

The Origins of Christmas

Introduction

- Even in the days of Paul there was debate on the observance of special days – Romans 14:5-6
- The observance and celebration of Christmas has been hotly debated and many of its traditions heavily scrutinized.
- In this lesson, we will look at the origins of some of these traditions.
 - Much credit due to Scott Aniol's articles on ReligiousAffections.org
- Note – Various Christmas traditions were created by writers such as Washington Irving (*Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon*) and Charles Dickens (*A Christmas Carol*).

December 25

- A common theory is that the date of December 25 came from “Christianizing” the Roman festival of Saturnalia (celebrated December 17-23).
- However, it seems more likely that early Christians who celebrated the Feast of Annunciation on March 25 (a date tied to Good Friday) simply added nine months to that date and came up with December 25.
- It seems most likely that Christ was born around the time of the Feast of Tabernacles (late September or early October).
 - Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, was in the course of Abia (Luke 1:5) which is supposed to have ministered shortly after *Shavuot* (Pentecost, late May to early June).
 - John the Baptist would be born nine months later, and Christ was six months younger than John – Luke 1:24-38
 - This makes 15 months after Zechariah's course, which would be around the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.
- Regardless, the date is not truly important, or it would have been given clearly. What is important is that our Savior was born.

Christmas Trees

- A common theory is that these trees have pagan roots, either in tree worship or the Roman Saturnalia.
- However, the actual practice is likely based on the “Paradise Tree”, or *Paradeisbaum*.
 - In medieval times plays based on Bible events were quite popular, including that of Adam and Eve.
 - A prop tree would be hung with fruit to represent the tree in Genesis 2:17

- It then became popular to have a “paradise tree” in homes on the Feast of Adam and Eve (celebrated December 24).
- These trees were popular in Germany and there is records of Martin Luther or his followers using them in the 16th century.
- This custom spread into the English word with Queen Victoria and Prince Albert (who was German).

Santa Claus

- It may seem strange, but the mythical Santa Claus of today was based on a very real and very Christian man.
- Nicholas of Myra (270-343) was an early Christian leader that little certain is known about.
 - He is supposed to have been at the Council of Nicaea (325) and there possibly slapped Arius or one of his followers.
 - One of the best-known stories about him was him secretly providing gold coins to three poor sisters so they could use them as a dowry and avoid becoming slaves or prostitutes.
 - He was honored on the supposed date of his death, December 6, with giving gifts to children.
- Luther and the Reformers moved the gift giving to Christmas but could not remove Nicholas from the public mind.
- The Dutch *Sinterklaas* or *Sint-Nicolaas* became anglicized as *Santa Claus*.
- Popular culture and advertising completely fabricated much of the story and characteristics of Santa Claus.

Xmas or Christmas?

- Many today assume that *Xmas* is literally crossing Christ out of Christmas.
- However, the practice of shortening Christ (Greek - Χριστός) as X goes back for centuries.
- While there is no historical basis for *Xmas* being an attempt to remove Christ from Christmas, it is still best to spell out His name.