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## Chapter 4: Early Celebration

Okay. So we have established that the name itself is perhaps not the best choice. Many would say this is a small issue that could be resolved, while retaining the bulk of what Christians choose to celebrate. All right then; let us take a look at the earliest celebrations and what the Official teaching of the Roman Catholic Church is about this celebration. Remember, the reality is, we have taken many of our cues from them, so it is logical to at least listen to what they have to say about the celebration. They spend literally pages talking about each major area of the world, from Jerusalem to Mesopotamia to Rome.

I have taken but a small portion of what they say to give you an idea of their reasoning:

Christmas was not among the earliest [festivals](#) of the [Church](#). [Irenaeus](#) and [Tertullian](#) omit it from their lists of [feasts](#) .... The first evidence of the feast is from Egypt. About A.D. 200, [Clement of Alexandria](#) (Strom., I, xxi in P.G., VIII, 888) says that certain Egyptian theologians "over curiously" assign, not the year alone, but the day of [Christ's](#) birth, placing it on 25 Pachon (20 May) in the twenty-eighth year of [Augustus](#). .... Others reached the date of 24 or 25 Pharmuthi (19 or 20 April). ... [Cyril of Alexandria](#), and his sermons (see Mansi, IV, 293; appendix to Act. Conc. Eph.) show that the December celebration was then firmly established there, and calendars prove its permanence. **The December feast therefore reached Egypt between 427 and 433.... In 385, ... 25 December was not observed at Jerusalem....** [Jerome](#), writing about 411 (in Ezech., P.L., XXV, 18), reproves Palestine for keeping [Christ's](#) birthday (when He hid Himself) on the Manifestation feast. [Cosmas Indicopleustes](#) suggests (P.G., LXXXVIII, 197) that even in the middle of the sixth century Jerusalem was peculiar in combining the two commemorations, arguing from Luke 3:23 that [Christ's](#) baptism day was the anniversary of His birthday.... More important, but scarcely better accredited, is

Erbes' contention (*Zeitschrift f. Kirchengesch.*, XXVI, 1905, 20-31) that the feast was brought in by Constantine as early as 330-35.<sup>81</sup>

This is just the beginning, people. It gets better....

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<sup>81</sup> Martindale, Cyril. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume III*. "Christmas". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>> Ed. K. Knight. 2003.

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## Chapter 5: Why Did We Set This Date?

### ***The Catholic Perspective***

When dealing with the origins of the Feast of Christmas, many theories abound. *The Catholic Encyclopaedia* discusses these possibilities:

The well-known solar feast, however, of Natalis Invicti, celebrated on 25 December, has a strong claim on the responsibility for our December date. For the history of the solar cult, its position in the Roman Empire, and syncretism with Mithraism, see Cumont's epoch-making "Textes et Monuments" etc., I, ii, 4, 6, p. 355. Mommsen (*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 12, p. 338) has collected the evidence for the feast, which reached its climax of popularity under Aurelian in 274. ... But even should a deliberate and legitimate "baptism" of a pagan feast be seen here no more than the transference of the date need be supposed. The "mountain-birth" of Mithra and Christ's in the "grotto" have nothing in common: Mithra's adoring shepherds (Cumont, op. cit., I, ii, 4, p. 304 sqq.) are rather borrowed from Christian sources than vice versa. ... The present writer is inclined to think that, be the origin of the feast in East or West, and though the abundance of analogous midwinter festivals may indefinitely have helped the choice of the December date, the same instinct which set Natalis Invicti at the winter solstice will have sufficed, apart from deliberate adaptation or curious calculation, to set the Christian feast there too.<sup>82</sup>

The author of this article concludes that the midwinter festivals at least had SOME influence on the choice of the date and the reason for the festival at all....

