sun-god to rise again, and bring them warmth and renewed life in the world around them. Were they such dullards that they did not recognize the passing of the seasons? In all likelihood, in their rejection of the God of creation, it simply became a custom to use this as an excuse for a time of drunkenness, gluttony and unbridled revelry. Whatever the rationale for the festivities, the annual event soon became an entrenched tradition, and this reason for the season was established long before Jesus came to earth.

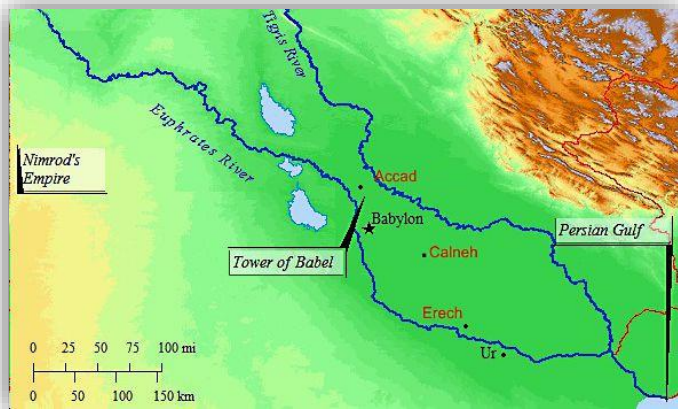


Emperor Aurelian

In AD 274, the Emperor Aurelian dedicated a temple to the sun-god Sol on December 25, and instituted the *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* (meaning, birthday of the Invincible Sun).⁷ This was simply added to the existing Saturnalia celebrations; pagan religions were very syncretistic, they easily borrowed from one another anything that would enhance what they already observed. However, this did not originate with Rome, but, in fact, came from Persia and the infamous city of Babylon. Yet the worship of a sun-god was not unique to Persia, for many ancient civilizations included the worship of gods and goddesses of the sun – from Japan to India to Greece to Central America, sun-worship was part of their ancient cultures.⁸

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Invictus.

⁸ <https://www.thoughtco.com/sun-gods-and-sun-goddesses-121167>.



It is generally accepted that ancient Babylon originated through the efforts of Nimrod (whose name means *rebellion* or *the valiant*⁹), who “began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before [against] the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before [against] the LORD” (Genesis 10:8-10).¹⁰ The Hebrew word

translated as *mighty one* also includes the concept of one who magnifies himself, a tyrant.¹¹ Nimrod became powerful as a successful hunter and provider for all who followed him. It seems evident that Nimrod earned his name from those about him – he was mighty before the people, but he was in rebellion against the Lord. He ensured that his people looked to him for guidance, provisions, and protection, rather than to Jehovah; hence, he became the ruler of a kingdom: “And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar” (Genesis 10:10) – central to what became known as Persia. Clearly, Nimrod was a leader who accomplished much, and his influence was significant.

Many historians identify Nimrod as one who began his practices as an alternative to walking in the ways of the true God; if he was not walking with God, then he must have been in step with Satan – there are no other options available (Jesus made that abundantly clear – Luke 11:23). What we see, as the mythology of the pagan gods and goddesses evolved, is that Satan, the great author of lies and rebellion (Jesus called him the father of lies – John 8:44), is also a great counterfeiter. Indeed, the pagan gods and goddesses changed through time; for example, Tammuz (worshipped by the Israelites, Ezekiel 8:14) began as a pastoral god about 2600 BC, was later viewed as more of an agricultural god, and finally, by merging with another god, he held the power of fertility.¹² It is God Who does not change (Malachi 3:6), whereas Satan will change how he appears so that he is able to deceive as many as possible; gods and goddesses constantly evolved through time, assumed different names in different cultures, and their story would change to afford them greater power and following. A more recent sun-god of ancient Persia was named Mithra and, by the time of the Roman Empire, the cult of Mithraism spread westward and became foundational for religion in Rome. What is interesting, is that Mithra is said

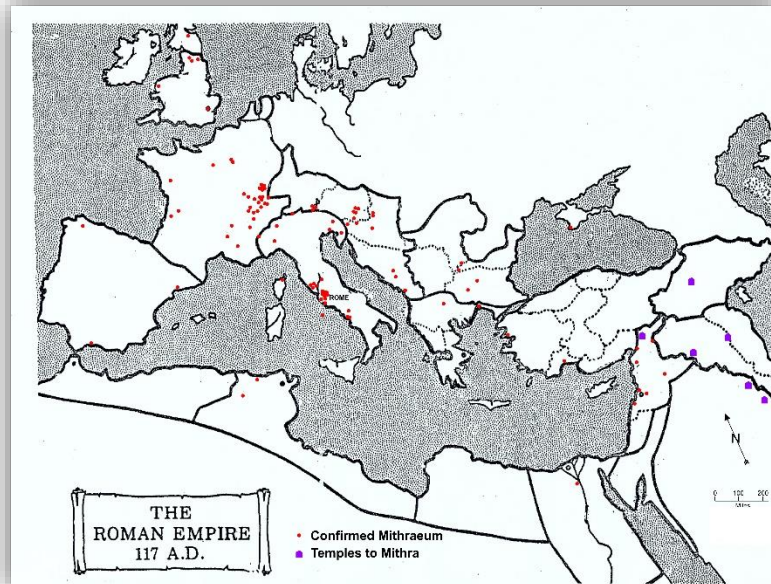
⁹ Strong's Online.

