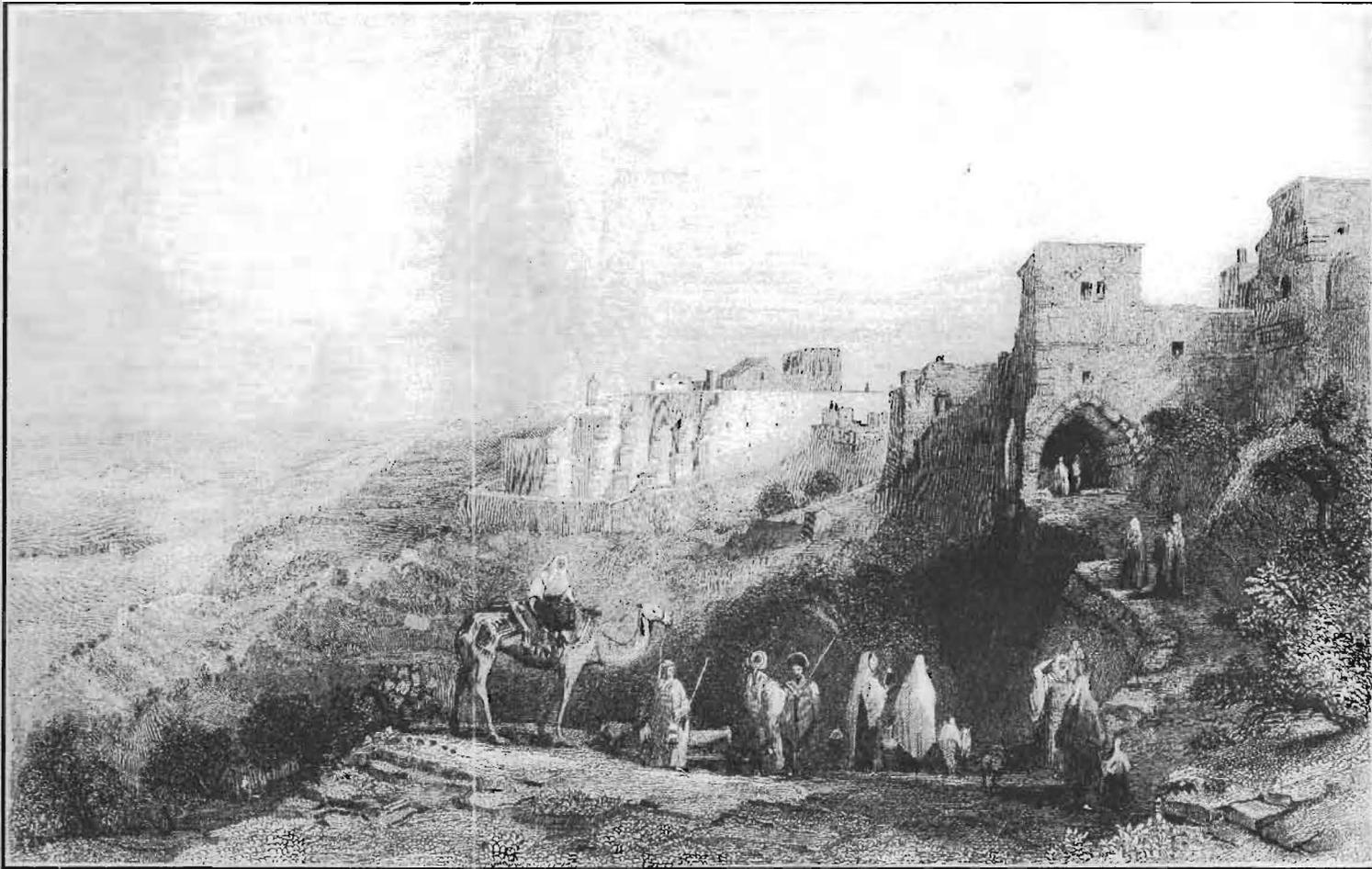


# CHRISTMAS



**Yes or No?**

A study by *Dr. J.E. VanBuskirk*

# **CHRISTMAS**

**Yes or No?**

© 2005

by Dr. T.E. VanBuskirk

No portion may be reproduced in any manner  
without written permission from the author.

Limited permission is given to make copies for use in a local Independent Baptist Church for use in Sunday School, Worship, hour, Bible Study, or for use in a Bible College or Institute that is a direct ministry of an Independent Baptist Church. Such copies may be given to members or visitors for purposes of study. Copies may not be made to give away or sell for use in a ministry that is not a direct ministry of that Local Independent Baptist Church or College/Institute. Copies may not be sold for more than the cost of printing, i.e., they may not be sold for profit, without written permission from the author.

For more information contact:

Dr. T.E. VanBuskirk  
Administrative Vice President  
Salt Lake Baptist College  
3769 W. 4700 S.  
Taylorsville, UT 84118  
801-964-0763  
[docvbk@saltlakebaptistcollege.org](mailto:docvbk@saltlakebaptistcollege.org)  
<http://saltlakebaptistcollege.org>

## Yes or No

### Introduction

Thanks to Gracia and her friend Deb for helping so much with the research for this study.