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

In a summation of the feasts of the church, the Encyclopedia had this to say

Prototypes and starting-points for the oldest ecclesiastical feasts are the Jewish solemnities of Easter and Pentecost. Together with the weekly Lord's Day, they remained the only universal Christian feasts down to the third century (Tertullian, "De Bapt." 19: Origen, "Contra Celsum", VIII, 22). Two feasts of Our Lord (Epiphany, Christmas) were added in the fourth century; then came the feasts of the Apostles and martyrs, in particular provinces; later on also those of some confessors (St. Martin, St. Gregory); in the sixth and seventh centuries feasts of the Blessed Virgin were added.<sup>83</sup>

One needs to realize, by the way, that this conclusion is not only the idea of the writer of the article itself. In the Catholic belief system, nothing may be accepted as "truth" unless it receives the "official okay" of the leadership. This document and the entire set of encyclopaedias received this distinction in 1908.<sup>84</sup> In essence, in the Roman Catholic economy, nothing can be printed unless it is scrutinised and accepted as orthodoxy<sup>85</sup> by the leadership. This set of encyclopaedias not only received approval from the local Bishop, but by the entire Catholic Ecclesial Leadership.

## ***Two Evangelical Perspectives***

We have taken a fleeting look at what the Roman Catholic Church has to say about where the Christmas celebration comes from and why the date of December 25<sup>th</sup> was chosen; however, we have not even begun to scratch the surface. What do other Evangelicals have to say about this celebration? What do they say the origin of this celebration is?

The *Church History Institute* (an Alliance Member of Gospelcom.net) gives a quick run-down of the history of the celebration of Christ. In their bulletin inserts that they offer to Evangelical Christendom eve-

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<sup>83</sup> Holweck, F. G. *The Catholic Encyclopedia Volume VI*. "Ecclesiastical Feasts". Ed. Robert Appleton Company, 1908. Online: <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>> Ed. K. Knight. 2003.

<sup>84</sup> Nihil Obstat, November 1, 1908. Remy Lafort, S.T.D., Censor Imprimatur. +John Cardinal Farley, Archbishop of New York.

<sup>85</sup> Essentially, "right belief"

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rywhere, they recount:

.... By the fourth century, however, many Christian groups had begun to observe Christ's birthday, though the day chosen for the celebration differed from place to place. Christians in the East generally celebrated on January 6; those in the West on December 25. Others set dates in March, April, or May. About 350 AD, Pope Julius set December 25 as the date of Jesus' birth. This corresponded with the Roman feast of Saturnalia, the festival of the Unconquered Sun. Since ancient days, people throughout the northern hemisphere had celebrated at this time when the daylight hours had reached their shortest and again began to increase. Temples were decorated with greenery and candles, there were feasts and parades with special music, and gifts were given to family and friends. Among the British Druids, mistletoe was worshiped, and the Saxons used holly and ivy in their winter religious ceremonies. As Christianity spread throughout Europe, many of the pagan customs and festivities of the winter solstice were absorbed into the celebration of the birth of Jesus.

**The English Puritans and Reformed Protestants across Europe determined to purify religious belief and remove everything that was not directly commanded or described in the Bible.** They believed the observance of Christmas on December 25 was pagan, taken from the Roman Catholic calendar. In 1644 the Puritans banned Christmas observance in England, but the ban was quickly rescinded when King Charles II took the throne. In America, however, the Puritans of New England continued to treat December 25 as just another day in winter well into the 1800's. By the 1830's Puritanism was being thrown off in New England, and people in the cities were beginning to celebrate Christmas with a mix of Dutch and English traditions. By the end of the century, most Americans were celebrating a Christmas with all the traditions of today -- lighted and decorated trees, Christmas cards, carols, fruitcakes, festive parties, shopping, and giving gifts.<sup>86</sup>

They also give a basic chronology, which is somewhat helpful in understanding the history of this holiday.

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<sup>86</sup> Curtis, Ken. *Glimpses Bulletin Inserts*. #84. "Let's Celebrate Christmas, but When and How?"  
<<http://chi.gospelcom.net/GLIMPSEF/Glimpses/glmps084.shtml>>.  
Christian History Institute. 2004.

