

The Real Christmas Story-Mtg #1

1. The celebration of 'Christmas'....

- A. Christians didn't begin to celebrate Christ's birth until the 2nd century (about 130 A.D.)...over 100 years after the event. It took a few hundred more years for it to become a widely recognizable event.
- B. The Bible nowhere tells us to celebrate Christ's birth....but for those people who preach against celebrating it, remember...angels (Luke 2:9-14), shepherds (Luke 2:15-20) & the Magi (Matt 2:1,2,9-11) celebrated His birth. Simeon (Luke 2:25-35) & Anna (Luke 2:36-38) celebrated it after the fact. The Magi even brought gifts.

2. The word 'christmas'....

- A. Around 336 A.D., the roman catholic church (the only church at that time) instituted a special mass(service) to celebrate the event...it became known as the christ's mass or christmas.
- B. The word 'christmas' came into full use in the 9th century A.D. The old English word 'christmas' dates from the 11th century (1050 A.D.).
- C. Xmas is a 13th century form of shorthand for christmas....X is the Greek letter 'chi', the 1st letter of the word christ in Greek....'khristos'.

3. The date/year/season of Christ's birth, December 25th, is not the true birth date of Christ and He was not born in the year '0'. Scholars believe He was born between 4-6 B.C., probably in the springtime.

- A. Year....He was born during King Herod's reign and Herod died in 4 B.C.
- B. Season....Shepherds would corral their flocks in mid-October to protect them from the cold, rainy season (Ezra 10:9,13 & Song of Solomon 2:11). It was an ancient custom of the Jews to send their sheep to the fields & deserts about the time of Passover (early spring) and bring them home at the time of the 1st rain (mid-October).
- C. Date (December 25th)....December was a very important religious month back then....
 - 1. 12/21...celebration of the death & resurrection of Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld & husband of Isis.
 - 2. The Jews celebrated 'Hanukkah', the feast of lights, in December.
 - 3. 12/26....birthday of Horus, son of Isis & a sun god.
 - 4. The Romans celebrated 'Saturnalia' (Saturn, god of the harvest...grains, fruits, nuts, wine,etc.) from 12/17/thru 12/23. It was a big celebration with feasting, exchanging of gifts, decorating with boughs of laurel & evergreen and a lot of 'merrymaking', sometimes to an extreme.
 - 5. The Romans also celebrated 'Kalends', new years day, dedicated to the two-headed god-Janus, who looked forward to the future and backward to the past.
 - 6. 12/25....the winter solstice by the Julian calendar (our calendar puts this on 12/22)....the day with the least amount of sunlight....people had festivals in gratitude to the sun god(s) for lengthening the amount of sunlight from this day on.
 - 7. 12/25....this day is identified with the Persian sun-god Mithras, the Syrian sun-god Sol Invictus (the unconquered sun) and with the lesser known Phoenician sun & fertility god, Baal (the Old Testament has a lot to say about Baal).

8. The Greeks celebrated their worship of Apollo, Attis, Dionysus, Helios, Hercules, Perseus & Theseus in December.
9. In 274/275 A.D., the Roman emperor Aurelian combined the nativity/god-man/savior cult observances of Apollo, Attis, Baal, Dionysus, Helios, Hercules, Horus, Mothra, Osiris, Perseus, Sol Invictus & Theseus into one celebration called 'The birthday of the Unconquered Sun' (Sol Invictus) on 12/25...representing the death & re-birth of the sun.
10. In 346 A.D., the Roman emperor Constantine officially declared Christmas a holiday and it became the only approved 12/25 activity. Because many parts of the roman empire already had the other celebrations at that time, they still kept them but the emphasis was now put on Christ as the Unconquered Son (not sun). Many pagans just went on celebrating in pretty much the same way. Over the years, their least offensive individual traditions were melded into the christmas celebration and their more offensive traditions were eventually stopped or discarded.

4. Christmas lights....

- A. Romans fastened candles to trees during Saturnalia as symbols of the sun's return after the winter solstice. They kept lamps burning in their homes to ward off evil spirits and candles in their windows to 'call back the sun'.
- B. Jews used candles at Hanukkah....the festivals of lights.
- C. Martin Luther (16th century) is credited with starting the tradition of lights on a christmas tree as a testimony to Him, who is a 'light to the gentiles'(Luke 2:32) and a 'light to the world'(John 8:12).

