

Separating Fact from philosophy Series 4:

The truth behind Christmas

Leviticus 19:4 "Turn ye not unto **idols**, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I *am* the LORD your God."

Leviticus 26:1 "Ye shall make you no **idols** nor **graven image**, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up *any* image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I *am* the LORD your God."

Deuteronomy 29:17 "And ye have seen their abominations, and their **idols**, wood and stone, silver and gold, which *were* among them"

1 Samuel 15:23 "For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness *is as* iniquity and **idolatry**. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from *being* king."

2 Kings 17:12 "For they served **idols**, whereof the LORD had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing."

1 Chronicles 16:26 "For all the gods of the people *are* **idols**: but the LORD made the heavens."

Psalms 135:15 "The **idols** of the heathen *are* silver and gold, the work of men's hands"

Isaiah 2:8 "Their land also is full of **idols**; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made"

1 John 5:21 "Little children, keep yourselves from **idols**. Amen."

**Christ Abundant Life
Ministries (CALM) Int'l**

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Angels are a significant part of Christian history. They are messengers, and played a significant role in foretelling of the birth of Jesus Christ. In Pagan regard the winter Solstice Angel represents this celebration as she carries a glowing candle to light even the darkest of days, similar to the Christkind who carries the tree of candles to light the way.



(Above Left) The Pagan Solstice angel, depicted with wings, a candle and the holly crown. (Above Centre) Ishtar, the Babylonian goddess of love and fertility, the golden cup in her hand (this could be interpreted as the golden cup filled with the blood of the saints in revelation). (Above Right) The Germanic goddess Holda (meaning 'merciful'), also known as Frau Holle, Perht, Berta ('Bright') and Frau Freke.

There are many different representations of the star placed at the top of the Christmas tree. They are used as a symbolic decoration to represent the star that the Sheppard's followed to the birth place of Jesus. Different representations of the star are used by many ancient civilisations, pagan religions and devil worship.



(Above) An imprint made from a cylinder seal found in Mesopotamia during the Akkad Period (circa 2334-2154BC) shows Inanna (Ishtar) standing with one foot on her emblematic roaring lion. The juxtaposition of the weapons with her wings indicates both human and divine aspects to her character. The eight pointed star is also emblematic of her association with Venus, "the Morning and Evening Star." Her headdress, which features multiple curved horns, is consistent with the Sumerian practice of denoting divinity. The single-horned mitre (also used in the worship of the Queen of Babylon's sacred animal, the unicorn) of the female to her left denotes her lower rank, as she raises one hand in a conventional sign of worship (Wolkstein 193).
Cylinder seal dimensions: h. 4cm, d. 2cm; black stone material.

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Christ Abundant Life Ministries

Christmas has been celebrated throughout the world as the retelling of the virgin birth of Christ on the 25th December. It has been associated with Santa Claus and the giving and receiving of presents, in the same spirit as the gifts given to Christ by the three wise men. Over the years and with the incorporation of myths and legends from Norse and Germanic origins children were told that if they were good they would be rewarded with presents, however if they were bad they were given a lump of coal, or in some folklore were taken away in a sack, beaten or killed. The celebration of Christmas has brought with it the decoration of the Christmas tree, the contemporary history of which originated in Germany with the legend of a prophet of Christianity, St Boniface, felling the sacred Oak tree and not being struck down by the feared god Thor. A fir tree grew from the roots, which was decorated in celebration of the people being freed from the fearsome rule of their gods and reverting to Christianity. Coca Cola commissioned an artist names Haddon Sundblom to design a new image of Santa for their advertising campaign, changing the green coloured father Christmas into the jolly red Santa Claus.

Customarily the tree was decorated with candles (later changed to electric lights) to remind children of the stars in the sky at the time of the birth of Jesus, along with the symbolism of Christ being the bringer of light. The Christmas tree, also symbolised by the tree of life is depicted as a many-branched tree illustrating the idea that all life on earth is related and has been used in science, religion, philosophy, mythology, and other areas. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*; the tree of knowledge, connecting heaven and the underworld, and the tree of life, connecting all forms of creation, are both forms of the world tree or cosmic tree. According to some scholars, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, portrayed in various religions and philosophies, are the same tree. The tinsel winding up the tree is used to depict the path of the snake winding up the tree of life to the summit and the crown, the point of limitless light, enchantment and enlightenment.

Different countries have different traditions, with St Nicholas day held on the 6th December, the winter solstice on the 21st and Christmas on the 25th. It was easy for public officials to merge the traditions and mythology of St Nicholas, to the celebration of Father Winter, the winter solstice and the regard to the gods. By merging St Nicholas with his darker companion Knecht Rupecht, the celebration of Christmas on the 25th December has become custom, assimilated into the Church to celebrate the birth of Christ. Once the traditions from pagan folklore had been incorporated into Christian belief and celebrations, the decoration of the tree, use of holly, ivy, mistletoe and tinsel were sure to follow.

Christmas History



(Above Left) One of the early images of Father Christmas. (Above Centre) An early depiction of Kriss Kringle. (Above Right) The redesigned image of Santa Claus produced for Coca Cola.