¹⁰ Kiel & Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament.

¹¹ BDB.

¹² <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tammuz-Mesopotamian-god>.

to have been born of an “immaculate virgin mother,” Anahita (who was called the Mother of God), on December 25th.¹³ By slaying a bull, Mithra claimed victory over death and became a savior god;¹⁴ it is held that he ascended to heaven in 208 BC at the age of 64 years.¹⁵ Considering that the prophecy of Isaiah was written about 700-681 BC, Satan had ample time to prepare a counterfeit to the prophecy: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel” (Isaiah 7:14). It was Mithraism with which the Christians of the first few centuries AD bumped heads, a religion that had become very well entrenched from one end of the Empire to the other, but nowhere more so than in the city of Rome (see map).¹⁶ As a god of victory, Mithra was particularly popular among soldiers, and places of worship (called mithraeums) were erected everywhere that the armies of Rome went.



It is fascinating to read of ungodly historians who point out the similarities between the heathen religious systems and the truths of God, and then leap to the conclusion that the truth (which they refer to as the Judeo-Christian religion) has been derived from the error of pagan mythology. They use this as justification to equate the Word of God with the pagan literature of man’s history, thereby denouncing God’s truth as being no more valid than the mythological musings of pagans. Satan has used this misconstrued perception of history to blind the eyes of many. It is true that many of today’s “Christian” religious practices have been derived from paganism, but such failure must never be confused with the truth that God has given us. Consequently, it is important to give consideration to some of the common practices that take place within Christian circles to determine their integrity in the light of God’s Word.

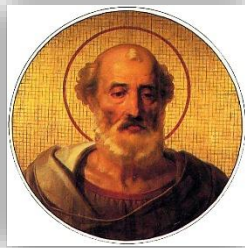
¹³ <https://www.drabruzzi.com/Mithraism%20and%20Christianity.htm>.

¹⁴ <https://romanempirehistory.com/roman-gods/mithras-god/>.

¹⁵ https://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Mithraism/mithraism_and_christianity.htm.

¹⁶ Adapted from: <https://www.mithraeum.eu/map.php>.

It has already been noted that Mithra's birth was assigned to December 25; however, this is not uncommon among the many pagan deities worldwide. "Bacchus of Egypt, Bacchus of Greece, Adonis of Greece, Chrishna of India, Chang-ti of China, Chris of Chaldea ... Sakia of India, Jao Wapaul (a crucified Savior of ancient Britain), were all born on the twenty-fifth of December, according to their respective histories."¹⁷ Many Romans observed the birth of Mithras on December 25, in the midst of their long-standing Saturnalia celebrations, and regarded it as the most holy day of the year.¹⁸ As the Christian religion (to be carefully differentiated from the Christian faith) became officially sanctioned by Rome (through the efforts of



Pope Julius I

Emperors Constantine and Theodosius), the matter of dealing with all of the pagan festivals became an issue – particularly since Mithraism was so deeply entrenched. Convincing the pagans to give up their times of revelry, even for those pagans who “converted” to the new Christian religion, was an impossibility. Practicing the adage that if you can't beat them, then join them, the Bishop of Rome, Julius I (pope from AD 337-352¹⁹), by carefully arranging the Hebrew and

Roman calendars, arrived at December 25 as the day when Jesus' birth was to be celebrated, even though logic, based upon the Gospel accounts, dictated against such a selection. Indeed, this was readily accepted by the people as the emerging Roman Catholic Church drew the pagan festivities of Saturnalia toward a more “Christian” theme, even though the activities continued to be as debased as before. The Romans, who were eager for any celebration, seemed to have little difficulty in making the shift from their pagan gods to a Christianized god as the “reason” for reveling; the reason was of far less importance than the celebration. Somehow, this doesn't sound much different from today.

The date, December 25, is important – but not for any reason that is remotely related to the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Savior for the world. It was a common date for the birth of the sun-god within the traditions of many pagan religions of the world; it fit well with the superstition of encouraging the sun-god to return and breathe new life into the world. Unfortunately, the leaders of the forming Roman Catholic Church had no qualms about taking pagan traditions and molding them so as to give the appearance of being Christian. As we can well imagine, Satan would have encouraged this, as he does with everything that is a violation of God's Word.

¹⁷ http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/kersey_graves/16/chap8.html

¹⁸ http://www.history.com/minisite.do?content_type=Minisite_Generic&content_type_id=1253&display_order=2&sub_display_order=3&mini_id=1290

¹⁹ Although *pope* was originally used by all bishops, it settled particularly upon the Bishop of Rome as he rose in power over his peers due to his close association with the emperors of Rome. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope>.

