



MERRY MYTHMAS !!

The First Christmas happened on December 25th in 336 CE, in Rome. According to a document dating to 354, this was the first celebration by the early Christians of Western Europe – by this time the Catholic Church – as the birthday of the New Testament Jesus. Is this date given in the New Testament? No. In fact, the nativity stories of the New Testament clearly have the birth of Jesus taking place in the springtime because this is when the shepherds watched over their flocks by night as it was the lambing season. (Of course, the bigger problem is that of the historicity of Jesus itself and the fact that the Gospel nativity stories make little sense.)

The struggling Catholic Church chose the date of December 25th as a way of saying “me too” and in order to compete with the other religions of the time. For this date had long been observed as the birthday of the sun and of many deities connected with the sun. These deities included Horus, Osiris, Attis, Dionysius, Krishna, Zarathustra, Hercules, Mithra, Adonis, Tammuz, Prometheus, and others.

And why was the birthday of the sun and of sun-gods observed on December 25th? Because it approximates – as best our ancient ancestors could tell – the winter solstice. This is the point at which, in the northern hemisphere, where all the ancient civilizations were centered, the sun’s progressive retreat to the south was finally halted and reversed. The winter solstice – literally the sun stopping or staying – was also the shortest day and the longest night of the year. After this, the days began lengthening again and people could depend on the return of the sun with its life-giving light and warmth. December was also known as the feast of Sol Invictus, the unconquerable sun.

There simply is no doubt that the institution of “Christmas” was simply an effort by the early Catholic Church to coopt an already existing holiday and make it its own. But in doing so, it opened the door to all the other pagan traditions connected with the holiday including the Yule log, decorated evergreen trees, mistletoe, and the characters of the Lord of Misrule and Holly King that contributed to the Santa Claus mythology. Obviously, none of these are mentioned in the New Testament and few people today are aware of their origins.

When the Reformation began in 1517, the times were ripe to begin questioning what had become a centuries-old tradition of Christmas. Martin Luther himself did not like the popularity of Saint Nicholas and is said to have introduced the character of the Christ Child. But Luther’s “Christkind” became “Kris Kringle” which morphed into yet another manifestation of Santa Claus.

In England, the tide of reform eventually produced the Puritans. These “godly” people, who eventually took over the country in 1649, not only recognized the un-biblical and un-Christian nature of the holiday but also objected to the “immorality” of its associated licentiousness. They also connected it with the hated “popery” of the Catholic Church and its signature ritual of the Mass. Under Oliver Cromwell, Christmas was banned in England as a pagan festival.

Meanwhile, some of the Puritans had emigrated to America where they famously landed at Plymouth in 1620 and went on to found the colony of Massachusetts. They too detested Christmas and its trappings, which is a curious thing considering that “their” holiday, Thanksgiving, is now the inaugural event of the annual Christmas season and, especially, Christmas shopping. By 1659 the Puritans were so scandalized by non-Puritans celebrating Christmas that laws were passed prohibiting any observance of the holiday. These laws were eventually repealed in 1681, after the restoration of the English monarchy. One can imagine the pronouncements of impending doom that the “godly” must have made about this reversal and its implications for the spiritual health of the land. In 1686 the colony’s governor took soldiers with him to attend Christmas religious services. And a year later the Reverend Increase Mather was complaining about those who celebrated Christmas being “consumed in Compotations, in Interludes, in playing at Cards, in Revellings, in excess of Wine, in Mad Mirth.” As late as 1870, when President Grant signed into law an act of Congress declaring Christmas a federal holiday, Boston public schools scheduled classes on December 25th and punished students who did not attend.

Not only the Puritans but the Quakers, Baptists, Methodists and some Presbyterians did not observe Christmas in colonial times and the early years of the United States. Today, Jehovah's Witnesses also spurn the holiday. Nor do Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and others celebrate the "birthday" of Jesus. There doesn't appear to be any clear consensus among unbelievers. Some embrace and some disdain Christmas, or they may observe it as the winter solstice, Festivus, or something else just as Jews may celebrate Hanukkah or people of African ancestry may observe Kwanzaa.

Given all this, two things seem indisputable. One, the first Christmas is lost in the deep time of our early ancestors. Sometime in prehistory people figured out that the seasons were related to the sun's apparent yearly migration from north to south and back again. Second, when people have mutually exclusive beliefs that cannot be tested by facts and reason, they will fight about them. In doing this, each faction will insist that its point of view is the original and only legitimate one and they will attack most energetically the other faction(s) that they perceive as most vulnerable. These days it is atheists.

In 2012, the winter solstice occurs on Friday, December 21st, at 5:12 AM Central Standard Time.

DOES SANTA CLAUS EXIST?

This is the burning question of our times! Believers say that Santa Claus must exist because otherwise there would be no reason to be good. And where do the presents come from if there's no Santa? Even NORAD tracks the annual flight of Santa! But a-SantaClausists say that it's just your parents doing it, that flying reindeer are impossible and, besides, there's no land at the North Pole. These cold-hearted Grinch say that we should just be "good for goodness sake" and not in order to get presents!

YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED, APPRECIATED, AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!
(ALL THE SUN GODS WANT THEIR BIRTHDAY PRESENTS SENT TO THE NTCOF!)

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH: "THE FREETHOUGHT FUTURE"

>>> Sunday, January 6th, 2013 <<<
SHERATON GRAND DFW AIRPORT
SE CORNER OF 114 AND ESTERS

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar, or through our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought - **JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!**

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Golden Corral Buffet and Grill in Grapevine, located just across from the Grapevine Mills Mall, at 2605 E. Grapevine Mills Circle, phone (972) 874-7900. To reach Golden Corral from the Sheraton, cross over the freeway and make a left onto John W. Carpenter Freeway (114) going west. Then take the first exit RIGHT onto International Parkway (121), then Grapevine Mills Parkway exit. Turn LEFT on Stars and Stripes Way, continuing on to E. Grapevine Mills Circle.

Freethought Salon: Get together to discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest to Freethinkers. Most Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton Vineyard in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM; see the meetup site!

Game Night: The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

Secular Singles: Freethinkers have met their life-partners with whom they have begun families through the Secular Singles group. Check the meetup site for the next date, time and location!

"The xmas holidays have this high value: that they remind Forgetters of the Forgotten, & repair damaged relationships."

- Mark Twain



DFWCOR

Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason

The North Texas Church of Freethought
 The Fellowship of Unbelievers

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