### What Happened? A Chronology of Christmas

- 4th century - -Emperor Constantine builds Church of Nativity in Bethlehem and declares Christ's birthday an official Roman holiday. The Bishop of Rome establishes December 25 as the day to celebrate Christ's birth. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia lives in Turkey. In Middle Ages his feast day is December 6, and he is known as a giver of gifts and the patron saint of children.
- 6th century - -The church sets apart the four Sundays preceding Christmas for devotional preparation--Advent begins.
- 8th century - -Boniface, English missionary to the Germans, replaces sacrifices to Oden's oak with a fir tree adorned in tribute to the Christ child.
- 11th century - -The word "Christmas" first used in English,
- 13th century - -Francis of Assisi ministers to the illiterate, common people by introducing a live nativity scene (crèche) into the church and festive carols in the language of the people.
- 17th century - -First mention of Christmas tree in Germany, though some traditions say Martin Luther was the first to have lighted candles on a Christmas tree. English law under Puritans makes December 25 an official work day.
- 18th century - -Handel's Messiah written in just 24 days.
- Mid-19th century - -Modern Christmas begins to take shape. Clement Moore's A Visit from St. Nicholas popularizes Santa Claus; Prince Albert introduces the Christmas tree to England; Christmas cards become a tradition. Charles Dickens' A Christmas Carol connects the spirit of warmth and good cheer with Christmas, and a Victorian sentimentalism becomes the Christmas Spirit.<sup>87</sup>

Almost every Christian who has done any kind of background study in this subject would have little issue with either his overview or the chronology. For those who are unsure, however, here is another article from Christianity Today's *Christian History & Biography* "Why December 25<sup>th</sup>?" detailing the development of this holiday that most celebrate without a second thought.

... [F]or the first three centuries of Christianity, Christmas

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

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wasn't in December—or on the calendar anywhere .... Some church leaders even opposed the idea of a birth celebration. Origen (c.185-c.254) preached that it would be wrong to honor Christ in the same way Pharaoh and Herod were honored. Birthdays were for pagan gods.... Not all of Origen's contemporaries agreed that Christ's birthday shouldn't be celebrated, and some began to speculate on the date (actual records were apparently long lost) .... The eventual choice of December 25, made perhaps as early as 273, reflects a convergence of Origen's concern about pagan gods and the church's identification of God's son with the celestial sun. December 25 already hosted two other related festivals: *natalis solis invicti* (the Roman "birth of the unconquered sun"), and the birthday of Mithras, the Iranian "Sun of Righteousness" whose worship was popular with Roman soldiers. The winter solstice, another celebration of the sun, fell just a few days earlier. Seeing that pagans were already exalting deities with some parallels to the true deity, church leaders **decided to commandeer the date and introduce a new festival**. Western Christians first celebrated Christmas on December 25 in 336, **after Emperor Constantine had declared Christianity the empire's favored religion**. Eastern churches, however, held on to January 6 as the date for Christ's birth and his baptism....**The pagan origins of the Christmas date, as well as pagan origins for many Christmas customs (gift-giving and merrymaking from Roman Saturnalia; greenery, lights, and charity from the Roman New Year; Yule logs and various foods from Teutonic feasts), have always fueled arguments against the holiday.**<sup>88</sup>

The introduction of this "new festival" is said to have been a response to give Christians an alternative to the pagan holidays that occurred on these same days. The problem with this is that that they appear to have simply "baptised" these elements as Christian and herein the problem arises. In both cases, these articles come from the pro-Christmas perspective. After recounting all of these things, each of the articles still discuss the merits of celebrating the day.

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<sup>88</sup> Coffman, Elesha. *Christian History & Biography* "Why December 25th?"

<<http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/newsletter/2000/dec08.html>>. Christianity Today International/Christian History Magazine. 2000.

# 6

## Chapter 6: Should We Keep December 25<sup>th</sup> as the Date?

It is widely acknowledged by Christian scholars that December 25<sup>th</sup> has its background in the worship of the sun. In his *defense* of Christmas, Chuck Missler discusses the December 25<sup>th</sup> date:

Mithra came to be identified with the sun-god Helios and became known as 'The Great God Helios-Mithras'. Several Roman emperors formally announced their alliance with the sun, including Commodus who was initiated in public. Emperor Aurelian (270 to 275 CE) blended a number of Pagan solstice celebrations of such god-men/saviors as Appolo, Attis, Baal, Dionysus, Helios, Hercules, Horus, Mithra, Osiris, Perseus, and Theseus into a single festival called the "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun", celebrated on December 25th.<sup>89</sup>

My contention is that if we are to choose to celebrate His birth as an anniversary of sorts, we should at least try to approximate the time when He was born. As you will see, the 25<sup>th</sup> of December is among the least likely dates for His birth.