The Name

The word *Christmas* finds its origins from the Old English, *Cristes mæsse*, and, as is very commonly understood, it comes from simply bringing the words *Christ* and *mass* together.²⁰ With a few exceptions in Spain and Portugal, the Roman Catholic tradition is to uniquely celebrate three masses on December 25: one at midnight, one at dawn, and one during the day; the first celebrates the birth of Jesus, the second His resurrection, and the third is simply a regular mass focused on His death.²¹ The phrase *Mass of Christ* has been found in use as far back as AD 1038,²² with the use of the one word, *Christmas*, dating to the middle of the fourteenth century.²³

What we cannot miss is that the Roman Catholic mass is central to the name of this celebration. The term *mass* includes all aspects of their service; however, at its core is the celebration of the Eucharist, which is also called the Holy Sacrifice.²⁴ Within Catholic tradition, it is believed that “through the words of consecration spoken by the priest” during the Eucharist, the Lord Jesus Christ becomes “present sacramentally, body, blood, soul and divinity” in the bread and the wine; however, this is very carefully clarified: “the two material things, bread and wine, are completely changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, leaving behind only their sensible appearances.”²⁵ Notwithstanding, they have taken this one step further: “Since Christ is sacramentally present under each of the species [the bread and the wine], communion under the species of bread alone makes it possible to receive all the fruit of Eucharistic grace.”²⁶ It is common, particularly in the West, to see only the wafer used in the services; following the service, a consecrated wafer (which they believe to be the body of the Lord Jesus Christ) is often placed in a monstrance and put on display, where it is worshiped by Catholics as being the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a very brief overview of the Catholic tradition as it pertains to the Mass of Christ. There is no Biblical basis for the Mass, the Eucharist is a travesty of the one sacrifice that Christ made for the sins of the world, and there is certainly no grace imparted by God to the participant through this unbiblical practice.

Before we leave this subject of the Mass and the Eucharist, we need to understand just a little more about how the Catholics view this Eucharistic celebration. The Council of Trent declares: “this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the mass, that

²⁰ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=c&p=30&allowed_in_frame=0

²¹ <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/activities/view.cfm?id=1002>

²² <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>

²³ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=c&p=30&allowed_in_frame=0

²⁴ http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P3Y.HTM

²⁵ <http://www.ewtn.com/faith/teachings/euchsum.htm>

²⁶ http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c1a3.htm

same Christ is contained and immolated [sacrificed] in an unbloody manner, who once offered himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross; the holy Synod teaches, that **this sacrifice** [the Eucharist] is truly propitiatory ..." (emphasis added).²⁷ This Council may have met more than four centuries ago, but "it is still present in the doctrine and life of the Church."²⁸ This same section from the Council of Trent appears in a current version of the Catholic Catechism as support for this heresy.²⁹ The essence of this is that the *unbloody* sacrifice made during the Mass is as effective for the cleansing of sins as the sacrifice that Jesus made upon the cross! They sincerely believe that Jesus is being sacrificed again in their Mass celebrations, and that the wafer eaten offers the same cleansing as the blood that Jesus shed while on the cross. This is nothing short of blasphemy! This is the Catholic mass!!

The second king of Rome, Numa Pompilius (reigned 715–673 BC), introduced what came to be considered as the oldest, and most pure religion; frequently when there was a calamity, the people would advocate that they return to the pure religion of Rome, which was introduced by their second king.³⁰ King Numa received this religious practice from his meeting with the highest of gods, Jupiter; the Numa tradition, as it became known, was a bloodless sacrifice (the shedding of blood was actually forbidden).³¹ This would seem to harken back to the sacrifice that Cain made – an "unbloody" sacrifice that was unacceptable to God (Genesis 4:3-5). Within the Numa tradition, the appeasement of the gods was accomplished through offering a *mola salsa*, a small, thin wafer made from ground, parched spelt, salt and water.³² We have just considered a religious system based in Rome that uses a small, thin wafer in its bloodless, sacrificial ceremony; the similarities are striking!

Despite this, the word *Christmas* rolls off the lips of Evangelicals today with no thought given to the travesty done by the Mass to the sacrifice that the Lord made for our sins. After some seven hundred years of use in its one-word form, it seems that we have lost most of our sensitivity to what is offensive to God. Today's Ecumenical stance taken by most Evangelicals only serves to dull their minds even further to the travesty of this word.

The Yule Log

²⁷ <https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2/creeds2.v.i.i.ix.html>.

²⁸ <http://www.catholicculture.org/news/headlines/index.cfm?storyid=19885>

²⁹ <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/resources/sacraments/eucharist/the-sacrament-of-the-eucharist-catechism-of-the-catholic-church/>

³⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Numa_Pompilius

³¹ <http://www.novaroma.org/nr/Numa>

³² http://www.novaroma.org/nr/Mola_salsa

There are differing thoughts on the Yule log within the traditions of the Scandinavian peoples (where it is most common); it was a custom of burning a large log during the time of the winter solstice, something that spread as far west as Ireland, south to Greece and north to Siberia.³³ The practice of yule predates Christianity arriving in the northern regions of what is now Europe; the Old Norse word *Jól* referred to their winter solstice feast of *Jólablot*, and would seem to bear some association with *yule*.³⁴ The tradition celebrated the re-birth of the sun with a continuous light as the days became longer and the sun regained its strength and brought new life to the world around them.