5. Christmas trees....

- A. Pagans decorated evergreens during the winter months.
 1. Vikings used evergreens as a symbol of hope that spring would return after the dark, cold winter.
 2. Druids (England & France) decorated oak trees with fruit & candles to honor their gods of harvest & light.
 3. Romans decorated trees with trinkets & candles during Saturnalia.
 4. The modern, christian practice stems from Germany in the 1600's. They decorated their trees with dolls, sweets, apples, wafers, gold foil & paper roses. Germans who settled in Pennsylvania brought the christmas tree customs to America, decorating with animal cookies, apples, brightly colored paper & strings of popcorn. By the 1890's, German mfg'ers. Were producing ornaments for christmas trees in America. Many other legends surround the christmas tree custom.

6. Christmas greens...

- A. Winter was a dreadful, fearful time for ancient people. The nights were cold & dark and evil spirits were thought to be especially active at christmas time.
 1. Mistletoe...a Celtic word meaning 'all-heal'. This was the sacrificial plant of the Druids (Celtic priests), because it grew on the sacred oak tree. It was used in their sacrifices to their gods and was believed to cure disease & infertility, to render poisons harmless, to protect homes from evil spirits & to bring good luck. The modern practice of kissing under it comes from a Norse myth....Frigga, one of the gods, gave her son, Balder, a

charm of mistletoe to protect him from the elements...another god used an arrow made of mistletoe to kill Balder. Frigga cried tears of white berries, brought her son back to life and vowed to kiss anyone who rested under the plant. Norse people would then hang it over the doorway or in a room to offer the blessings of Frigga to visitors. Kissing under the mistletoe was seen as a pledge of friendship. Victorian English expanded the Frigga/Balder legend to allow unmarried males to kiss unmarried females beneath the mistletoe. Some modern Europeans still practice the custom of kissing under it to receive from Frigga the blessings of life, fertility, peace & freedom from disease.

2. Holly....was believed to have magical powers and drive demons away.
 - A. In old England, unmarried women were told to tie a sprig of holly to their beds to guard them from evil spirits and witches, especially on Christmas Eve.
 - B. Germans considered it to be a good luck charm against nature.
 - C. Because of its sharp thorns and blood red berries, most Christians thought it symbolized the crown of thorns.
 3. Ivy....was the ancient symbol of Bacchus, the Roman god of wine & revelry. It was used in festivals. Lately, its 'feeble' appearance has reminded some of man's feebleness and the need to cling to God for strength. It has thus become a Christian symbol of mortality.
 4. Poinsettia....a South American shrub called 'the flower of the Holy Night'. Introduced into America in 1828 by Joel Poinsett.
7. **Yule logs....** there are 3 likely origins of this tradition...
- A. Yule comes from 'jul' or 'jule', an old Norse word. It was a 12 day celebration in December honoring Jul, a sex & fertility god. A big log would be fed into the fire. It would be fed in a little bit each day and burn for 12 days.
 - B. An old Germanic word 'Iol' meaning a turning wheel. This would refer to the rising of the sun-wheel after the winter solstice.
 - C. An Anglo-Saxon word 'geol', celebrating the winter solstice in December.
 - D. Yuletide is the season of the Yule. The tradition of burning the Yule log originated among the German tribes as a celebration to Thor, the god of the Yule (who chased away frosts and commanded gentle winds and spring rains to come and bless mankind).
8. **Christmas carols....**
- A. Wassailing....the tradition of going from house-to-house singing, eating, drinking and socializing with friends & relatives. Wassail refers to a drink of warm ale or spiced cider. Wassailing was to drink to someone's health. Wassail is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word 'wes-hal' or 'be whole'. In England, originally, the practice focused on apple orchards. The purpose was to salute the trees in the dead of winter to insure a good crop for the coming year. In each orchard, major trees were selected and cider or liquor was sprinkled over their root systems. Sayings were recited to scare away evil spirits.
 - B. Carol....is a Greek word meaning 'dancing while playing the flute'. Eventually it came to just mean singing a joyful song. The 1st modern carol is attributed to St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century. By the 16th century, carols were being sung about Christmas.