



# THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

*Beyond parties, presents and peace  
proclamations — beyond Santa  
Claus, reindeer, church bells and  
Madison Avenue miracles — lies the  
origin of Christmas. Chances are  
you've never understood its real  
meaning.*

*by Gary Alexander*

**T**HE SEASON to be jolly is nearly upon us again. With it will come parties, gifts, family get-togethers — and family break-ups — all with the stern reminder not to forget the “real meaning of Christmas.”

Admonitions to promote peace, love, joy, goodwill and hope stem from a sincere desire to circumvent the overwhelming commercialism of the season. But as usual, the admonitions will be almost totally ignored, and understandably so. The “real meaning” of the holiday has always been annoyingly vague.

To confuse matters further, the alleged birthday of Christ has come to be inescapably associated with a jolly Nordic saint secretly bearing gifts in the night. With a Santa on every street corner, most children forget that Christmas is somehow supposed to be a billion-dollar birthday party for Christ.

A closer look at the history of Christmas should clear up the mystery. Ironically enough, it will show that today's generally irreverent celebration of December 25 comes far closer to the “real meaning” of Christmas than most Christians dare to admit.

### How Modern Christmas Began

Commercial Christmas is only about 50 years old. James H. Barnett of the University of Connecticut explains the origin of “Green Christmas” in his book *The American Christmas: A Study in National Culture*.

“The studied exploitation of the festival did not develop fully until the third decade in the present century,” he writes. “At the close of the war in 1918, the American economy was geared to a high level of output and a host of new products were ready to be sold. However, consumer demands were shrinking, and there was serious danger of a stagnant market.”

Postwar retailers and manufacturers, it seems, were faced with a dilemma. The assembly lines were rolling, but consumer cash was not.

The flash depression of 1920 struck, making businessmen even more desperate.

“In this dilemma,” continues Barnett, “business leaders sought some means of increasing normal, peacetime buying, and turned to promotion and high-pressure sales methods. Both merchants and advertising agencies recognized the commercial possibilities of folk festivals, and began to exploit these occasions shortly after 1920. This was immediately successful and has continued unabated to the present.”

Now we find Christmas business dominating the entire second half of the calendar year. The busiest month in railroad freight yards is August, primarily because manufacturers are shipping goods to retail

their business, and more gifts are exchanged on December 25 than on all the other 364 days combined!

Just about every imaginable kind of object has been a Christmas gift, and just about everyone has received his share of the bounty. But ironically, the churches — actively expounding the Christmas spirit — suffer monetary reverses. In fact, seasonal Christmas spending consistently exceeds all religious contributions given to all churches for the entire year! And gifts to religions consistently decline during December.

Wouldn't it be incongruous if you attended a birthday party where everyone exchanged gifts with the guests, while the host was ignored — honored with no gift at all? Fig-

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outlets in preparation for the Christmas gift traffic. Christmas sales begin around Labor Day (early September), rather than early December.

Retailers look at it this way: “The more shopping days before Christmas, the more potential sales. The whole approach to selling is to get stuff out as early as possible. You need plenty of time for reorders.” It's now quite common to see Christmas advertisements in early October!

### Gifts for Everyone?

Since 1965 the American public has spent over 10 billion dollars on Christmas gifts each year, or about \$125 billion between the years 1965-1974. In just 10 percent of the year's shopping days — the period from Thanksgiving to Christmas — most shops do more than 20 percent of

uratively speaking, that is what happens on Jesus Christ's supposed “birthday.”

Yet this is only one of the Christmas “opposites” — those customs and practices which work in opposition to what a desperate humanity wishes Christmas would be. Compare a few of the other Christmas practices to the textbook that most Christians profess to read.

### Christmas “Opposites”

- Isn't it a little hypocritical to teach our children a fantastic web of falsehoods about Santa Claus, the reindeer, and even the time and circumstances of Christ's birth, while we are supposedly honoring the one who said, “Thou shalt not bear false witness”? (Matthew 19:18.)

- There are more murders and accidental deaths at Christmas time than at any other time of year; yet



**DEPARTMENT STORES,** variety stores and gift shops count on December Christmas sales to double their normal turnover of goods. In fact, retail trade in December often exceeds the total sales for the following three months combined. The crowds of the New York department store pictured at the right are typical of the crowds engendered by such a doubling and tripling of the normal department store expenditures.