**A. Quote from Deb - "I've known many Christians in my life who go through an anti-Christmas phase - it's nothing new. Like my cousin, who was trying to be so radical. He later grew out of it, and will admit that. They now enjoy the holiday with their children."**

**B. The argument that Christians shouldn't celebrate Christmas is nothing new. It has been banged around for three centuries.**

1. Tighe wrote last December (2004) in Touchstone, a Chicago-based magazine for Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditionalists concerning the theory that Christmas is a pagan holiday:

**"[T]he pagans-first theory originated only three centuries ago in the writings of Protestant historian Paul Ernst Jablonski and Catholic monk Jean Hardouin."**

2. Another reason that is given by Protestants and even some Independent Baptists is that it is a Catholic holiday and, thus, we non-Catholics should never celebrate it.

**C. Possibilities of why Christians think that we shouldn't celebrate Christmas:**

(And a few quick answers to some of them.)

1. It could be true that we shouldn't and they have found Biblical evidence to prove it.

2. Those who believe that we shouldn't, believe so because of **deception**.

(Someone deceived them.) We are commanded in the Bible to combat deception.

**II Tim 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman**

**that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.**

**:16 But shun profane [and] vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.**

3. Those who believe that we shouldn't, believe so because of **ignorance**.

(Not studying to get to the truth of the matter but relying on others to do the thinking for them- this allows deception to take place.) **Again: II Tim 2:15-16**

4. Those who believe that we shouldn't, believe so because of **fear**.

(Fear of paganism or fear of Catholicism, etc.) **This is a sign of immaturity.**

**I Jn 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. 17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.**

5. Those who believe that we shouldn't, believe so because of their own **rebellious and contentious spirit**.

Rebellion of this sort is forbidden by God:

**Prov 17:11 An evil [man] seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him.**

And the contention caused by it spreads everywhere:

**Prov 17:14 The beginning of strife [is as] when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.**

And a contentious spirit is an issue of nothing else but PRIDE!

**Prov 13:10 Only by pride cometh contention...**

6. Those who believe that we shouldn't, believe so because of a **thirst for recognition**.

This is intermingled with #5; i.e., rebellion and a thirst for recognition seem to go together- at least in the way God judges them.

**Prov 17:19 He loveth transgression that loveth strife:**

**[and] he that exalteth his gate seeketh destruction.**

And the thirst for recognition is nothing but PRIDE!

**Prov 15:25 The LORD will destroy the house of the proud...**

**Prov 16:18 Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.**

D. Deception, ignorance, immaturity and fear, a rebellious and contentious spirit, and a thirst for recognition- these are the various possible reasons behind rejecting Christmas.

They are reasons but not excuses! And a rebellious and contentious spirit and pridefully seeking recognition, these are FORBIDDEN by God and we have already covered that!

Now we will try to address the other reasons to see if they are REASONABLE!

I. Was there rejoicing and celebration at the original Christmas- the birth of Christ?

*Everything must have a beginning- so to start at the beginning we must ask ourselves this question: "Was there rejoicing and celebration at the original Christmas- the birth of Christ?"*

A. Rejoicing prophesied concerning the birth of the prophet John who would turn many to Christ.

**Luke 1:44 "... and many shall rejoice at his birth."**

B. Rejoicing took place at the birth of Christ.

**Lk 2:20 "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them."**

- The Wise Men saw the star heralding Christ's birth and rejoiced.

- They were not at the manger- but they did rejoice at His birth.

**Mt 2:10 "When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy."**

- And this was some time AFTER Christ's birth.

**Mt 2:2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.**

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

We don't know how many wise men there were, because the Bible does not say- it does say, however, that there were either three symbolic gifts or various gifts consisting of three substances- **"gold, frankincense, and myrrh."**

C. It is obvious that rejoicing and celebration **did** surround the birth of Christ- both at the time of it's occurrence and continuing until a later time by the wise men.

Now we must ask ourselves this question - "Should we continue to celebrate the birth of Christ today - and - is it okay to do so on December 25<sup>th</sup>?"

## II. Fear, ignorance, and deception.

We have seen that fear is a sign of spiritual immaturity; but, it is still, nonetheless, a reason why some people say we should not celebrate Christmas.

Ignorance: Not knowing the facts. This, as we have seen is not an excuse but it is a reason why people say we should not celebrate Christmas.

Deception: The existence of “ignorance” can be a prime cause of “fear” and both of those leave people open to easy “deception.”

Therefore, we shall address, and try to lessen, the amount of ignorance surrounding our subject; and by doing so we can combat both the fear and the ease with which deception is foisted upon those who simply do not know the facts.

**It is time to reach toward spiritual maturity and dispel the “fear” that God warns us is a sign of a lack of it!**

Ignorance is a common condition that is nothing to be ashamed of - however, failing to study a question that has arisen - to remain in ignorance - is not wise.

