

Shouldn't Christmas be a Jewish Holiday?

By Messianic Rabbi Ed Rothman

In the 21st century, the miraculous birth of Y'shua (Jesus) the Messiah is recognized and celebrated by multiplied millions of people from every nation in the world. In 1971, when I became a brand new Jewish believer in Jesus, I joyfully joined in the celebration of Christmas, not knowing anything about the Jewishness of my faith in Y'shua and being ignorant of the pagan roots of this annual observance of Messiah's birth. Looking back I am grateful for the grace through which G-d saw the simple sincerity of my heart. In His kindness He met me where I was in my limited understanding of Him and my lack of knowledge of the darker chapters of church history. At the outset of this discussion, I must make it very clear; G-d loves and accepts each of us more than we can adequately comprehend. He will meet each of us in our genuine adoration of His Son, Jesus the Messiah, even when it may be doctrinally or historically inaccurate. This is the understanding from which this study should be read.

The Pagan Roots of *Christ-Masse*

In the 4th century, the Church found it did not possess the adequate influence to abolish the non-Christian pagan festivals. In an effort to unite the Church and accommodate the heathen masses, the Church Fathers, who shaped church doctrine & practice, attempted to integrate the pagan festivals with the theological doctrines of Christianity in an attempt to more easily assimilate the multitude of unchurched peoples into the Christian faith. It seems that their plan was to gradually rid the world of paganism by sanctifying the heathen holidays with biblical themes.

They absorbed the *Feast of Saturnalia*, which honored Saturn, the Roman god of agriculture. At this time the people hoped and prayed each year for the restoration of his *Golden Age of Peace & Prosperity* by venerating him with 7 days of celebrating *peace & goodwill toward all men*. Gifts would be given to children accompanied

by a spirit of merriment while visiting with and banqueting in each other's homes. All government, business, and school activities would cease. All executions and military operations would be postponed. For 1 week all men, including slaves were equal! The festival took place every year from December 17-24.

They also adapted the Germanic & Celtic rites of the Winter Solstice (Sun stands still), called *Brumalia* (the birthday of the unconquered Sun). The belief was; because December 21st was the shortest day of the year, that on the 22nd the Sun would *die and 3 days later on the 25th be born-again or risen from the dead*, as it began to climb in the sky and the days grew longer. This would signal the beginning of wild festivities of mirth with the use of holly, mistletoe, Yule logs, wassail bowls and paradise trees (evergreens trimmed with candles). The obvious connection was to replace celebrating the birth of the *Sun god* with the birth of the *Son of G-d*, who described Himself as *the Light of the World* (John 8:12 & 9:5).

In 350 AD, Julius I, Bishop of Rome, set the date for *the Nativity* (the birth of Messiah) on December 25th. The reasoning for this was to begin with March 25 (the date they believed to be both the Conception & Passion [the Death] of Jesus the Messiah) and then to add 9 months to it, arriving at the 25th of December. By 354 AD the Roman almanac listed December 25th as the anniversary of the birth of Christ.

Is December 25th the Anniversary of *The Nativity (Messiah's birth)?*

Luke 1:5 reveals to us that Zacharias, was a priest of the order of Abijah. King David divided the Aaronic priesthood into 24 orders and the order of Abijah was the 8th order in the course of priestly service (1 Chronicles 24:10). Each priest would serve for 1 week, twice a year and all priests from all 24 divisions would serve during the 3 pilgrimage festivals. Since Zacharias served during the 8th order, take 8 weeks and add 2 weeks for serving during Passover & Shavuot. We do not know for sure the exact year Y'shua was born, hence we do not have the date of the beginning of that Hebrew calendar year.

The 1st month of the Hebrew calendar is Nissan (or Aviv = Spring) which approximates mid-March to mid-April on our calendar. As an estimated guess, we can begin our calculations from Mid-March, add 10 weeks and find ourselves in early June. If we add a week or two (mid-late-June) for the conception of Yohanon (John) the Immerser (around Shavuot [Pentecost]) and add 6 months for the time when Miryam (Mary) conceived Y'shua through the miraculous intervention of the Holy Spirit [Luke 1:35-36] that will bring us to about mid-late-December). Maybe Y'shua was conceived on Dec. 25th. If you add 9 months to that timeline, it would

place the possible birth of Messiah in late-September to early October, which would approximate the time for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. "The Word became flesh and dwelt (or tabernacled) among us (John 1:14)."