Since 1960, retail trade in December, as measured in billions of U.S. dollars, has more than doubled, as the following table indicates:

1960	.....	\$22.2 billion
1961	.....	\$22.9 billion
1962	.....	\$24.1 billion
1963	.....	\$25.1 billion
1964	.....	\$27.7 billion
1965	.....	\$30.6 billion
1966	.....	\$31.8 billion
1967	.....	\$32.6 billion
1968	.....	\$34.1 billion
1969	.....	\$36.0 billion
1970	.....	\$37.6 billion
1971	.....	\$40.7 billion
1972	.....	\$43.8 billion
1973	.....	\$46.9 billion
1974	.....	\$50.0 billion

(est.)

(Source: U.S. Dept. of Commerce)

Most of this retail trade can be attributed to normal consumer expenditures, but about one fourth (or \$12 billion this year) can be attributed directly to Christmas gifts. This amounts to about \$300 per family of five.

Jesus said, "Thou shalt do no murder" (Matthew 19:18). And isn't it a little contradictory that on the supposed birthday of the Prince of Peace, parents buy their children plastic guns and other toys of violence?

- One fourth of all liquor sales come during the Christmas season, supposedly honoring the one who said, "Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness . . ." (Luke 21:34).

- Christ also spoke against setting one's heart on the "abundance of things." Yet the purchase of many "things" is what Christmas is all about. He also stated, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). But no other day stresses *getting*, especially to children, as much as Christmas. The question most asked at this time of year is, "What did you get?" — not "What did you give?"

- Finally, isn't it somewhat strange that professing Christians would observe a day which neither Christ nor his disciples ever mentioned — much less commanded or kept?

#### Can You Put Christ Back Into Christmas?

If Jesus Christ of Nazareth were transplanted into a modern Christmas party, he might enjoy the companionship, but he certainly would not recognize it as his birthday, because he was born in early autumn, and he didn't observe birthdays as anything special anyway. Instead, he would recognize December 25 as the Roman "Saturnalia" of his day or the Babylonian religious festival honoring the "birthday of the Sun."

He might even advise those who worry about "putting Christ back into Christmas" to stop worrying. It's impossible. Christ never was in Christmas. And the public today truly is keeping the "real" or original meaning of Christmas — a commercialization of an utterly pagan, openly hedonistic celebration that has been given an aura of respectability via labels of peace, joy, love

and goodwill to all. Most have supposed that the Christmas celebration is rooted in these good intentions, and, of course based on the birthday of Jesus. This idea is false.

There is no need in this article to prove the depths of Christmas' pagan roots. That information is readily available in your local library. Discover it for yourself.

To summarize, "Christmas" began over 4,000 years ago in Babylon, then migrated to Egypt, Greece and Rome. In Rome, it combined with Nordic and Druidic customs and was finally "blessed" as a Christian holiday over 300 years after Jesus Christ died. In each of these pagan societies, December 25 was celebrated as the birthday of the

earth. They were afraid the sun, as the symbol of heat and light, was dying. So they lit fires, sacrificed animals, shouted to their sun god, and were in general "dismayed at the heavens.")

To continue, "For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers, that it move not."

#### A Better Day . . .

Even though Christmas is pagan in origin, some feel it is rather unfair to condemn the positive aspects of Christmas unless there were something far better to take its place.

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*sun*, on the occasion of the sun's "rebirth" at the winter solstice.

An hour or two of research would document these assertions. Look in the major encyclopedias under "Christmas," "Saturnalia," "Sun Worship," "Yule" and related words. Or peruse some complete books about Christmas under the "394" Dewey Decimal heading in your local library.

You might even turn to a scripture in the Bible (Jeremiah 10:1-4) where God condemned the keeping of pagan practices centuries before the birth of Jesus: "Thus saith the Lord, *Learn not the way of the heathen*, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them." (The heathen nations became frightened as the sun reached its winter solstice on or around December 21 — when the sun is farthest from our orbiting

Happily, there is.

About 3,500 years ago, God revealed to his people Israel a pattern of days set apart for a holy purpose and for festive family celebration.

Concerning those days, God commanded, "Thou shalt rejoice" (Deuteronomy 16:14; 14:26). These special days were kept "with joy" (Ezra 6:22). They were joyous feast days in which entire families could partake of fine food and drink, and enjoy real love, peace and goodwill. They were *family* festivals (Deuteronomy 14:26) of tremendous meaning and purpose.

If you would like to know more about these "days," write for our free booklet, *Pagan Holidays — or God's Holy Days — Which?*

These are special days of real meaning and purpose for humanity — of which Christmas is a cheap counterfeit. □