Yule Log Traditions

Tradition says that the log was to be the largest that could be handled by the hearth for which it was intended; generally, it was to be taken from one's own property (never purchased), it was burned in honor of the gods, and it marked the beginning of the winter solstice celebrations. It was also believed that the festivities would continue as long as the log burned, which sometimes extended to twelve days. Offerings of food, wine and decorations were often placed on the log, symbolizing the removal of all of the mistakes, faults and bad choices that the contributors had made in the previous year; there was no need for confession or repentance – simply put a cookie on the log, and let your sins burn away. The log was never permitted to burn up completely, splinters of the log were kept to start the fire for the Yule log of the following year; the portion that was kept was considered to be a talisman that offered protection to the home from fire, lightning and hail.³⁵ However, if the log burned out before it should have (it was supposed to burn for at least 12 hours), it was viewed as a bad omen, and a sign that tragedy would strike the home in the following year. This tradition was fraught with superstitions. Those who adhere to these traditions, even in our day, will acknowledge that the historical root for the celebration is the re-birth to the sun on the shortest day of the year, thereby instilling hope for new life.

“Sadly, now in the 21st century, it [the Yule celebration] is more like a mass exercise in commercialism, even though the church has tried to take over the ancient festival of Yule, so called Christians seem to have no idea what or why they are

³³ <http://www.noelnoelnoel.com/trad/yulelog.html>

³⁴ <https://manyeats.com/history-of-the-yule-log/>.

³⁵ <http://www.noelnoelnoel.com/trad/yulelog.html>

celebrating!”³⁶ It is interesting to read this comment made by a modern pagan who recognizes that the winter solstice celebrations are really theirs, but, that through the efforts of the Roman Catholic Church, so-called Christian themes have been imposed on their most holy day. As one pagan notes: “Our Christian friends are often quite surprised at how enthusiastically we Pagans celebrate the ‘Christmas’ season.”³⁷ Interestingly, the pagans are far more discerning than the Christians in understanding the reality of all the trees, lights and merriment.

Within our traditions, we have probably all heard of the Yule log even if we have never participated in its use during the seasonal celebrations (those of Scandinavian heritage would be more familiar with this custom). One of the reasons that the Yule log lost its favor is the simple fact that hearths began to disappear, and gradually the huge Yule log was replaced by a smaller one that would fit the stoves that came into use, only to be replaced further by a baked, edible “log,” which would grace the tables of those who sought to maintain a semblance of the tradition. However, what cannot be missed is that its roots lie in the paganism of the sun-god and celebrations of the winter solstice.

The Christmas Tree

Now let’s consider what has become central to modern celebrations – Christian and pagan alike. “The history of Christmas trees has many roots, ranging from the use of evergreens in ancient Egypt and Rome to the German traditions of candlelit trees that made its way to America in the 1800s.”³⁸ Egyptians homes were decorated with palm rushes, symbolizing the victory of life over death; the Romans celebrated Saturnalia, in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture, by decorating their homes and temples with evergreen boughs.³⁹ Even though it seems that most



The Christmas tree – early 1900s

³⁶ <http://www.wiccaweb.org.uk/yule.html>

³⁷ <https://www.msu.edu/user/rohdemar/earth/sabbats/yule.html>

³⁸ <https://www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas-trees>.

³⁹ Ibid.

ancient cultures did not bring a whole tree into their homes, they did bring greenery in to celebrate the lengthening of the days; some cultures considered the evergreen to be a special plant of the sun-god because it never lost its appearance of life. The focus on the evergreen during the winter solstice was a reminder of the new life that would come as the sun, once again, began to rise higher in the skies.

Often the words of the Lord to Jeremiah are referred to as being a condemnation of this practice: “Thus saith the LORD, 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 [this is the over-arching principle of what follows; we must guard against simply participating in the pagan customs]: for *one* cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it [beautify it] with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not [so it doesn’t wobble or totter]. They *are* upright [“a hammered work” often formed from a single piece] as the palm tree [as the trunk of a palm, like a column], but speak not: they must needs be borne [carried], because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also *is it* in them to do good” (Jeremiah 10:2-5).⁴⁰ We have looked at several of the pagan practices surrounding the winter solstice, and it is clear from the Lord’s words to Jeremiah that we are not to incorporate any of them into our lives. However, by carefully considering this passage, and comparing it to a similar passage in Isaiah 44:12-19, it would seem that the context deals more generally with idolatry and the making of idols, rather than something like today’s Christmas tree (although a case could be made for calling today’s tree an idol). Having said that, it is very clear that we are to avoid making pagan traditions our own – which would include the practice of bringing trees (or portions thereof) into our homes at the time of the winter solstice. The greater principle, dealt with here, is that we are to guard against becoming involved in the customs of a pagan world (their ways are vain, empty, like a vapor). The practice of bringing an evergreen tree into the house dates back to the Romans and the Egyptians, and probably the Babylonians before them – it springs from the superstitions of a pagan people at the time of the winter solstice, and their perceived need to encourage the sun to rise again to warm the earth. The thrust of Jeremiah 10:2-3 establishes the error of such heathen practices, with the overriding command that we “learn not the way of the heathen,” and Jeremiah 10:10-11 affirms the living power of the true God in contrast to the impotency of the idols.