You could put it this way:

**“Ignorance is nothing to be ashamed of -  
but staying that way when you don’t have to, IS!”**

### B. Fear of Catholicism.

One argument is that “Christmas is a Catholic holiday - not a Christian one.” And since we are not Catholic, then it is proposed that we “shouldn’t celebrate the Catholic holiday of Christmas at any time.”

#### 1. Did Christmas originate with the Catholic Church?

a. Christ Mass - many Protestant scholars and nearly all Catholic ones believe that this is the origin of the word “Christmas.” **THIS IS NOT TRUE!**

b. Yes, the Catholics did institute the “Christ Mass” to celebrate the birth of Christ and Yes! they did join the two words to make up the word Christmas but, that does NOT mean that what we Christians celebrate is the same as what the Catholics celebrate - we celebrate on the same day that they do because the Catholics happened to adopt the day that we use for their own celebration.

- They use the Bible too, does that mean we need to throw out the Bible?

- They call themselves a “Church” does that mean we need to throw out the term “Church?”

- They use the term “Priest,” so does that mean we cannot call Christ the **“high Priest of our profession...”** ? (Heb 3:1)

- They falsely claim that Peter was a Catholic and the first Pope, does that mean we can’t teach and preach about Peter from the Bible?

c. The Catholic Encyclopedia presents Christ Mass as not being widespread in Catholic circles until the mid-fourth century; although some portions of the Catholic Church had celebrated it from around the mid-third century.

And the earliest uses of the term by the Catholics in English as what we would call Christmas is, once again according to the Catholic Encyclopedia: **“The word for Christmas in late Old English is *Cristes Maesse*, the Mass of Christ, first found in 1038, and *Cristes-messe*, in 1131...”**

- d. Some, foremost the Catholics, insist that the word “mass” is a strictly Catholic term. This is simply not true. It existed as a word long before Catholicism adopted it.
- The word translated as “mass” is from Late Latin *missa*, from Latin, feminine of *missus*, past participle of *mittere* to send
  - Latin root - *mitto, mittere, misi, missum*, [to send, dispatch; to send as a gift; to fling; to shed; to utter; to let go, release, give up; to dismiss, discharge; to pass over] a subject.
  - Old English *mæsse*
  - **The Catholics appropriated the word and used it in the sense of “to dismiss.”**  
Catholic Dictionary - “The Eucharist as a sacrifice is called the Mass, most probably from the dismissal (*missa*) of the catechumens before the celebration.”
  - It is evident that the Catholics simply adopted a Latin word to denote their “sacrament.”

e. Christian celebration of Christmas.

We, on the other hand, use the “mas” in Christmas in the sense of “sent, dispense, to send as a gift.” God “sent” Christ as a gift to us. Yes, He was “dispatched” from Heaven and He was “sent” to us, and we use the term Christmas, and “mas” in that sense.

**NOTE:** Some believe that “Christmas” was started by the Catholics. This is simply not true.

They did not celebrate it as a Catholic mass (*Dies Natalis Invicti*) until the mid to late 3<sup>rd</sup> century. They did not actually call it the equivalent of “Christmas” until around 1100.

**Thus, since it was not a holiday appointed by the Catholic Church and the name “Christmas” does not mean “Christ Mass” but rather “Christ sent,” and since Christian use of the holiday predated the very inception of the Catholic Church itself in the third to fourth century and their subsequent inception of Christ Mass, then to fear Christmas as a celebration of a Catholic holiday simply doesn’t line up with the facts. They celebrate the Christ Mass while we celebrate Christmas in recognition of the fact that God dispatched (“mas”) Christ from Heaven and “sent” (“mas”) Him to us. That should lay that particular “fear” to rest.**

2. Did early Christians celebrate the birth of Christ on December 25th?
  - a. John Chrysostom of Constantinople who died in A.D. 407 recorded that Christians had marked Dec. 25 from the early days.
  - b. However, historical records show that the December date used by many to celebrate was not considered by some to be His actual birth date but rather His probable conception date.
    - Scholars believe that the Roman Census generally took place between August and October.
    - This earlier date for His actual birth would be more in line with **Luke ch. 2** which tells us that the shepherds were tending their flocks in the field. It would have been too cold in December- the flocks would have already been gathered in for the winter by that time.
3. It is obvious that the Christians did celebrate on Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> from the earliest times but we are not sure exactly what they were celebrating.

### III. Could December 25<sup>th</sup> be the True date of Christ’s birth?

#### A. Is it possible?

1. Chrysostom (c. 347-407) of Constantinople had an argument that modern scholars ignore:  
**Luke 1** says Zechariah was performing priestly duty in the Temple when an angel told his

wife Elizabeth she would bear John the Baptist. During the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Mary learned about her conception of Jesus and visited Elizabeth "with haste." The 24 classes of Jewish priests served one week in the Temple, and Zechariah was in the eighth class. Rabbinical tradition fixed the class on duty when the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70 and, calculating backward from that, Zechariah's class would have been serving Oct. 2-9 in 5 B.C. So Mary's conception visit six months later might have occurred the following March and Jesus' birth nine months afterward.

