

Replacing Christmas

By Randall Ricker December 5, 2020
Sabbath Church of God

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The birth of Christ

Luke 1:5, 7-13, 23-24

5 There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth... 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. 8 So it was, that while he was serving as priest before God in the order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priesthood, his lot fell to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord. 10 And the whole multitude of the people was praying outside at the hour of incense. 11 Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing on the right side of the altar of incense. 12 And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John... 23 And so it was, as soon as the days of his service were completed, that he departed to his own house. 24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying,

The birth of Christ

1 Chronicles 24:1, 3-5, 7, 10

1 Now these are the divisions of the sons of Aaron. The sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar... 3 Then David with Zadok of the sons of Eleazar, and Ahimelech of the sons of Ithamar, **divided them according to the schedule of their service**. 4 There were more leaders found of the sons of Eleazar than of the sons of Ithamar, and thus they were divided. Among the sons of Eleazar were sixteen heads of their fathers' houses, and eight heads of their fathers' houses among the sons of Ithamar. [16+8=24 divisions] 5 Thus they were **divided by lot**, one group as another, for there were officials of the sanctuary and officials of the house of God, from the sons of Eleazar and from the sons of Ithamar... 7 Now the first lot fell to Jehoiarib, the second to Jedaiah, ...10 the seventh to Hakkoz, **the eighth to Abijah**,

Companion Bible: The division of Abijah served in the temple in June and December

John the Baptist was conceived in June.

The birth of Christ

Luke 1:24-27, 31-33, 36, 39-41

24 Now after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived; and she hid herself five months, saying, 25 "Thus the Lord has dealt with me, in the days when He looked on me, to take away my reproach among people." 26 Now **in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent** by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, 27 **to a virgin** betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was **Mary**... 31 And behold, **you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus**. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. 33 And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." ...36 Now indeed, **Elizabeth** your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now **the sixth month for her** who was called barren... 39 Now Mary arose in those days and went into the hill country with haste, to a city of Judah, 40 and entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

The birth of Christ

The conception of John the Baptist in June

+ 6 months to the conception of Jesus in December

+ 9 months to the birth of Jesus in September, not December 25.

The birth of Christ

Luke 2:7-12, 16

7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. 8 Now there were in the same country **shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night**. 9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." ...16 And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.

The birth of Christ

Adam Clarke's Commentary:

It was a custom among the Jews to send out their sheep to the deserts, about the passover, and bring them home at the commencement of the first rain: during the time they were out, the shepherds watched them night and day. As the passover occurred in the spring, and the first rain began early in the month of Marchesvan, which answers to part of our October and November, we find that the sheep were kept out in the open country during the whole of the summer. And **as these shepherds had not yet brought home their flocks, it is a presumptive argument that October had not yet commenced, and that, consequently, our Lord was not born on the 25th of December**, when no flocks were out in the fields; nor could he have been born later than September, as the flocks were still in the fields by night. On this very ground the nativity in December should be given up.

The birth of Christ

Song of Solomon 2:11

For lo, the winter is past, The rain is over and gone.

Ezra 10:9, 13

9 So all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered at Jerusalem within three days. It was the **ninth month**, on the twentieth of the month; and all the people sat in the open square of the house of God, trembling because of this matter and because of **heavy rain**... 13 But there are many people; **it is the season for heavy rain**, and we are not able to stand outside. Nor is this the work of one or two days, for there are many of us who have transgressed in this matter.

Why Christmas on December 25

Jesse Hurlbut, *Story of the Christian Church*: For 50 years after St. Paul's life, a curtain hangs over the church through which we vainly strive to look; and when it rises, about 129 AD with the writings of the earliest church fathers, we find a church **in many aspects different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul.**

Why Christmas on December 25

Samuele Bacchiocchi *From Sabbath to Sunday A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity*, 1977

The adoption of the 25th of December for the celebration of Christmas is perhaps the most explicit example of Sun-worship's influence on the Christian liturgical calendar.

It is a known fact that the pagan feast of the *dies natalis Solis Invicti*—the birthday of the Invincible Sun, was held on that date. Do Christian sources openly admit the borrowing of the date of such a pagan festivity? Obviously not. To admit borrowing a pagan festival, even after due re-interpretation of its meaning, would be tantamount to an open betrayal of the faith. This the Fathers were anxious to avoid. Augustine and Leo the Great, for instance, strongly reprimanded those Christians who at Christmas worshiped the Sun rather than the birth of Christ. Therefore, it is well to keep in mind that in the investigation of the influence of the Sun-cults on the Christian liturgy, the most we can hope to find are not direct but indirect indications. This warning applies not only for the date of Christmas but for that of Sunday as well.

