

the  Venues  
Go Deep

Unwrapping Christmas  
"The History of Christmas"  
December 06, 2015

*How much do you get into Christmas decorations? Are you closer to Clark Griswold or The Grinch?*

*What are your thoughts on the "War on Christmas?"*

Did you know that:

\*Early Christians didn't celebrate Christ's birth for the first three centuries.

\*The word "Christmas" wasn't used until 1038.

\*Puritans in England and New England made Christmas observance illegal.

\*The U.S. Congress was in session on Christmas day until 1856.

*On which side of the "war on Christmas" do the people in the above "Did you know" section seem to fall?*

*What is your reaction to these "Did you know" facts?*

History is about two questions:

- 1. What?** What happened? What was happening?

Many of our celebrations of Christmas predate the birth of Christ.

In the Norse country, at the Winter Solstice, people burned the Yule log and brought evergreen trees into their homes and had a party!

*What were the meanings behind these symbols?*

Further south, in Rome, Winter Solstice brought 3 festivals:

1. Saturnalia – This party was held from December 17-23. People took off work, would visit friends in their homes, which were decorated with laurel, trees, and candles. Gifts were exchanged. Two big features:
  - a. An abundance of food, drink, fun – not all of it was too wholesome.
  - b. Equality – Everyone was treated equally.

Lucian, a second century writer put it like this: *"Let every man be treated equal, slave and freeman, poor and rich...and let no one be ill-tempered or cross or threaten anybody...All shall drink the same wine...all shall have their meat on equal terms. The waiters shall not show favor to anyone...Neither are large*

*portions to be placed before one and tiny ones before another, nor a ham for one and a pig's jaw for another – all must be treated equally."*

2. January Kalends – (Their New Year's Party)

3. Sol Invictus/Mithras - These two gods, one Roman, one Persian, were merged together. Both were considered "gods of the unconquerable sun." They represented the end of the long nights and the return of the sun – the bridge between heaven and earth.

Their birthday? December 25!!

*What similarities do you see between our celebrations today and their celebrations then?*

*What significance do you see in the church picking the date of December 25 for the celebration of Christ's birth?*

Christianity became the official religion of Rome under Constantine.

As Christianity spread across Europe, it assimilated many of the winter celebrations into its celebration of Christ's birth.

*Why do you think the Puritans in England and New England made Christmas illegal?*

## **2. So what?**

*What lessons from history can we learn and apply to our lives today?*

*What does the tension of Christmas celebration then say about the tension of Christmas celebration today?*

*Christmas was a marriage between the secular and spiritual. What do you think about that marriage today?*

*What does it mean to "Keep Christ in Christmas"?*

*What do you think about the protest against stores that say "Happy Holidays?"*

The history of Christmas celebration shows some common desires in humanity.

*What do these Bible passages say about those desires?*

A desire for light in the darkness – Isaiah 9:2

A desire to start over – Luke 15:20

A desire for life out of death – 1 Corinthians 15:55

A desire for celebration and fun – Ecclesiastes 9:7

A desire for social justice – Mark 10:42-43; Galatians 3:28