Another possibility would be if we began the reckoning from the second priestly course that would start approximately in mid-late September or early October. Once again the timing coincides with the biblical feasts. 10 weeks (including the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement & Tabernacles) which would bring us to mid-late-December. Was Yochanon, the Immerser conceived on Hanukah and Y'shua at Shavuot (Pentecost)? Could Y'shua have been conceived on the same day that G-d gave birth to the Nation of Israel (Exo. 19:5 & Deut. 32:11) & the Kehilah (the Church)? If that were true, it would mean that Y'shua was born around mid-late March or early April, at Passover. "Behold the Lamb of G-d, which takes away the sin of the World (John 1:29)." Any way you slice it, Y'shua (Jesus) was probably not born on December 25th. Please forgive me if I burst any bubbles or knocked over any sacred cows.

The Star of Bethlehem

In Daniel 2:28 & 5:11, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Daniel as the chief of the Magi (wise men / astrologers). In Matthew 2:1-2 we read of Magi from the east coming to Jerusalem in search of Him who was born, King of the Jews. They saw His star and came to worship Him. On December 25th, 2 BCE (Before Common Era), Jupiter (the Royal planet or planet of Kings) was stationary over Bethlehem as viewed from Jerusalem. Was this the eastern star?

Jupiter was located in the abdominal region (the womb) of Virgo (the Virgin) for 6 days. The ancient rabbinic sages called Jupiter, *Tzedek* (The Righteous One). The holiday of Hanukkah was possibly being celebrated when the Magi presented their gifts to the Messiah King (Matthew 2:9-11). Was December 25th the day that the Magi presented their gifts to Y'shua?

The Biblical Evidence of *Messiah's Miraculous Birth*

1. The Promised Seed – Genesis 3:15
2. Virgin birth, G-d w/ us – Isaiah 7:14
3. G-d Became a Man – Isaiah 9:6-7
4. Born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2
5. Born a man to free us – Heb. 2:14-16
6. The Seed of Abraham – Gal. 3:16
7. The Seed of David – John 7:42
8. To sit on David's throne – Luke 1:32
9. G-d's Son by Holy Spirit – Luke 1:35
10. Born King of the Jews – Mat. 2:2

Why have anything to do with a holiday rooted in paganism and now the high holy day of unbridled capitalism? I suggest that we consider for a moment that more people are exposed to the Gospel (Good News) of our L-RD & Savior between Thanksgiving and Christmas than at any other time of the year. And the thing that amazes me the most, is that more often than not, people are more open to the Gospel during this season, than at any other time of the year. On December 24th-25th, multiplied millions of people around the world take time to pause and declare that G-d sent His Son Jesus to this world to save us from our sins.

I believe that G-d has taught me another way of looking at Christmas. Instead of beating the air in fighting the tide of public opinion that proclaims a day of celebration

to honor the miraculous birth of the Son of G-d, why not use this public platform to share the Good News? Since this is the celebration of the 1st advent of the Jewish Messiah, the promised King of Israel, then shouldn't we redeem this time (Eph. 5:16) and use it for the glory of G-d, build His Kingdom and further His eternal purposes for all of mankind?

The Grace of G-d & Human Traditions

“Let no man judge you in meat or in drink or in respect to a holy day, a feast day or of a new moon or of the Sabbath days: Which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is of Messiah (Colossians 2:16-17).” I believe that Rabbi Saul (Apostle Paul) is speaking here of Jewish observances and not Christian ones, which did not yet exist. But there is a larger principle, which I believe can and should be applied to the observances which are now sacred celebrations to the majority of those in the Christian arm of Messiah's body.

In Y'shua's High Priestly intercession before He was to suffer and die for our sins, He entreated His Father to Make us ONE, even as He and the Father are ONE (John 17:21-23). *I believe that Y'shua's desire to have tangible loving unity amongst His disciples is of the highest priority and utmost importance to Him* (John 13:35). Instead of arguing over how and when to celebrate the birth of our Savior, we should expend our energy in our Heavenly Father's business of edifying fellow believers and reaching those who have yet to know the incomprehensible love He has revealed to us in His only begotten Son, Y'shua (Jesus) the Messiah.

“Let us follow after the things which make for peace & the things whereby we may edify one another (Romans 14:19).