Why Christmas on December 25

Samuele Bacchiocchi *From Sabbath to Sunday*

To the majority of scholars, as stated by J.A. Jungmann, “It has become progressively clear that **the real reason for the choice of the 25th of December was the pagan feast of the dies natalis Solis Invicti** which was celebrated in those days with great splendor.”

Joseph A. Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great*, 1962, p. 147; L. Duchesne (fn. 74), p. 26, also recognizes this as a more plausible explanation: “A better explanation is that based on the festival of Natalis Invicti, which appears in the pagan calendar of the Philocalian collection under the 25th of December. . . . One is inclined to believe that the Roman Catholic Church made the choice of the 25th of December in order to enter into rivalry with **Mithraism**”; John Ferguson, *The Religions of the Roman Empire*, 1970, p. 239, defends the same view; cf. Franz Cumont (fn.71), p. 89 and (fn. 51), I, p. 342: “It appears certain that the commemoration of the nativity was placed on December 25, because on the winter solstice was celebrated the rebirth of the invincible god. By adopting this date ... **The ecclesiastical authorities purified somehow some pagan customs which they could not suppress.**”

Why Christmas on December 25

Samuele Bacchiocchi *From Sabbath to Sunday*

In the Orient, however, the birth and the baptism of Jesus were celebrated respectively on January 5 and 6. B. Botte, a Belgian Benedictine scholar, in a significant study concludes that this date also evolved from **an originally pagan feast, namely Epiphany, which commemorated the birth and growth of light**. It was not an easy task for the Church of Rome to get the Eastern churches to accept the new date of December 25th, since many of them “firmly adhered to the practice of observing the festival of Christ’s birth in its old form as an Epiphany festival on January 5th-6th.”

Why Christmas on December 25

Samuele Bacchiocchi *From Sabbath to Sunday*

Gaston H. Halsberghe in his recent monograph *The Cult of Sol Invictus*, already cited, similarly concludes: “The authors whom we consulted on this point are unanimous in admitting **the influence of the pagan celebration held in honor of Deus Sol Invictus on the 25th of December**, the Natalis Invicti, on the Christian celebration of Christmas. This influence is held to be responsible for the shifting to the 25th of December of the birth of Christ, which had until then been held on the day of the Epiphany, the 6th of January. The celebration of the birth of the Sun god, which was accompanied by **a profusion of light** and torches and the **decoration of branches and small trees**, had captivated the followers of the cult to such a degree that even after they had been converted to Christianity they continued to celebrate the feast of the birth of the Sun god.”

Why Christmas on December 25

The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, under “Christmas”:

“How much the date of the festival depended upon the pagan Brumalia (December 25) following the Saturnalia (Dec. 17-24), and celebrating the shortest day of the year and the ‘new sun’...cannot be accurately determined. The pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia were too deeply entrenched in popular custom to be set aside by Christian influence...The pagan festival with its riot and merry-making was so popular that Christians were glad of an excuse to continue its celebration with little change in spirit and in manner. Christian preachers of the West and the Near East protested against the unseemly frivolity with which Christ’s birthday was celebrated, while **Christians of Mesopotamia accused their Western brethren of idolatry and sun worship for adopting as Christian this pagan festival.**”

Syncretism of customs

Merriam Webster: the combination of different forms of belief or practice

Dictionary.com: the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles, practices, or parties, as in philosophy or religion.

Syncretism of customs

Livescience.com

Ronald Hutton, a historian at Bristol University in the United Kingdom... The **Christmas tree** is a 17th-century German invention, University of Bristol's Hutton told LiveScience, but it clearly derives from the pagan practice of bringing greenery indoors to decorate in midwinter. The modern **Santa Claus** is a direct descendent of England's Father Christmas, who was not originally a gift-giver. However, Father Christmas and his other European variations are modern incarnations of old pagan ideas about spirits who traveled the sky in midwinter, Hutton said.

History.com

In Germany, people honored the pagan god Oden during the mid-winter holiday. Germans were terrified of Oden, as they believed he made nocturnal flights through the sky to observe his people, and then decide who would prosper or perish. Because of his presence, many people chose to stay inside.