Quote from the magazine article from which this information was taken: "Though it is not a matter of faith, there is no good reason not to accept the tradition of March 25 conception and Dec. 25 birth."

2. Another possibility of why Christians picked Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> is that the rededication of the Temple by the Maccabees occurred on the 25<sup>th</sup> of Chislev- or as we would reckon, Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>. To the Jews this is known as Hanukkah. The story is that at the dedication there was only enough of the special oil for the Menorah, the seven branched lamp, to last for but one day. The story goes that the oil miraculously lasted for eight days, time enough for more to be prepared. From this story the feast became to be known as "the festival of lights."

Christians might have picked the day of Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> because this would be in line with the many times that Jesus claimed to be "**the light of the world...**" (Jn chs. 8, 9, 11, 12, et al)

It may have been the early Christians' way of illustrating Jn 1:9 "**That was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.**"

3. Therefore, it is possible that Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> is the date of Christ's birth but it is also just as possible that the date was chosen because of the "**light of the world...**" connection or the connection of the celebration of His conception.

## B. Could other dates also be possible? Yes!

1. There is some evidence that His birth could have taken place during the Feast of Tabernacles which falls, according to our calendar, on Sept. 29<sup>th</sup>. (Hebrew - 15<sup>th</sup> of Tishri)

This would be in line with I Jn 1:14 that tells us that "**The word was made flesh, and dwelt (tabernacled) among us.**" Exactly as the children of Israel dwelt in tabernacles in the wilderness.

If Jesus truly was born during the Feast of Tabernacles, and one counts backwards the normal number of days of human gestation, 278 days, then you again come up with the date of December 25<sup>th</sup> - and that as the day of Christ's conception in the womb of Mary- and this is given as another reason why some celebrated that date in Christian history.

2. April 6<sup>th</sup>, in the East, and March 25<sup>th</sup>, in the West were chosen by some because of the Jewish belief of "integral age" concerning the prophets- meaning the belief that the prophets were born and died on the same day as their birth.

Second-century Latin Christians in Rome and North Africa appear to have desired to establish the historical date on which the Lord Jesus died. By the time of Tertullian they had concluded that he died on Friday, 25 March, 29. (Note: This is impossible- March 25, 29 was not a Friday, and Passover Eve in A.D. 29 did not fall on a Friday and was not on March 25<sup>th</sup>, or in March at all.) And because this was the date of Christ's supposed crucifixion, then they conjectured that He must have been born on that same day.

In the East, April 6<sup>th</sup> was chosen because it was the Spring Equinox.

3. Many other dates have been suggested down through the centuries. In fact, one eighteenth century Jesuit scholar stated that almost every month of the year has been proposed by someone at sometime as being the month of Christ's birth.

C. Does it matter?

1. No one knows for sure the true date of Christ's birth, although it could have been on Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>. But one thing we do know, He was born and that is what we celebrate.
2. It doesn't matter who is right about what date, what does matter is that we freely choose to celebrate Christ's birth; and we have traditionally, for at least 18 or more centuries, chosen to celebrate on December 25<sup>th</sup>.

My dad celebrated his birthday for 75 years on July 12<sup>th</sup>, and we celebrated it with him. He found out when he was 75, when he finally was able to locate a copy of his birth certificate, that the official date of his birth was July 17<sup>th</sup>. After all of those years of doing so, he decided to continue celebrating on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July. And we celebrated it with him. It didn't matter when he was born, all that mattered was that he was born; and that is what we celebrated.

And it is the same with Christ. We do not celebrate the day (that is probably why God hid that from us) but rather we celebrate the birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

## SUMMARY

**We have shown that there is no connection between our celebration of Christmas (Christ sent) and the liturgy of the Catholic Christ Mass. The Catholics simply appropriated words and days that were already in common use by the non-Catholic Christians and others.**

**When Constantine elevated Catholicism to power, then the appropriation of Christian historical figures and holidays began to take place in earnest. And that appropriation continued its acceleration down through the centuries until, today, few bother to even question the "facts," as presented by both the Catholic and the Secular scholars, but would rather accept the deception.**

**As we will see in the next segment, the Catholics trace their holiday back to Caesar Aurelian and his institution of a pagan holiday which he hoped would replace the holiday that the Christians had already been celebrating on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. This in itself shows that the Christ Mass holiday celebrated by them, one purposely appropriating the day of a pagan holiday, is not the same as the Christmas celebrated by us. Both of our holidays have some terms and words in common, true, but that does not mean they are the same.**

**We have also seen that our holiday is not descended from their holiday, but rather predated it. Therefore, we have, hopefully, laid to rest that fear and turned the ignorance that fostered it into knowledge that is useful for arriving at the truth.**

**Next week we will conclude with "The Pagan Holiday Connection" (which does not exist) and questions about "Christmas trees" and such articles as used in our traditional celebration of the birth of Christ.**

**Dr. T.E. VanBuskirk**

**Taylorville, Utah - Dec. 4, 2005 & Nov. 30, 2006**

## III. The Pagan Holiday Connection.

We have already laid to rest the fear of Catholicism, and now we must address another "fear" that is integral to the dispute of "Yes or No - should Christians celebrate Christmas." That fear, as was the earlier one of the "Catholic connection," is propagated by ignorance and misinformation. And, as was stated in the introduction, fear and ignorance lead to ease of deception by those who would propagate their own particular agendas through deceptive propaganda. As we shall see, there is no "Pagan Connection" and, therefore, no reason to fear.