### ***A Catholic Perspective***

Recently, an article was brought to my attention by a fellow believer. This article ran on December 18, 2005 in the Calgary Herald. In it, a Catholic Deacon discusses the chronology of our Lord's birth in correlation with the keeping of December 25<sup>th</sup>. In essence, his line of reasoning went thusly:

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<sup>89</sup> Missler, Chuck. *Focus on Jerusalem Library*. "The Roots of Christmas." December 28, 2005.  
<<http://focusonjerusalem.com/rootsofchristmas.html>>, 2005.



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Early Christians calculated Jesus of Nazareth's historic birth from Scripture, Doll claims. Dec. 25 is the date, given the timeline of his cousin John the Baptist. "In the time of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest, Zechariah . . . and his wife Elizabeth, also of the line of Aaron," says Luke (1:10). Zechariah and Elizabeth were "upright and blameless," but sorrowfully, they had no children and were now "advanced in age." Then Zechariah "was chosen by lot, by the custom of the priesthood, to go into the Temple of the Lord and burn the incense," Luke continues. **Priests burned incense at the Holy of Holies on only one important day, Doll says: Yom Kippur or the Day of Atonement, 10 days after Rosh Hashana, the New Year. That year (4 BC, he argues) Rosh Hashana was Sept. 15.** . . . Temple priests were celibate for their 10-day appointments, says Doll. So Zechariah is away from Elizabeth from Sept. 15 to Sept. 24. He then goes home, and John is conceived Sept. 25. The same Angel Gabriel later appears to young Mary of Nazareth, saying, "Hail, full of grace." He promises she will bear a Son "whose kingdom will never end." Mary asks, How? since she "does not know man." The angel replies "the Holy Spirit will come upon you . . . ." As proof, Gabriel tells her, "Even Elizabeth your cousin is having a child in her old age; she who was barren is in her sixth month. For with God, nothing is impossible." Six months from John's conception, Sept. 25, is March 25, henceforth known as the Annunciation or conception of Jesus. From 500 AD until 1582 (and the new Gregorian calendar), it was also the Christian New Year. And: Nine months after Jesus' conception, March 25, is Dec. 25, his birth, Doll announces triumphantly. Why does Doll think John's conception was in 4 B.C., also the year Herod died? Jesus starts his public life at "about 30." That Passover, he argued with the priests of the temple. They remarked, "It has taken 46 years to build this temple" (John 2). Herod began his rebuilding of the temple in 19 BC. So Jesus and the priests argued in 28 AD. His crucifixion is in 30; and the Romans destroy the Temple 40 years later. Admittedly, human gestation is 38 weeks, not simply nine months. And calculating Rosh Hashana [sic] for 4 BC could miss by a week or two. Still, even if the church was off by a week, Doll says, **it did its best to pinpoint a real event on the historical calendar, not merely replace one myth with another myth.**<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Woodward, Joe. *Calgary Herald, Faith and Reason Section*. "Christmas on Dec. 25 linked to Scripture". <http://www.canada.com/calgaryherald/news/faithandreason/story.html?i>

The Deacon makes a jump from what the text actually says to what he *thinks* it says. The text only says that Zechariah “was chosen by lot, by the custom of the priesthood, to go into the Temple of the Lord and burn the incense,” it doesn’t say he was chosen to burn incense in the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement – the term, Temple of the Lord, means exactly that; it doesn’t mean the Holy of Holies. Secondly, while he doesn’t actually say it, he gives the impression that somehow, the honour of burning incense by priests chosen by lots *only* happened *on* the Day of Atonement. Again, this intimation is incorrect.

In fact, incense was burnt twice a day *every* day in the temple. The text tells neither day nor month Zechariah was chosen by lots. It also neglects to mention that it was the Day of Atonement. The deacon in the article brings up a “nice” idea, but, sadly, it is based only on part truth. While there was a **possibility** it was done on the Day of Atonement, there is just as much a possibility that he was chosen for any of the other days allotted to the 8<sup>th</sup> division of Abijah (the tribe from whence Zechariah stems). Because the argument is based on a false premise, the subordinate arguments that follow are invalid.