Syncretism of customs

History.com

Saturnalia

In Rome, where winters were not as harsh as those in the far north, Saturnalia—a holiday in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture—was celebrated. **Beginning in the week leading up to the winter solstice and continuing for a full month, Saturnalia was a hedonistic time**, when food and drink were plentiful and the normal Roman social order was turned upside down. For a month, slaves would become masters. Peasants were in command of the city. Business and schools were closed so that everyone could join in the fun.

Also around the time of the winter solstice, Romans observed Juvenalia, a feast honoring the children of Rome. In addition, members of the upper classes often celebrated the **birthday of Mithra**, the god of the unconquerable sun, on **December 25**. It was believed that Mithra, an infant god, was born of a rock. For some Romans, Mithra's birthday was the most sacred day of the year.

Syncretism of customs

History.com

In Scandinavia, the Norse celebrated Yule from December 21, the winter solstice, through January. In recognition of the return of the sun, fathers and sons would bring home large logs, which they would set on fire. The people would feast until the log burned out, which could take as many as 12 days. The Norse believed that each spark from the fire represented a new pig or calf that would be born during the coming year.

History of Christmas, Author History.com Editors, Website Name HISTORY

URL <https://www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas>

Access Date November 24, 2020

Publisher A&E Television Networks

Last Updated January 27, 2020

Original Published Date October 27, 2009

Syncretism of customs

But, myths aside, the history of the Christmas-tree is difficult to trace. It may have some remote connection with the great tree Yggdrasil of Norse mythology. It may be a revival of the pine-trees in the Roman Saturnalia which were decorated with images of Bacchus, as described by Virgil in the Georgics:

In jolly hymns they praise the god of wine,
Whose earthen images adorn the pine,
And these are hung on high in honor of the vine.
(Dryden's translation.)

Two other suggestions are offered by Sir George Birdwood in the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* (vol. i. pp. 19–20). “It has been explained,” he says, “as being derived from the ancient Egyptian practice of decking houses at the time of the winter solstice with branches of the date-palm, the symbol of life triumphant over death, and therefore of perennial life in the renewal of each bounteous year; and the supporters of these suggestions point to the fact that pyramids of green paper, covered all over with wreaths and festoons of flowers and strings of sweetmeats, are often substituted in Germany for the Christmas-tree.

Walsh, William S.,
*Curiosities of Popular
Customs and of Rites,
Ceremonies,
Observances*, 1897

Syncretism of customs

Jeremiah 10:2-5

2 Thus says the Lord: "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; Do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, For the Gentiles are dismayed at them. 3 For the customs of the peoples are futile; For one cuts a tree from the forest, The work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. 4 They decorate it with silver and gold; They fasten it with nails and hammers So that it will not topple. 5 They are upright, like a palm tree, And they cannot speak; They must be carried, Because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, For they cannot do evil, Nor can they do any good."

Syncretism of customs

Deuteronomy 12:30-31

30 take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you **do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.'** 31 You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

'The services of worship increased in splendor, but were less spiritual and hearty than those of former times. The forms and ceremonies of paganism gradually crept into the worship. Some of the old heathen feasts became church festivals with change of name and of worship" (Hurlbut, *The Story of the Christian Church*, p. 79)

Gifts of the magi

Matthew 2:1-2, 11

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, **wise men from the East** came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." ...11 And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, **they presented gifts to Him**: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Adam Clarke Commentary

They presented unto him gifts - The people of the east never approach the presence of kings and great personages, without a present in their hands. This custom is often noticed in the Old Testament, and still prevails in the east, and in some of the newly discovered South Sea Islands.

Biblical festivals

Passover

Matthew 26:19-20, 26-29

19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the **Passover**. 20 When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve... 26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." 27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many **for the remission of sins**. 29 But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Biblical festivals

Days of Unleavened Bread

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

6 Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

7 Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are **unleavened**. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. 8 Therefore **let us keep the feast**, not with old leaven, **nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth**.

Biblical festivals

Pentecost

Acts 2:1-4, 38

1 When the Day of **Pentecost** had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance... 38 Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Biblical festivals

Feast of Trumpets

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For **the Lord Himself will descend from heaven** with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and **with the trumpet of God**. And **the dead in Christ will rise** first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Biblical festivals

Day of Atonement

Revelation 20:1-3

1 Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2 He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and **Satan**, and **bound him for a thousand years**; 3 and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.

Biblical festivals

Feast of Tabernacles

Revelation 20:4-6

4 And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And **they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years**. 5 But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.

Biblical festivals

Last Great Day

Revelation 20:11-14

11 Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And **the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.** 13 The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. 14 Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

Why this is important

Mark 7:7

And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

John 4:24

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.