Christmas tree - modern

⁴⁰ Strong’s Online.

We've mentioned the use of the evergreen within the customs of the Egyptians and the Romans. Consider the Lord's instructions to Israel before they possessed the Promised Land: "These *are* the statutes and judgments, which ye shall observe to do in the land, which the LORD God of thy fathers giveth thee to possess it, all the days that ye live upon the earth. Ye shall utterly destroy all the places, wherein the nations which ye shall possess served their gods, upon the high mountains, and upon the hills, and **under every green tree**: And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves [*asherah*] with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place" (Deuteronomy 12:1-3).⁴¹ Twelve times mention is made of the "green tree" in the Old Testament, and every one of them is in reference to pagan practices. Central to the pagan religious traditions of the people of the land were these *green trees* – they held a place of high regard, symbolizing immortality and fertility. Today, the tradition of the evergreen continues as the tree (whether real or fake) is given the central place within most homes and many churches during this season. However, the word of the Lord is unchanged: "... utterly destroy all the places ... under every green tree ..." (Deuteronomy 12:2-3); "Learn not the way of the heathen ... The customs of the people *are* vain" (Jeremiah 10:2-3). Lest we consider this to be an OT command that has no bearing on us today, consider Paul's words: "And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:16-18). We serve a God Who does not change – how quickly we forget; how easily we turn a blind eye to the Lord's commands.

Decorating the symbol of life (the evergreen tree) dates back at least to Rome, when they were adorned with bits of metal during the Saturnalia celebrations (carried out during the time of the winter solstice). The Scandinavians would put bells in their trees to alert them to the presence of spirits, and they would hang food and other treats on the tree for the spirits. Often atop the tree would be placed a "five-pointed star, the pentagram, symbol of the five elements."⁴² The pentagram is the generally accepted symbol of Wicca, and the five elements are commonly considered to be wood, fire, earth, metal and water (with some variations, depending on the cultural context). Although the star may have changed designs, and even though we might like to think of it as representing the guiding star of the Magi, that does not change the origin of the practice. The reality is that any decorations, whether applied to a tree or to the house generally, would all be in agreement with the ancient Roman celebration of Saturnalia.

⁴¹ Strong's Online.

⁴² http://www.blueworldgardener.co.uk/articles/xmas_tree_pagan.html

Christmas Wreaths

As we have already noted, the evergreen was considered to be a symbol of immortality within the pagan cultures, and we have seen that the Romans and Egyptians all brought the greenery into their homes at the winter solstice as symbols of new life. The wreath has always symbolized honor, importance and success, and originated within the ancient Persian Empire – which should be no surprise.⁴³ It was initially much smaller than what we see today and was worn on the head. Laurel wreaths (which trace their history back to the god, Apollo, in the ancient Greek mythologies) were typically awarded the victors in the early Olympic Games. Eastern Europeans would form a wreath from evergreen boughs, and place candles in it believing that it would bring spring and sunshine sooner.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, the wreath was readily taken into the Catholic Church's traditions, and today the Advent wreath (used to count down the time to the "coming of Christ") is a well-established custom. However, most interestingly, this is no longer an exclusively Catholic tradition. Before my wife and I left the Evangelical Free Church in 2002, the lighting of the Advent wreath candles had become an accepted part of their December traditions; it was simply added without any word of explanation.



Advent Wreath

The wreath is typically made of an evergreen branch, which represents the permanence of life or new life in Christ, and formed into a circle (without beginning or ending), which is said to symbolize the eternity of God. The adaptation of pagan traditions can, obviously, be very easily justified through applying wonderful, spiritually sounding symbolism. Nonetheless, the circular formation of the wreath also represents the sun (and the sun-god), that all-important symbol at the time of the winter solstice. Within ancient Egypt, the circle represented the sun, and became a significant part of the portrayal of their sun-god, Ra.⁴⁵ Interestingly, our word *halo* comes from the Greek *halos*, meaning the disk of the sun or moon;⁴⁶ many of the world's religions use halos to identify those whom they consider to be holy – it is found in ancient Greece and Rome, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Catholicism (as well as many of the Reformation denominations).⁴⁷ A slight modification of the

⁴³ <http://www.worldofchristmas.net/christmas-wreath/history.html>

⁴⁴ <http://festivals.iloveindia.com/christmas/christmas-wreath/history.html>

⁴⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ra>

⁴⁶ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=h&p=2&allowed_in_frame=0

⁴⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Halo_%28religious_iconography%29

symbol for the sun-god, and you have a perfectly acceptable halo – which came to be used prolifically in religious art.

