

CHRISTMAS IS NOT A PAGAN HOLIDAY

Celebrating the incarnation of Jesus at Christmas is a longstanding Christian tradition spanning over a millennia. Although there has clearly been growth, lore, and traditions added to our modern practice of the holiday the accusation of substantial pagan roots falls apart under historical inspection. All the traditional “pagan” associations and connections with Christmas, when truly put under the microscope, turn out to be themselves more fiction than fact.

→ A good portion of this material owes its credit to the work of Michael Jones of *Inspiring Philosophy*. To find out more visit inspiringphilosophy.org

DEC. 25th

claim

The date of Christmas is borrowed from pagan festivals like Sol Invictus and / or Saturnalia

Winter Solstice

reality

Sol Invictus

Sol Invictus was not placed on 12/25 until 354 AD when the Philocalian Calendar records this but doesn't specify any festival with regards to sun worship. Prior to this, the Julio-Claudian fasti inscriptions say Sun festivals were on August 8th, 9th, 28th, and December 11th, and maybe October 19th. The Philocalian Calendar says Emperor Aurelian honored the sun with chariot races every 4 years Oct 19-22.

Saturnalia

Saturnalia was never on 12/25. Macrobius says Saturnalia began 14 days before January, which comes out to December 17th, using Roman Calendrical dates. He says it lasted for 3 days, but according to the Fasti inscriptions, it lasted to the 24th during the days of the Republic.

The *Winter Solstice* had no festive significance to ancient Romans. There were no celebrations planned for the date and they disagreed on when it was. The Julian Calendar does say 12/25, but Pliny the Elder says 12/26, and Columella says 12/23.

“Father Christmas”

Father Christmas, surprisingly, pre-dates Santa Claus. But he is not a pagan deity. Instead, he was a medieval personification of Christmas. Richard Smart of Plymtree is the first to write about him, referring to him as Sir Christmas, and his task is to announce the birth of Christ

Oxford Book of Carols, no. 21, 41-3

SANTA



Wesley Huff
Teach . Reach . Encourage . Equip

“Santa”

Santa Claus can only be traced back to Dutch immigrants in New York in the early 1800s. He came from the Dutch *Sinterklaas*, also known as St. Nicolas. His feast day was on 12/6 and was moved to 12/25 around this time to help make Christmas a family holiday. Newspapers promoted it and encouraged to give gifts on Christmas instead of New Years' like it traditionally was before this. *Sinterklaas* was rebranded from a catholic priest to look like a traditional dutchman from that time period, which included a big red suit. After this Santa was exported around the world and different countries added new spins. Stockings were also promoted around this time period and trace back to Clement C. Moor's “A Visit from St. Nicholas.” In 1927, in Finland, a radio broadcaster, Markus Rautio, morphed the old pagan deity, Joulupukki, into a Santa figure. Santa changed the Joulupukki figure, not the other way around.

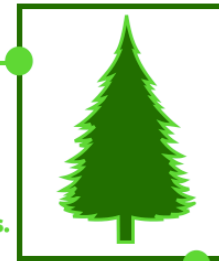
A dictionary of English Folklore, section: Santa.

Pliny the Elder nat. his. 18.99-221; Columella, (De Re Rustica 9.14.12).

CHRISTMAS TREES

claim

Christmas trees find their origin in druid and pagan practices of bringing pine trees into one's house to ward off nature spirits.



reality

Christmas trees only go back to the 16th century in Europe. The first mention of Christmas trees is in an Alsace ordinance in the 16th century. Almost no early pagans thought pine trees were sacred, let alone associated with 12/25. Germanic tribes believed the oak was sacred. Maximus of Tyre said, “The Celts indeed worship Zeus, but they honour Him in the form of a lofty oak.”

Pliny, nat. his. 16.95; Maximus of Tyre, Dissertation VIII, section 8.



MISTLETOE

Mistletoe does not go back to paganism. The first we hear of using mistletoe as Christmas decorations are in Robert Herrick, “Hesperides poetry collection,” (892, 980), and then William Coles mentions it is a decoration in “The Art of Simpling” (1600s). The tradition of kissing under it did not begin until the end of the 18th century in Britain.

A dictionary of English Folklore, section: Mistletoe.

Steven Hijmans, “Sol Invictus, the Winter Solstice, and the Origins of Christmas”, Mousion, Number 47/2 (2003), 277-298).

Macrobius, Saturnalia 1.10:1-3.