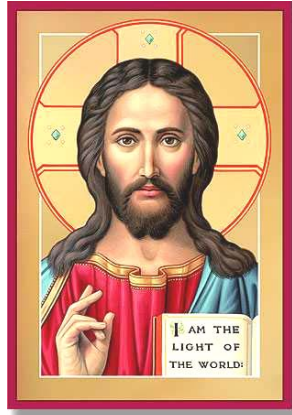


Jesus is the Reason – For the Season

Overview

In a few weeks the Catholic Church will celebrate the birth of Jesus known as Christmas – on the 25th of December. As we approach this wonderful time of the year, it is important that we keep the celebration in perspective.



Where did the word Christmas come from?

In spite of the secular overtones of this season – the word Christmas emphasizes the Christian influence and spiritual importance. The word evolved in the English speaking countries during the middle ages. For many years the faithful celebrated a mass called “**Cristes Maesse**” from the Old English language – which meant the “**Mass of Christ**”. Over the centuries the word became a comprehensive one.

What are the origins of Christmas?

The early church had little interest in the actual date or circumstances for the birth of Christ. It was more important for them to await the final or second coming of Jesus. Even before the celebration of His birth the early church was honoring the martyred saints of the church.

The date for Christmas

There are two traditional dates for Christmas. The western church uses December 25th while the eastern church uses January 6th. This can be traced to the 4th century when Rome had a Nativity festival. Symbolism was very important especially with regard to the seasons of the year. During the winter solstice the days became shorter and the nights longer. Since the winter solstice occurred on December 25th in the Julian calendar - this became the popular date for Christmas.

There may also have been some influence from the pagan cultures, which played a part in setting the date. Worship of the sun god by the Roman Empire on December 25th was offset by the addition of the celebration for the birth of Jesus on the same date.

Christmas traditions

Many traditions developed over the years as the faithful celebrated this special holiday such as the following:

- ❖ The Christmas Candle – usually in the form of an Advent Wreath is common.
- ❖ Window lights symbolizes lighting the way for Mary and Joseph.
- ❖ Nativity scenes were made popular by Saint Francis.
- ❖ The Las Posada symbolizes the search by Mary and Joseph for a room.
- ❖ A Christmas tree originated from the German traditions as a symbol of life from the use of evergreens.
- ❖ Christmas Carols evolved from the English word “**carolen**” which means to sing joyfully.
- ❖ There really is a Santa Claus as the tradition began with Saint Nicholas from his practice of giving presents to the needy children – in secret.

The most popular of celebrations

By the 5th century, the beginning of the church year in the season of Advent was common and it replaced Christmas as the beginning of the church year. By the Middle Ages Christmas was an established tradition.

Finally, in spite of the secular influence try to keep Jesus as the focal point during this season. **Jesus is truly the real reason for the season!**