Santa has been associated with many different names around the world including Santa Claus, Crist Krindl (Kriss Kringle), St Nicholas, Pere Noel, Sinterklaas, Knecht Ruprecht, Joulupukki, Tomte, Grandfather Frost, Yule King, Father Christmas, Yule God, Yultid and Krishna. The common link of all these figures is that they all possess the same custom of visiting children on Christmas day to reward good children by coming down the chimney leaving gifts under the tree. The Christkind was depicted as a sprite-like child, usually with blond hair and angelic wings. He was believed to be the incarnation of Jesus as an infant. Christkind is also depicted to travel alongside Knecht Ruprecht in Germaic mythology. Knecht Ruprecht was also depicted to travel alongside St Nicholas, he carried with him a sack of ashes as well as a bundle of switches. He was also referred to as Black Peter as he went down the chimney to deliver the presents for St Nicholas (or ChristKind) and in doing so became blackened with soot.



(Above Left) Knecht Ruprecht accompanying St Nicholas on his rounds on 6th December. (Above Centre) Krampus, or Père Fouettard accompanying the St Nick depicted as a child. (Above Right) Zwarte Pier accompanying SinterKlaus.

In many places, the image of St Nicholas has merged with Knecht Ruprecht to form "Ru klaus" meaning Rough Nicholas, so named because of his rugged appearance; "Aschen Klaus", meaning Ash Nicholas because of the bag of ashes he carries with him; and "Pelznickel", meaning Furry Nicholas, referring to his fur-clad appearance.

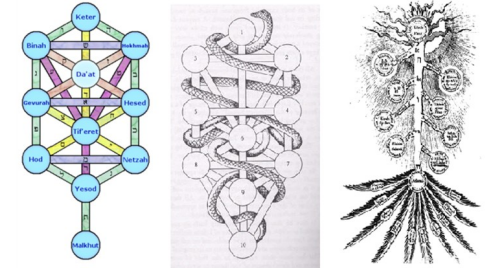
Yule is a time to honour love and new birth, as well as the collective unity of man. Just as Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ, Yule celebrates the birth of the Sun God (child of the Goddess in the Pagan belief system). Yule is primarily the celebration of the rebirth of the Sun. Many people associate the Winter Solstice, or winter itself with death, as it is the season in which nature is dormant, and in which many plants die off and crops are scarce. Conversely, the Winter Solstice, although it is the longest night, (lasting more than 12 hours, usually on the 21st December), it is also the turning point of the year, as following this night the sun grows stronger in the sky, and the days become gradually longer once more. Thus the Winter Solstice is also a celebration of rebirth, and there are many traditions that stem from this perspective.

In Norse Mythology, one of Odin's sons, Balder was believed to be so beautiful that he shone with a bright light. He was the most beloved of all the Norse Gods and sometimes referred to as "Balder The Beautiful". His mother extracted an oath from all things that they would never cause him harm, but she had overlooked the humble mistletoe. Loki, (god of mischief), tricked Hoder, (Balder's brother and the god of night, snow and winter), into throwing a branch of mistletoe at Balder. Hoder was blind and so did not know where he was aiming, and consequently killed his brother. At the funeral, Odin leaned down and whispered into his son's ear, 'Rebirth', reminding Balder that he was to be reborn into a new world after Ragnarok (the final battle between good and evil).



(Above Left) The Norse god Odin, believed to visit the earth during Yultid leaving bread for the poor. (Above Centre) Norse god Baldin, sometimes referred to as a light bringer. (Above Right) Loki tricking Hodur into firing the arrow of mistletoe that would kill his brother.

Some old stories tell us that when winter came the old druids advised the people to take Holly into their homes to shelter the elves and fairies who could join mortals at this time without causing them harm, but these stories also tell of a warning, to make sure and remove the Holly entirely before the eve of Imbolc (halfway between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox), for to leave just one leaf in the house would cause misfortune. Old Scottish traditions dictate that no branch should be cut from a Holly tree, but rather it should be pulled free in a method considered fit for a sacred tree. It was also considered unlucky to fell a Holly tree or to burn its green skinned branches. Yet luck was increased if a small branch was kept and hung outside of the house, there it would continue to protect against lightning. In ritual uses, Holly is associated with the life, death and re-birth symbolism of Lughnassadh/Lammas, the first harvest of the year. (The same ritual that is celebrated by the feast of Saturnalia).



(Above Left) A simplified depiction of the Kabbalistic tree of life. (Above Centre) The tree of life with a snake linking the sephirah to portray the path to enlightenment. (Above Right) The Cabbalah tree of life.

Various motifs have been found on cylinder seals around the world in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and pre-Columbian Mexico depicting gods watering the tree of life.



(Above Left) An eagle-headed Assyrian divinity sprinkling sacred water onto the Tree of Life. (Above Right) A Mesopotamian cylinder seal depicting the tree of life.



(Above Left) The Holly King with his Holly Crown, depicted inside a holly wreath, after his defeat of the Oak King. (Above Right) The eternal serpent, symbolising life, death and rebirth. (The circle of life, or eternal life)

Exerts and images taken from the case studies relating to the origins of Christmas from the book, Empires of the Fallen, by Dale Pywell