If you read Exodus 30, you will find the text which outlines the original command given to Aaron. Later, the honour of burning incense fell to the casting of lots of those within the tribe of Levi. It happened only once in a person’s life, true, but it did not have to happen on the Day of Atonement.

Later, the act of casting lots for the daily sacrifice and the burning of incense was introduced. This act, known as the Tamid can be read about in the Mishnah. For those who would like to read more about this intriguing custom, please see “Appendix B” of this book.

## ***General Scholarship***

It is of note that most scholars would agree that Jesus was likely born in September/October of the year, rather than December.<sup>91</sup>

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d=2a82558b-1b34-4eac-ab21-908217390859> Published Sunday, December 18, 2005.

<sup>91</sup> Some scholars do herald the spring as a possibility, as well, but generally speaking, almost none believe that the evidence points to December 25<sup>th</sup>. At best, the late December celebration may be able to point to the incar-

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It is also of note that Scripture mentions precious little by way of his birthday in an overt fashion; we can, however, glean a pretty clear approximation of at least the month of His birth from the Word and the customs of the day:<sup>92</sup>

- ◆ Jesus began His ministry on or about His 30<sup>th</sup> birthday (Luke 3:23).
  - ❖ Jesus' ministry lasted 3 ½ years.<sup>93</sup>
  - ❖ He was murdered in March/April, on the Feast of Unleavened Bread/Day of Preparation
  - ❖ If one counts back 6 months, one gets an approximation of September/October
- ◆ Sheep do not stay out in the pasture in December, as Israel gets cold and it often snows then, as it is winter season.
- ◆ Rome was not in the practice of calling for a census in the dead of winter; they generally did this while it was still relatively mild.
  - ❖ The census was done for taxation purposes; it makes more

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nation, but why not use a feast mentioned in the Bible to celebrate it (the Feast of Dedication) and another Biblical feast (Feast of Tabernacles) to commemorate His birth, if we feel we must. Dr. Henry Morris in his liner notes to Luke 2:8, 13 says this about the date of the traveling of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem:

A more probable time would be late September, the time of the annual Feast of Tabernacles, when such travel was commonly accepted. Thus, it is rather commonly believed (though not certain) that Jesus' birth was around the last of September....The probability is that this mighty angel, leading the heavenly host in their praises, was Michael the archangel; this occasion was later commemorated by the early church as Michaelmas ('Michael sent'), on September 29, the same as the date of the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. It would have at least been appropriate for Christ to have been born on such a date, for it was at His birth that 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt (literally tabernacled) among us' (John 1:14). Dr. Henry M. Morris, The Defender's Study Bible (notes for Luke 2:8,13).

<sup>92</sup> For those who would like a look at detailed version of the reasoning for the dating of Jesus' birth in September/October, please take a look at the webpage <http://www.versebyverse.org/doctrine/birthofchrist.html>

<sup>93</sup> Some would say 2 ½ years; however, most think 3½ in keeping with the chronology in Daniel 9, as well as the text shown in the Gospel accounts.

sense to call for taxes around harvest time compared to the dead of winter....

- ❖ The great archaeologist, William Ramsay, says this about the idea of holding a census in the dead of winter:

But, when such a plan of tribal numbering was adopted, the time of year had to be carefully considered. In the first place the winter months had to be avoided, during which traveling was often, difficult, and in which unfavorable weather might cause great hardship and even prevent the plan from being carried out. As the day had to be fixed a long time beforehand, it must have been fixed in the season when good weather could be calculated on. In winter, weather might be good or it might be bad, and at the best it would be cold and trying.

That a day was fixed by the authorities, and that it was not left to the discretion of the people to go when they pleased (as in Egypt people seem to have been permitted to send in their enrollment papers at any time they pleased within the year), seems to follow from the fact that Joseph and Mary traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem at the very time when the birth of the child was approaching. Moreover, the advantages of the plan in ease and speed would have been sacrificed, unless a day had been fixed for the numbering.