### A. Pagan Roman Holidays in the first 3 centuries A.D.

1. There is no evidence that any of the cults existent during that time held feasts on December 25<sup>th</sup>; which, at that time under the Julian Calendar, was the winter solstice.
2. There were two temples of the sun in Rome, one of which (maintained by the clan into which Aurelian was born or adopted) celebrated its dedication festival on August 9<sup>th</sup>, the other of which celebrated its dedication festival on August 28<sup>th</sup>. But both of these cults fell into neglect in the second century. None of these cults, old or new, had festivals associated with solstices or equinoxes.
3. Mithraism- the new cult of Rome at that time.

Some antagonists of Christmas maintain that the Roman cult of Mithraism used December 25<sup>th</sup> as a festival day. Such propositions show a decided lack of study on the part of the proponents of the theory.

- Because there are no reliable surviving texts that give the liturgical prescriptions for the practice of Roman Mithraism, we have to conclude that there is no evidence that this cult ever held December 25<sup>th</sup> as having any significance whatsoever.
- Much recent study of the cult present credible and systematic evidence that this particular cult, Roman Mithraism, was not an offshoot of Iranian Mithraism, as has been supposed since Cumont wrote his 2 volume work on Mithraism in 1886-1889. This book was considered the definitive work and thus remained unquestioned for over 70 years and was the basis for the belief that Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> was a special day for the Roman Mithraic cult.
- David Ulansey (The Cosmic Mysteries of Mithras) in an article in Biblical Archaeology Review, maintains that the Roman cult of Mithras had nothing to do with the Iranian cult of Mithras. He maintains that the Roman cult merely borrowed from the Iranian cult. His arguments are quite compelling and based upon the repeated iconography of the Roman cult which shows the slaughtering of a bull accomplished by Mithras in the Roman cult. Such an act by the Iranian Mithras is not shown in any of the Iranian iconography and, furthermore, neither is it mentioned in any of the texts of the Iranian cult. And texts from the Iranian cult are many, in contrast to the Roman cult which has a dearth of texts and among the small number are none written by adherents to the religion but rather by outsiders who lived at the time when the religion was in its last few waning years.

David Ulansey and many others maintain that the Roman cult merely borrowed the name of the "god" Mithras and some few other details from the Iranian Mithraic cult. His arguments, drawn from various sources, are extremely compelling.

From the First International Congress of Mithraic Studies in Manchester England, which met in 1971, down to the present day, Cumont's theories have been increasingly refuted.

In contrast to the theory that Roman Mithraism is descended from the Iranian religion by the same name, modern interpretations of Roman Mithras as the astronomical bull-slayer have continued to move diametrically away from Cumont's interpretations.

4. From the mounting evidence it is quite obvious that the Roman cult of Mithras was not descended from the Iranian cult by the same name and was not celebrating the winter solstice, December 25<sup>th</sup>, as part of its worship.

In fact, the cult didn't even have a wide following until the mid-third century; and in spite of a wide following it was never an officially recognized Roman religion. The only official religion, other than emperor worship, in the Roman Empire in the first three centuries A.D. was Magna Mater which arrived in AD 204. And it didn't hold that December 25<sup>th</sup> had any religious significance.

Although it became quite a substantial religion in Rome from the 2<sup>nd</sup> through the 4<sup>th</sup> centuries, several disadvantages of Mithraism that kept it from becoming extremely widespread in the general population were that its adherents were mostly soldiers and a few statesmen and that women were specifically excluded.

- B. December 25<sup>th</sup> does become a pagan holiday- but long after it was a Christian one.

Many antagonists who decry Christmas as a pagan holiday cite the fact that Emperor Aurelian instituted the pagan festival of the "Birth of the Unconquered Son" on 25 December, 274. It is true that Aurelian instituted that festival; but, the insistence that Christians later adopted that day for their celebration of Christ's birth (as the Catholics believe because of Pope Julius I.'s declaration in AD 350) is not born out by the facts.

### **I give the following reasons for that latter statement:**

1. Because the belief by Christians that Jesus was born on December 25<sup>th</sup> predated the first institution of a Roman pagan holiday on that day.
  - The definitive "Handbook of Biblical Chronology" by professor Jack Finegan (Hendrickson, 1998 revised edition) cites an important reference in the "Chronicle" written by Hippolytus of Rome three decades before Aurelian launched his festival. Hippolytus said Jesus' birth "took place eight days before the kalends of January," that is, Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>.