The Advent Wreath typically includes four or five candles, the four represent the four weeks of the advent, the weeks leading up to the celebration of the “birth of Jesus,” and the fifth, if used, represents His birth and is generally lit on December 24. Once again, we have a pagan tradition redefined, tweaked and polished to give an appearance of Christianity. What Christians are too often prone to forget is that Satan is no fool, and he loves to disguise himself as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14); making the pagan sun-god traditions to appear to be “Christian” is a small task for him, and a great victory in sowing confusion in the minds of those who should know better.

Mistletoe

The mistletoe is a plant that typically sends roots out that penetrate a host tree from which it derives its life; even though it is capable of living independently, it is most commonly seen as a parasite, and so it is referred to as a hemiparasite.⁴⁸ The white berries that it produces are considered to be poisonous, yet provide food for birds. The berries are produced around the season of the winter solstice and are said to symbolize new life or immortality (it’s amazing how many things, within paganism, symbolize immortality or new life), and they



Mistletoe

were popular among the ancient Druids, and in Norse mythology. The Druids believed it to be a branch that had been sent from heaven, and then grew upon a tree on earth.⁴⁹ Contained within such pagan mythology is the obvious corruption of God’s prophetic Word concerning the Christ, the “Branch” of Zechariah 6:12, coming from heaven. To the Druids, the mistletoe symbolized the reconciliation between god and man (again a satanic corruption of the role of Messiah). Since it never touched the ground (being parasitic), the mistletoe was thought to be very spiritually powerful (most particularly the mistletoe that would occasionally be found growing on an oak tree – a sacred tree for the Druids).⁵⁰ Mistletoe was once referred to as “All-heal,”⁵¹ and was used as an antidote against poisoning, to ensure fertility, and to protect against all kinds of witchcraft.⁵² Druids would cut branches of the plant from where it grew,

⁴⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mistletoe>

⁴⁹ <https://mysteriumacademy.com/how-did-the-druids-use-mistletoe/>.

⁵⁰ <http://gardenline.usask.ca/misc/mistleto.html>

⁵¹ <http://www.candlegrove.com/mistletoe.html>

⁵² <http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/noel/angl/gui.htm>

being careful to catch the cuttings in a white cloth so that they would not hit the ground and lose their potency. These would then be divided among them and attached to their doorways to protect their homes from storms and evil⁵³ – “... the customs of the people *are* vain ...” (Jeremiah 10:3).

As to the practice of kissing under the mistletoe, this seems to have come from Norse mythology. As the story goes, a particularly popular and well-loved god, Balder, was killed by an arrow made from mistletoe. His mother’s tears became the white berries. When Balder was resurrected to life, his mother reversed the reputation of the mistletoe and proclaimed that anyone passing under the plant would receive a kiss from her (a sign of approval and blessing). The tradition also has roots that extend to the Roman Saturnalia celebrations – reminiscent of the temple prostitution and sexual license that flourished during this time (the winter solstice celebration).⁵⁴ As the Roman Catholic Church absorbed these pagan traditions into their calendar, it seems that the mistletoe was not to be left behind, although it isn’t as central to the seasonal celebrations as many others.

Obviously the pagan stories surrounding the mistletoe needed to be upgraded in order to be acceptable within the Roman Catholic traditions, and so another “more spiritual” tale was devised. It is said that it was the wood of the mistletoe tree that was used for the cross of Christ, and because of this it was cursed to live as a parasitic plant on the goodwill of other trees (in similar fashion to the curse upon the serpent in the Garden). “Some believe that an additional penance was required: that the Mistletoe was obliged to bestow good fortune and blessings upon everyone who walked beneath it from that time forward.”⁵⁵ Within the Roman Catholic Church, we find great veneration for the cross itself, and this legend strikes a chord for the acceptance of the paganly-sacred mistletoe into their religious traditions.

Giving of Gifts

There seems to be one primary source for this custom: Saturnalia celebrations from ancient Rome. It was common during this time of the year (around the time of the winter solstice), in particular, for gifts to be given to the emperor, who was looked upon as being divine. Even the Roman Catholic Church recognized the pagan roots of this practice, and banned it during the Middle Ages for that very reason. However, paganism began to prevail, and so



⁵³ <http://www.candlegrove.com/mistletoe.html>

⁵⁴ <https://truthwithsnares.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/biblical-discernment-ministries-offline-2020.pdf>, p. 1785.

⁵⁵ <http://www.novareinna.com/festive/mistle.html>

an acceptable “Christian” context needed to be devised. The “reason” for the gift exchange took one of two approaches: 1) the Magi brought gifts for the Christ child, or 2) St. Nicholas, that imaginary saint of the fourth century, was known to give gifts. With these “proofs” in hand, the practice of giving and receiving gifts at this time of the year was thereby considered to be sanitized and deemed acceptable.