Further, it was urgently necessary that the time which was fixed should not interfere with agricultural operations — that it should not come between the earliest date for the first harvest and the latest date for finishing the threshing, and getting in the grain and the fine cut straw from the threshing floors. The harvest varied considerably in different parts of the country, and reaping extended over about seven weeks, beginning from the middle of April.

Taking these circumstances into consideration, we may say with considerable confidence that August to October is the period within which the numbering would be fixed. It is no objection to this view that tradition places the birth of Jesus at Christmas. It is well known that the tradition is not early, that it varies in different periods and in different sections of the Church, and that the earliest belief was different.

Lewin, in *Fasti Sacri*, p. 115, selects 1st August as the day and month. Without laying any stress on the reasoning from the priestly periods by which he reaches this precise and exact conclusion, we must attach great weight to the argument which he founds on the fact that

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the shepherds were watching their flocks in the open country by night. In Asia Minor, at least, the pasturing of the flocks by night takes place only during the hot season and not in the winter. The sheep will not eat under the hot sun: they stand idly in a dense crowd in any place where the semblance of shade can be found during the day, and during the night they scatter and feed. In cold weather they seek food during the day.

On this characteristic of the sheep is founded the rule, said to be observed in Palestine, that the flocks were sent out after the Passover and brought in about October before the “former rain”. Within that period, April to October, the day fixed for the numbering must fall; and during that period April to July was required for the reaping and garnering of the year’s crop.<sup>94</sup>

The assertion that Jesus was likely born during the September/October period has been made countless times by a host of Christian scholars. Scripture also bears this out more clearly than it does the December 25<sup>th</sup> date.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ramsay, William. *Was Christ Born in Bethlehem?* Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, December 27, 2005 <<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/ramsay/bethlehem.html>>, Updated November 6, 2005.

<sup>95</sup> Here is a thought; why don’t we celebrate His birth on a more likely date of His birth – say, the Feast of Tabernacles. If we **must** celebrate His birth, should we not at least try to base our customs on things that **God instituted** (and by the way, intends to keep in the millennium – see Zechariah 14) and on days that are more in line with the probable date?

It is of interest that swaddling clothes are associated with the Feast of Tabernacles, (or the Feast of Booths), as is His incarnation. In fact, in John 1:14, we are told that he dwelt among us – the Greek here is σκηνωω 1) *to fix one’s tabernacle, have one’s tabernacle, abide (or live) in a tabernacle (or tent), tabernacle 2) to dwell*, - in other words, to put on a temporary dwelling place. This festival is known as “the festival of Lights”; it was a time of the teaching of the word of God to the people of God. Makes sense that the Light of the World – the Word who is God would have come to the World during the Festival of Lights – a time when the Word was being preached.... This makes a lot more sense biblically than trying to fit non-biblical themes to our Lord.

I would again ask **if** we are going to honour His birth, **why** we would choose a day that has nothing to do with the approximation of His birth.

Some cite evangelization as the reason for the keeping of this day.

## ***Evangelism of the Masses***

What about this seemingly notable cause? The argument that is laid out for this often sounds something like, “If we stop celebrating Christmas, we will offend the sensibilities of the non-believers and will cut off the bridge to salvation that has been made.”

In fact, many pastors and preachers today willingly admit that Pope Julius<sup>96</sup> added the celebration of Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup> in order to 1) make recently converted Christians who had been persecuted by their pagan loved-ones feel more comfortable by allowing them to celebrate the feasts – without getting into the excesses of the paganism, such as sexual orgies and the like and 2) to help the church maintain the “status quo”; they did not want to be “wanting” compared to the celebrations of the pagans; after all, the Roman leadership had only recently made Christianity the Official Religion of Rome.

The line of reasoning continues, “Everyone else is doing it, why not us? If we are all celebrating on the same day, it makes things simpler for the pagans to accept and join into that which the Church is doing. This is one of the many ways the Church builds bridges to the non-believers.”

The problem with this, is that we are not “building bridges” when we present the lies of Christmas alongside the Biblical account of His birth, but basing things on non-sanctioned, non-biblical tradition and fables, rather than truth. Essentially, ***we are building villages*** – finding something that resembles the truth and building on that foundation of sand.

