

**General Topics :: Directions: Is Christmas Pagan?**

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I found this argument quite weak and sort of a condoning a "emerging church" style of assimilation into worldly society.

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December 6, 1999

Q: A friend says her church doesn't celebrate Christmas because it began as a pagan holiday. Why then do most churches celebrate Christmas?

A: Was the event we now call Christmas originally a "pagan holiday"? In some ways. Does that mean the church should discard it, along with its lights, tinsel, and increasing commercialism? Only if we are prepared to abandon many other holidays and common Christian practices that the early church co-opted for its own purpose of glorifying Christ.

Christmas has its origins in the fourth century. December 25, which Christians now herald as Jesus' birthday, was actually the date on which the Romans celebrated the birth of the sun god.

After the Roman emperor Constantine converted to Christianity at the Milvian Bridge in 312, he sought to combine the worship of the sun god with worship of Christ. Christian leaders accepted Constantine's conversion in a positive light and saw the "Christ-mass" celebration as a vital part of the process of converting the pagan world.

Long before Constantine, Christians found ways to redeem local cultures and salvage elements in those cultures that naturally pointed to Christ, whether Hebrew, Syrian, Greek, or Roman. They denounced inhumane pagan practices, but at the same time took over pagan temples and converted them to churches. They replaced the old gods in popular devotion with heroic martyrs of the persecutions. And they replaced the holy days of paganism with festivals of the Christian year.

Larger questions loom behind the observance of Christmas: Why a church calendar at all? Why a Sunday? Why an Easter? Is there New Testament authority for religious holidays?

As Christmas, Easter, and Sunday all indicate, the Christian calendar is based upon the major events ...

from: <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1999/december6/9te085.html>