

#39 Northside Natter

16 December 2020

Today, I'm taking a brief look at **Christmas**.

Mainline Christians in the world believe that 25 December is the day Jesus was born and they celebrate his birth accordingly. The fact that they celebrate his birth at all is promising. However, for most people, the celebration is all about consumerism and has nothing at all to do with Jesus.

We know that Jesus's birth was more likely to have taken place around the last few days of September to early October. Why? Because the shepherds watched their flocks by night (Luke 2:8), and I can tell you that if it was December, they would have been neck-deep in snow - shepherd popsicles. As for the sheep, they would all have frozen to death in the open field without shelter of any kind.

Another reason we know it wasn't Winter when Jesus was born is because the Romans required a census of the people to be taken and there was little chance of successful travel through the winter snows without many infants and elderly expiring along the way. It had to be done in another season – a warmer one.

The year of Christ's birth is sometimes touted to have been 4BC, based on a conclusion Josephus made about the eclipse that took place on 13 March 4BC, prior to Herod's death. This conclusion has since come into question.

The date was more likely on 29 December 1BC. Either way, according to Tertullian (160AD) and Irenaeus, Jesus was born in the 41st year of the reign of Augustus, who began his reign in 43BC. Augustus died fifteen years after Jesus's birth, on 19 August 14AD. Tertullian also states that Jesus was born 28 years after the death of Cleopatra who died in 30BC. Therefore, it could be more confidently concluded that Jesus was born in 2BC. Note: there is no year 0 between BC and AD.

Using records of Josephus and the Talmud it can be ascertained that John the Baptist was born around 19 or 20 April in 2BC. As John was six months older than Jesus, it can be assumed that Jesus's birth was in Autumn.

Luke 1:36

And behold thy cousin Elisabeth, she has also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. [Angel of the Lord said to Mary].

If we take the six months literally, we could say that Jesus was born on 29 September, 2BC. We don't need to be that exact, we know Jesus was not born in the winter months, let alone on a pagan festival date.

The early church did not celebrate the birth of Christ. They celebrated his death, which was the Jewish custom for a person who has passed on.

Christianity was legalised by Constantine in 312AD because he realised there was a large population of slaves in the Roman Empire who were Christians. A political decision only. As time went on, many of the pagan rituals and celebrations of the Empire were morphed into the practices of this Roman Christianity and we can still see these practices in certain mainline churches today.

On 25 December each year the Romans took a holiday to celebrate the winter solstice. The holiday was known as Saturnalia. This pagan sun god was thought to have died on the winter solstice and so, this holiday fed into that tradition.

Interestingly, it is believed that almost all occultic traditions originated from Babylon.

Isaiah 47:12-13

Stand now with thine enchantments and with the multitude of thy sorceries wherein thou hast laboured from thy youth; if so be, thou shalt be able to profit, if so be thou mayest prevail. Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee.

I encourage you to read the entire chapter to understand the full context of these verses. Rome took on most of these practices and incorporated them into their own festivities.

Why the Christmas tree? The Babylonian king, Tammuz (the son of Nimrod), was said to have been the sun god. His death was memorialised annually during the winter solstice (22-23 December) by burning a log in the fireplace at night. The next morning, his rebirth (into a state of infancy) was celebrated by replacing the burnt log with a trimmed tree. Apparently, the Chaldean word for 'infant' is yule, from which comes the ancient Christmas word Yuletide. We may have heard of the Yule Log? It's now a famous dessert. Its origin is clear. This occultish sun-god worship was easily absorbed into the Roman festivities.

Jeremiah 10:2-5

Thus, saith the LORD. Learn not the way of the heathen and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain. For one cuts a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with an axe. They deck it with silver and with gold. They fasten it with nails and hammers that it moves not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not. They must needs be borne because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.

These verses describe wooden, man-made idols cut from trees and carved into images of man, beast, bird and other weird concoctions. The worship of other gods was the focus of these scriptures and it is easy to see the use of a Christmas tree with all the trimmings as fitting into this scenario to represent Tammuz their sun god. Just for your information, mistletoe is a symbol of fertility which also has its roots in Babylon. There are also other traditional symbols associated with Christmas that can be traced back to the same city.

So, what of Christmas? We celebrate the day with family and friends, gift-giving and relaxation. Do we celebrate the birth of Christ at this time? No, yet like the Jewish tradition, we celebrate his death.

We understand that Christmas is a time for every manufacturing company and retailer in the world to make up for all the slow sales they had throughout the year. We know it has high economic importance and that is why it continues. We don't stress it. It is what it is, but it has nothing to do with the Saviour of this world. Wouldn't it be nice if people just stopped associating it with Christ? Why not call it Yulemas instead? (*mas* meaning festival).

Christmas is a way to get people thinking about Jesus if nothing else. I was introduced to baby Jesus through Christmas traditions, and while it was not swaddled in God's truth, it added to a God-consciousness. When I finally heard the truth preached, it was not a totally alien concept. When we come to the Lord, he takes our wrong ideas and turns them around to be replaced with the truth. We cannot condemn others for their celebration of Christmas for they know no better than we did. But we can quietly accept the truth of what it is and use that truth to witness to them. Our testimony is our best weapon. Let it be a good one.