The purpose of building a bridge is to take someone **from where they are into a new place** that offers freedom from the place they were at before. We don’t just “fix up” the place they are at to make it look

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<sup>96</sup> I believe under Constantine’s considerable influence.

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kind of the same as the other side....

You will notice that while Paul utilised the information he knew about the pagan worshippers on Mars Hill, he did not then fuse all of the pagan implements of worship to their idols into real faith. He took them from where they were (the altar to the “unknown god”; one of the poet’s sayings about being God’s offspring) and brought them to where they needed to be ....

God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; For in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' "Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, **but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained.** He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.<sup>97</sup>

Note that he took a **statement**, “For we are also His offspring” and brought them to a greater understanding. He **did not** tell them that they were free to take their **elements of worship** and **integrate them into worship** with God. He actually talked to them about their ignorance and how they needed to repent of their idolatry, their art and **man’s devising**, since God cannot be worshiped that way. He also said that ignorance was not an excuse any longer.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Acts 17: 24 – 31

<sup>98</sup> “God overlooked humankind's sin, especially false worship. He "overlooked" it not by excusing it or failing to notice it, but rather **by not punishing it as it deserved** (Rom 3:25; Acts 14:16). Now, however, God commands all people everywhere to repent. Each generation's problem is that their ignorant worship is culpable, rebellious, false worship. God's

We are not to worship the Lord in just any old way, “as long as we are trying to glorify the Lord”. The truth is, there are some forms of worship that God accepts and there are some forms that He hates. For a fuller explanation of this idea, please see the line of argument under “Who is God” in this book.

As we have already seen, God’s Church has a great deal of unbiblical tradition to untangle from the truth when it comes to talking to people about Jesus – or even making sure our worship to God is biblical. As I have already mentioned, tradition in and of itself is not necessarily wrong; it becomes a problem, however, when we have to try to justify the keeping of the holiday, simply because we **may** have freedom to do so, even if it is in opposition to the plain reading of Scripture.

### ***The Imminence of His Return***

Some argue that the Church did not celebrate His birth for the first few hundred years because they felt He was going to “come back at any moment.” When He did not, people began to want to celebrate more of the important days of His life such as the Birth “until He finally returns.” This argument is one based only on conjecture; nowhere in the Bible does it mention that they did not celebrate His birth because He was going to come back soon.

If the truth be known, precious little is mentioned in the Word of God with respect to His birth at all; comparatively speaking, the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection take up the lion’s share of the Scriptures in the New Testament. Paul, in discussing his primary focus, talks about the need to speak of nothing “among you except Jesus Christ

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solution is not to receive more information but to make a radical turn from idolatry to the one true God (Acts 14:15; 26:20). Formerly human-kind lived in a sinful ignorance that God in his mercy passed over. Now, after sin has been judged in Jesus' death and resurrection, comes the "day of salvation" in a gospel proclaimed in his name, calling for repentance and promising forgiveness. Today there is no room in God's economy, as Paul preaches it, for so-called B.C. Christians--persons saved without knowledge of Christ and his saving work (contrast Kraft 1979:231).” – Bible Gateway. *IVP New Testament Commentary*, “Witness at Athens”. Intervarsity Press. Gospel Communications International <<http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/commentaries/index.php?action=getCommentaryText&cid=5&source=1&seq=i.51.17.3>>, 1995-2005.



## WHY DID WE SET THIS DATE?

and Him crucified.”<sup>99</sup> Much of the New Testament is dedicated to the teaching of sound doctrine and the correction of wrong teaching; nevertheless, nowhere in the text are believers admonished to commemorate His birth from year to year.

This line of argument is based on tradition and silence; as I have mentioned before, while traditions of men are not *necessarily* inappropriate, when it comes to the behaviour and teaching/living out of our faith, our traditions need to be in subjection to the written word of God. *It* is the standard for our behaviour, not church fathers, pastors, ecclesial bodies, popes, professors, teachers, scholars, our parents, or even ourselves.

I must interject here that the desire to remember His birth is not necessarily wrong, per se; the thing is, though, one cannot utilize the argument of silence in Scripture regarding the yearly celebration of his birth as a reason to do so.

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<sup>99</sup> I Corinthians 2:2