Santa Claus

This has become the epicenter of modern celebratory traditions, virtually across the board, for both the pagan and Christian alike. Within today’s context, this marvel of human invention has taken on the very attributes of God, and yet he continues to hold a place in the seasonal celebrations for many



Santa demonstrating divine abilities

Christians. Santa Claus is all knowing (omniscient) – everyone in the world is subject to his determination as to whether they have been good or bad; he is everywhere at once (omnipresent) – he delivers presents to all of the children of the world in one night; he is all powerful (omnipotent) – he makes a sleigh and reindeer fly through the sky and works the miracle of climbing down every chimney to deposit presents for the children. No professing Christian would claim that he is

real, yet they unabashedly include him in their celebrations.

Tradition says that the modern-day Santa Claus found his origin in the life of fourth-century Saint Nicholas, Catholic bishop of Myra in Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey).⁵⁶ Although this is a popular tradition, even the Catholic Church admits that there is virtually no evidence to indicate that there ever was a bishop Nicholas.⁵⁷ However, despite that, he was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church, and December 6 was a day for commemorating his life, which often includes a visit



Dutch Sinter Klaas with helper Black Pete

⁵⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Nicholas

⁵⁷ <http://www.americancatholic.org/features/saints/saint.aspx?id=1221>

from “St. Nicholas” dressed in the red robes of a bishop and sporting a long beard; he goes to the children, inquires after their behavior, and distributes simple gifts.⁵⁸ Although the Reformation cut into these Nicholas visits (the concept of saints was frowned upon by the Reformers), the Dutch continued to observe December 6 in honor of *Sinter Klaas*, as he was known to them.⁵⁹ When the Dutch brought this over to America, there was some contention between the English and Dutch children – and much hesitation on the part of the English to accept such a “Catholic” tradition. The solution was to move the activities of *Sinter Klaas* (or Santa Claus, as he became known in English) to December 24. The seasonal celebrations of December 25 were already so much a part of the English traditions that they did not recognize that they had been duped into shifting the St. Nicholas celebrations from one Catholic determined date (December 6) to another (the eve of the selected date to celebrate the birth of Jesus).



Odin

Santa Claus actually incorporates the traditions of several cultures (not just Roman Catholicism), making him an international prodigy. There are elements of his supernatural abilities that find their roots in the Norse mythology of Odin (or Woden) and Thor. Odin, the chief god (often referred to as the “Allfather” of the gods⁶⁰) was said to sport a long, white beard, would ride through the air on a white (or gray) eight-legged horse, and was benevolent to the common people.⁶¹ Children would place straw or carrots for Odin’s horse in their boots by the fireplace when Odin was on his journeys at the time of the winter solstice; as a reward for their offerings, their boots would contain presents in the morning (can you recognize another tradition?). The long, white beard, riding through the air, and leaving presents behind all speak of the modern-day Santa Claus.

Thor, on the other hand, was a hammer-wielding god associated with thunder, lightning, storms, strength and fertility.⁶² He is said to ride through the skies in a chariot pulled by two white goats, and makes his home in the north; his color is red (in keeping with being the god of lightning; fire was his element), fireplaces are sacred to him, and he is said to come down the chimney into his element, the fire.⁶³ We can see some of the characteristics of these Norse gods finding expression in the

⁵⁸ Greg Dues, *Catholic Customs and Traditions*, p. 60.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odin>

⁶¹ <http://www.orthodox.com/html/santa.html>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleipnir>

⁶² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thor>

⁶³ <http://www.av1611.org/orthpubs/santa.html>

modern-day Santa. However, the Germanic tribes did not readily accept the infiltration of their culture by the Catholics, and they wore emblems of Thor's hammer in rebellion, and incorporated the names of their gods into their place names as much as possible. Today we see the remnants of that evidenced in the names assigned to two days of our week: Wednesday (Woden's day) and Thursday (Thor's day).⁶⁴



Thor

Clearly, Santa Claus is a hybrid of mythology and imagination, carefully polished during the 20th century to his present day appearance. The ads run by Coca-Cola during the 1930s did much to popularize the modern-day appearance of this god. Up to this time, it was generally accepted that justice came with Sinter Klaas or St. Nicholas – rewarding of the good, and punishment of the bad. However, with his appearance in the ads for Coca-Cola, it was deemed to be inappropriate to include anything that was not strictly positive, therefore, all punishment had to go (he might be said to check a list, but that's as far as it goes).⁶⁵ What has become a central, significant part of December celebrations, we must admit, finds its origins within the mythology and superstitions of ancient peoples. Despite this, professing Christians will still stand in line to have their children sit on Santa's lap for a picture, but they find little or no time (or interest) to give consideration to the warnings in God's Word to avoid the vain customs of the pagans.