The Chronicle was written approximately AD 200; thus, it, and its statements concerning Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> as the day recognized by Christians as the day of Christ's birth, predated Aurelian's institution of the festival honoring the "Birth of the Unconquered Son" on that day by at least seven decades.
  - Chamber's Book of Days tells us the following:

"Towards the close of the second century, we find a notice of the observance of Christmas in the reign of the Emperor Commodus." (You may remember Commodus as the Emperor portrayed by Joaquin Phoenix in the movie "The Gladiator." (2000) Also, the 1964 movie "The Fall of the Roman Empire" was loosely based on Commodus' life.)

Commodus reigned from 180-192, so this would make the celebration of Christmas on Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> by the Christians during his reign some 80-90 years before Aurelian's decree.
  - This account from Chamber's, when taken along with Hippolytus' statement in the Chronicle, readily confirm the celebration of Christmas on Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> as already existing at least pre-200 AD. This means it not only predated Aurelian's pagan festival by at least 80 years, but that it predated even the birth of Aurelian in 214 AD by at least a decade or more.

2. When these evidences are combined with Chrysostom's statement from the end of the fourth century that "Christian's had celebrated December 25<sup>th</sup> from the early days," then it leaves little doubt that December 25<sup>th</sup> was used as a Christian holiday for many Christians for celebrating the birth of Christ (and for celebrating His conception for some other Christians) for nearly a century before Aurelian made it a pagan holiday and a century-and-a-half before it finally became a Catholic holiday celebrating the Catholic mass, *Dies Natalis Invicti*.
3. In the words of Tighe, "Rather, the pagan festival of the Birth of the Unconquered Son instituted by the Roman Emperor Aurelian on 25 December 274, was almost certainly an attempt to create a pagan alternative to a date that was already of some significance to Roman Christians. Thus the pagan origins of Christmas is a myth without historical substance."

## C. Summary.

1. Because of the weight of historical evidence, we can finally set the fear of a pagan connection to Christmas to rest.
2. When Christians first began to celebrate Christmas on Dec. 25<sup>th</sup>, which we have seen was at least by the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century and also for some unknown length of time before that, there was no pagan cult of any known significance in Rome that celebrated December 25<sup>th</sup> as a festival or religious day of any special significance.
3. In fact, we now know that it was not the Christians that adopted a pagan holiday for their celebration (as the Catholics later did for their celebration of Christmas along with many pagan symbols) but rather it was the Pagan Emperor Aurelian who appropriated the date of the Christian holiday of December 25<sup>th</sup> for his own pagan religion's purposes.

## PART TWO Various Other Matters.

### I. The Christmas tree.

#### A. Trees fashioned and worshiped as gods are forbidden!

Read **Jer 10:1-14** and look especially to verses **:5** and **:10-14** for understanding by context.

#### B. To Christians, on the other hand, trees, which we do not worship, are a sign of many things.

##### 1. They are a biblical sign of rejoicing in the next coming of the true God.

By putting up a Christmas tree we look with rejoicing during our celebration of Christ's birth at Christmas, to a time when He shall return again! The Christmas tree used during our celebration of His First Coming reminds us of His Second Coming.

**Ps 96:11-13** **"Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that [is] therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth."**

##### 2. Early Christian usage of the Christmas tree.

- 7<sup>th</sup> Century Christians used the triangular shape of the fir tree to represent the Trinity.
- 12<sup>th</sup> Century Christians hung fir trees upside-down from ceilings as a symbol of Christianity.
- The first decorated tree was at Riga in Latvia, in 1510.

Candles were added at that time to symbolize the beauty of God's stars twinkling through the trees on a cold winter's night. This trend was followed a century later, in 1610, with the introduction of tinsel to give the tree the same sparkling effect. Beads were then added for the same reason by 1846; and God's messenger of Christ's promised birth (and the later messengers of His arrival), the angel, at the top of the tree was added at this time.

- The best record we have of a decorated Christmas tree is that of a visitor to Strasbourg (near the French-German border) in 1601. His record tells us of a tree decorated with "wafers and golden sugar-twists (Barleysugar) and paper flowers of all colours."

Those trees were viewed as symbolic of the Paradise Tree in the Garden of Eden. The many food items were symbols of Plenty, the flowers were originally only red (for knowledge) and white (for innocence).

- 18<sup>th</sup> century Germans celebrated by putting up Christmas trees- with the exception of the Catholics along the lower Rhine which considered it a Protestant custom which they, of course, refused to follow.
- In England by the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, each member of the family had their own small Christmas tree in the home placed up on tables. Each person's gifts were stacked below it.
- By 1747, community trees began to show up in American German settlements in Pennsylvania. Windsor Locks, Connecticut, claims that a Hessian (German) soldier put up a Christmas tree in 1777 while imprisoned at the Noden-Reed house in that city. They claim that it was the first Christmas tree in New England.
- By 1860-1880, the Christmas tree was becoming a common sight all across America, not just in the German settlements.

- The star at the top of the Christmas tree has, and does still, represent the Star of Bethlehem.