Molding Santa's image

Santa Claus is completely dressed in red, and sports white hair and flowing beard. Red, along with green, are the two colors that symbolize the celebrations at this season of the year. It is claimed that red represents the blood of Jesus, Whose birth this holiday purportedly celebrates. However, let's look a little deeper. As John was commissioned by the Lord Jesus to write the Revelation, he turned at the sound of Jesus' voice and saw Jesus: "His head and *his* hairs *were* white like wool, as white as snow ..." (Revelation 1:14a). As John recorded the description of Jesus when He comes to establish His millennial reign on earth, we read this: "And he *was* clothed with a vesture dipped [immersed] in blood ..." (Revelation 19:13a).⁶⁶ Jesus, Whose hair is white, will return to earth in a red robe; Satan has cleverly created a central figure for this season and given him

⁶⁴ <http://www.thortarp.com/norse.htm>

⁶⁵ <http://www.realmagick.com/7014/how-odin-became-santa-claus-symbolism-and-pagan-origins-of-a-gift-giving-saint/>

⁶⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

the white hair and red clothing of the Son of God! Santa is not an imaginary character that Christians should tolerate at this time of year, he is a tool of Satan (the letters of *Santa* reworked) to draw children (most particularly) into a world without the God of the Scriptures.

Christmas Colors

One more thing, we noted above that the recognized colors for this season are red and green. When John was taken, in the spirit, into the presence of God, we are told that God's presence was "to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone" (Revelation 4:3). Although the modern jasper can be of various colors, the ancient jasper stone was green,⁶⁷ and the sardine stone was red.⁶⁸ Therefore, as John entered into the presence of God, he was impressed with the colors of green and red. Satan, in his insatiable desire to counterfeit all that God does, has used the colors that are identified with God for this pagan festival that is supposedly in honor of the birth of God's Son, Jesus! We are called upon to use discernment to test all things according to God's Word: "Prove [test, examine (present tense, imperative mood)] all things; hold fast [(present tense, imperative mood)] that which is good [that which passes the testing]" (1 Thessalonians 5:21).⁶⁹ We are to be continually testing everything that comes our way, and the celebrations of this season are inescapable; we are to be holding to those things that are approved after examining them carefully against God's Word. What should be evident by now is that the celebrations of this season are **not** approved by God!

Summary

As we are considering the celebrations that are supposed to be in honor of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, we must keep God's view of such in mind. Deuteronomy 12:29-32 gives us the Lord's instructions to Israel as they were going into the Promised Land: there was to be absolutely no compliance with the heathen customs. However, what we find is that Israel did not obey this command and, even after King Mannaseh "housecleaned" the spiritual practices in his day, the high places that were used in pagan traditions were not rejected by the people (2 Chronicles 33:15-17). The failure of Israel is often referred to as syncretism – they merged the pagan practices into what the Lord required of them. God is holy and has called us to live lives that reflect His holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). We cannot be holy before God while participating in heathen practices; therefore, this is not really syncretism but would be more accurately characterized as

⁶⁷ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jasper>.

⁶⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnelian>.

⁶⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

capitulation to heathenism. Paganism can easily tolerate incorporating foreign practices into their regiment, because the final product is simply a variation on the broad road that leads to destruction; however, faith in God absolutely cannot accommodate any form of paganism, for doing so immediately destroys the faith in God and leaves only paganism. God's desire is for a holy people, free of contamination from all of the pagan practices of those who do not know Him. The December seasonal traditions might not include the extremes of paganism, nevertheless there can be no doubt that that is their source, and will serve to destabilize faith in God. If it is our desire to live in holiness (in obedience to God's call – 1 Timothy 2:9), then we must not permit the stain of paganism to touch us. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). This is a conditional promise: I (the Lord) will receive you, IF you come out from among them and do not cling to what is unclean!

There are many other traditions not specifically dealt with here, but perhaps this has laid a foundation for discernment upon which the Spirit of God can build. We must not adopt the "see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil" approach when it comes to spiritual matters; nor can we naively and/or blindly follow the "pastor." The crème-de-la-crème of the religious elite of Jesus's day heard these words from Him: "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me." (Matthew 15:7-8). Pastors are not being trained to think Biblically, nor are they taught how to study the Word of God – they are steeped in the traditions of their denomination, or of Evangelicalism generally. However, Evangelicals will not be able to hide behind their pastor when they stand before God and have to give an account of what they did in this life – we are individually accountable, and it is time that we shouldered that responsibility (Romans 14:12).

Even though those who are responsible for merging the pagan with the sacred might bear the greater blame, we are all accountable to "try the spirits" of this season to determine if they are of God (1 John 4:1). The common excuse is that it is important to celebrate Jesus' birth – who said that it was important? There is not a word in Scripture that says that we are to celebrate His birth; however, we are told explicitly how we are to remember Him – whenever we eat of the bread and drink of the cup we are to bear Him in mind (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). In our simple, uncluttered communion service, we remember the Lord Jesus Christ (His birth, death, and resurrection), and proclaim His death (His payment for our salvation) until He returns for us. The celebration of His birth is an extra-Biblical custom that cannot be traced to the Scriptures, but its pagan roots can very easily be exposed. Just because something has been a tradition among professing Christians for 1500

years does nothing to sanctify it in God's eyes; God will not change His standard even if those who call themselves by His name practice paganism for a million years. The words of the Lord to Israel ring through to us today, "Learn not the way of the heathen ... for the customs of the people are vain" (Jeremiah 10:2-3) – we would do well to heed this warning!