### 3. Gifts.

- Historically these have symbolized the giving spirit that God showed in **John 3:16** when He gave Christ to mankind as Saviour and is biblically based upon the physical giving of gifts back to Christ by the Wise Men.
- We show that same spirit of selfless giving by giving gifts to one another expecting nothing in return; and, we should go further and give gifts directly to Christ as the Wise Men did. And that we can do by giving those birthday gifts for Christ to the body of Christ here on earth, the local New Testament Church which the Bible tells us is His body.
- One other thing, giving gifts at any time, which would also include at Christmas, to our brothers and sisters in Christ who are in need would also fall under the scripture that tells us that when we do it to them then we are doing it to Christ. This principle is taught in **Mt 25:34-45**.

### C. But are there pagan religions that use the tree also and should that stop us from using them?

1. Yes there are pagan religions that use trees; but, they also use many thousands of other things that Christians, and Jews, use. If we stopped using all of those things then we would have to stop using not only wood (trees) but also much of the foods that we eat; and the fruit of the vine, such as the grape-juice we use at the Lord's Supper; water; various metals such as gold, silver, brass, copper and a multitude of others; precious gems; clothing of various materials; a multitude of various kinds of building materials; and so many other things that we would soon die if we stopped using all of them. In fact, we would die if we stopped using even a few of them, especially when it comes to the necessities of life such as food, clothing, shelter, and water, which a multitude of false religions use in their worship of their false gods.
2. In addition, if it was required that we stop using those things because some pagan somewhere uses them in some manner in their pagan and cultic religious observances, then God was wrong for telling the Israelites that they HAD TO use those things in the construction and maintenance of His Tabernacle and, later, His Temple. For all of the things used in their construction or in the ceremonies performed in them were also used by the pagans in their religions. Even the Ark of the Covenant was made of wood and overlaid with gold. And both the Holy of Holies and much of the construction of the Tabernacle and the Temple were made of wood, and contained various objects made of precious metals and precious stones. And since we know that God is never wrong, then we know, biblically, that use of those things is not prohibited just because the pagans use them also.
3. Just because a pagan uses something in a religious manner does not mean that we cannot also use it. The Bible simply teaches that we cannot use it for the same purposes for which they use it; i.e., to worship a false god. (**Jer 10:1-14**)

## II. The Use of Any Day

There are so many false gods worshiped, millions in Hinduism alone, that EVERY day of the year is dedicated to some god or other. In fact, with the multiplied millions of false gods, there are many gods for each and every day since there are only 365 in a year. Should we then forbid the use of any day for worship of the true God, or in memory of the incarnation of God the Son, Jesus

Christ, as at Christmas? This is illogical since it would be contrary to the very commands of God who, in His Word, commanded certain days be set aside for Jewish festivals and Sabbaths in the Old Testament; and His commands in the New Testament that we gather for worship and celebration and the practice of the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper which would necessitate the use of at least some days for these purposes. God is not illogical and would not command us to do something and then give us a prohibition that would make it impossible to obey His first command.

Therefore, to say that December 25<sup>th</sup> is not allowed for Christian purposes because of some connection with a pagan God would be to say that we cannot use any day for Christian purposes because every day is dedicated to some false god or other- or most likely to many gods. And this would put us in direct disobedience to God's command that we do use days for worship and observance of the ordinances.

It's either all or nothing, and in the context under consideration, we cannot disallow one day without disallowing them all. And, as we have seen, that would put us in direct disobedience to God!

### III. Summary of Sections One and Two

- A. The Christmas tree and its accouterments and gifts represent certain things to true Christians:
1. The tree represents the Trinity of God in its triangular shape.
  2. It is a visible reminder, at our celebration of his First Coming, of Christ's return at His Second Coming.
  3. Its lights and baubles and bangles and tinsel that glitter and shine remind us of the awesome beauty of God's creation. Just like the stars that glitter and twinkle through the trees even on the coldest of winter nights.
  4. The angel at the top of the tree, should we use one, represents God's messengers who announced His coming birth and, later, His arrival.
  5. Should we chose to use a star at the top, then that represents the Star of Bethlehem that guided the lost to the Saviour and showed the time and place of His birth to all who would seek Him.
  6. The gifts under the tree remind us of the giving spirit that God showed to the world in Christ and that we are to show to others as well as to Him as personified in His body, the local New Testament Church, as the magi did to Christ while He was here in the flesh. And that we should especially give gifts to those brothers and sisters in the Lord who have need. For when we do so to them then Christ tells us that we are doing so to Him.
- B. It is true that some of the common symbols and materials of the Christian Christmas are used by pagan religions; but that does not mean that ours have a pagan origin. It simply means that there are some common usages. That does not mean that we cannot use those things, such as trees, lights and other sparkling baubles, presents, etc., anymore than it means we cannot use the thousands of other things, including the necessities of life, that are used by them. To the contrary, God even commanded the OT Israelites to use those various things in building His Tabernacle and Temple. This gave His stamp of approval to the use of the materials, but He also commanded that we not use them for the religious purpose of worshiping the pagan gods.

- C. Therefore, when we use the materials (trees, decorations, gifts, etc.) in a godly manner, then we are following His biblical precepts that teach us to use them in that way and not in the way of the heathen.
- D. And in the matter of disallowing Dec. 25<sup>th</sup> for Christian purposes, such as the celebration of Christ being “sent” to us (Christmas), because of the use of it by pagans, then it is obvious that we cannot do so without disallowing every other day of the year. And this, as we have seen, would put us in direct disobedience to God’s plain commands to assemble and worship and observe the ordinances. In fact, we could not specifically set Sunday aside as a day of worship because it is the “Day of the Sun” and originated in pre-Christian Egyptian culture and their religion of sun worship (the sun-god Re). And the same can be said for every other day of the year.

## GENERAL SUMMARY

- I. We have seen that Christmas is not a Catholic holiday but rather a holiday on which Christians celebrated our Lord's birth for at least 150 years before the Catholics did so. And that our Christmas means "Christ sent," and not the same as their Christ Mass, *Dies Natalis Invicti*, which they refurbished as Christmas and celebrated as such nearly 1,000 years later.
- II. We have also seen that Christmas was not taken from a pagan holiday but rather a Christian one celebrated from before the third century which the pagans appropriated from us at least 70-80 years later during the third century.
- III. We have examined the symbolism and history of the tradition of celebrating December 25<sup>th</sup> as Christmas and found that the Christians have been celebrating on that day, for various reasons, since antiquity; and, that it has been celebrated specifically as the date of Christ's birth since before AD 200.
- IV. We have examined the origin of the Christmas tree and its accouterments and all of the symbolism involved and have found no connection with paganism in the way that they are used in our Christmas celebrations. To the contrary, we have found that the Christmas tree and its ornaments and the presents associated with the tree and the holiday represent totally Judeo/Christian precepts such as: the Trinity, the Second Coming of Christ, Christianity in general, God's beautiful creation, the spirit of godly giving, the Star of Bethlehem, and the angelic messengers of God.

**NOTE:** Remember that using these things in the way that the pagans use them, to worship false gods, is, however, prohibited by God.

- V. Therefore, we must conclude that Christmas is a holiday to be enjoyed by Christians, when practiced correctly without worship of the day, the tree and its accouterments, and the gifts, rather than worship of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. We also have to wonder if those who teach otherwise simply have not studied the scriptures nor history but rather seem to operate out of fear and, in the case of some, deception or an aspiration to exaltation of self (which is pride) rather than out of knowledge and study as God commands us. It seems they have degenerated into "**vain and profane babblings:**" which God tells us will "**increase unto more ungodliness.**" (II Tim 2:16)

I fail to see how such erroneous teachings about Christmas and the insistence of those who espouse them will in ANY WAY advance the cause of Christ to the unbelievers. In fact common sense and experience both teach us that such displays of fear and/or ignorance are totally counter-productive in their effect.

### My admonition is-

**Enjoy a good godly Christmas and pray for those (Gal 6:1) who would rob themselves, and others, of the joy of celebrating the very birth of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.**

Dr. T. E. VanBuskirk

Taylorville, UT - December 11, 2005 and December 1, 2006

## BIBLIOGRAPHY and other references

1. **King James Bible**
2. **Wikipedia (Online Encyclopedia)**
3. **Pulseplanet**
4. **Calculating Christmas - William J. Tighe**, the Story Behind December 25  
Touchstone Magazine
5. <http://www.thebookofdays.com/months/dec/25.htm>  
**Chamber's Book of Days**
6. <http://www.roman-emperors.org/commod.htm>
7. <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=Xmas>
8. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Festival\\_of\\_the\\_Unconquered\\_Sun](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Festival_of_the_Unconquered_Sun)
9. <http://www.worldspirituality.org/December-25.html>
10. <http://www.crystalinks.com/mithra.html>
11. <http://www.well.com/user/davidu/mithras.html>
12. <http://eawc.evansville.edu/essays/mithraism.htm>
13. <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Anglo/part6.html>
14. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian\\_Calendar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregorian_Calendar)
15. **The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle** - Online Medieval and Classical Library Release #17
16. **Why is Dec. 25 the date to celebrate Christmas?** - Richard Ostling - Assoc. Press
17. <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php>
18. *Historia Augusta: Life of Commodus*
19. *Book 73 of Cassius Deo's History*
20. **Latin Dictionary** - <http://www.nd.edu/~archives/latgramm.htm>
21. Jones, Bill, **Was Jesus Born on December 25?** Article
22. <http://www.holidays.net/christmas/tree.htm>
23. <http://www.christmasarchives.com/trees.html>
24. <http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/holidays/christmas/trees.html>
25. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas\\_tree](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas_tree)
26. <http://www.bsu.edu/web/01bkswartz/xmaspub.html>
27. **Online Etymology Dictionary**
28. <http://www.egyptologyonline.com>
29. **The Holy Bible, A+ Edition, Bible and references on CD**