

CHRISTMAS

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe in the Christmas holiday. The Watchtower has taught that the celebration of Christmas sprang from pagans/heathen nations, and has nothing to do with biblical theology. I will build this discussion around that premise.

Before I begin, I'd like to share some information concerning the Watchtower position on Christmas. Although they have changed their view of the holiday, the Watchtower celebrated this event in times past:

"Don't quibble about the date; join in with the world and celebrate Christmas." WT 12-1-1904, p. 3468

"The Studies in the Scriptures suggested as Christmas gifts." WT 12-15-1907, p. 4094

"Christmas is so important, regardless of the date." WT 12-15-1926, p. 371

The Watchtower celebrated the Christmas holiday and instructed their members to "join in." However, the Watchtower has since changed their mind and currently forbids the celebration. Because the Watchtower commands it, members now abstain.

The most important question in reference to celebrating Christmas is, of course, whether God approves such celebration. That said, Watchtower theology teaches that Christmas is not a Christian holiday, and even asserts that its origin emanates from pagans. That is the proclaimed position of the Watchtower; however, is it supported by the Bible? As with everything, God's word is our authority.

There is a story I'd like to share. It's called: *Take my Son*:

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art.

When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war. He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son.

About a month later, just before Christmas, There was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands.

He said, 'Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life. He saved many lives that day, and he was carrying me to safety when a bullet struck him in the heart and he died instantly... He often talked about you, and your

love for art.' The young man held out this package. 'I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I think your son would have wanted you to have this.'

The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. He stared in awe at the way the soldier had captured the personality of his son in the painting. The father was so drawn to the eyes that his own eyes welled up with tears. He thanked the young man and offered to pay him for the picture. 'Oh, no sir, I could never repay what your son did for me. It's a gift.'

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

The man died a few months later. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Many influential people gathered, excited over seeing the great paintings and having an opportunity to purchase one for their collection.

On the platform sat the painting of the son. The auctioneer pounded his gavel. 'We will start the bidding with this picture of the son. Who will bid for this picture?'

There was silence ...

Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, 'We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one.'

But the auctioneer persisted.. 'Will somebody bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? \$100 ... \$200?'

Another voice angrily ... 'We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Gogh's, the Rembrandts. Get on with the Real bids!'

But still the auctioneer continued. 'The son! The son! Who'll take the son?'

Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. 'I'll give \$10 for the painting...' Being a poor man, it was all he could afford.

'We have \$10, who will bid \$20?' 'Give it to him for \$10. Let's see the masters.' The crowd was becoming angry ... They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections. The auctioneer pounded the gavel ... 'Going once, twice, SOLD for \$10!'

A man sitting on the second row shouted, 'Now let's get on with the collection!' The auctioneer laid down his gavel. 'I'm sorry, the auction is over.' 'What about the paintings?' 'I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will.... I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the paintings.'

The man who took the son gets everything!

God gave His son 2,000 years ago to die on the cross. Much like the auctioneer, His message today is: 'The son, the son, who'll take the son?'

Because, you see, whoever takes the Son gets everything!

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:16

The fact is that Christmas is all about the Son. Yes, the birth of Christ who became the Savior of the world. His birth was His Father’s gift to the world. All those who would believe in Him, God said, “should not perish, but have eternal life.”

The Son of God, or God the Son, saves us from all sin. From the sin of Adam and Eve ... past sin ... present sin ... and all future sin. The Apostle Paul helps us appreciate how sin no longer condemns us to God’s wrath (when we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior), and the free gift He provides us instead. Romans 6:22 reads:

“But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.”

Jesus Christ came into the world to save the world. His purpose was not to judge it. This can be sustained in the book of Matthew 3:17, which reads:

“For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him.”

Christmas, the birth of God’s Son, was the most important event in human history. The Bible foretold His coming and it had finally arrived:

“For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6

Before I share the first Christmas celebrated in scripture, I’d like to comment on celebrating events not mentioned in scripture. I understand that the Watchtower forbids celebrations that are not specifically commanded in scripture. I find this interesting, as I will explain.

When God speaks (through scripture) His children should listen. However, not only do we need to listen with our eyes and ears, but with our hearts and minds as well. In this way, we glean the messages God communicates through scripture. As an illustration of how our hearts and minds are engaged, I will use the example of wedding anniversaries.

Although the Bible is silent on the annual celebration of wedding anniversaries (which is Watchtower approved), there is absolutely nothing wrong with observing the event. God sanctions marriage. Adam and Eve were created by our Heavenly Father, and were married by God Himself. Marriage is God ordained ... God sanctioned ... and thereby blessed.

Although the Bible does not specifically command us to observe/celebrate our wedding anniversary, Christians nevertheless are free to recognize their wedding day annually if they wish, because marriage is an institution created by God Himself. Therefore, what God ordains, His children may freely celebrate.

Similarly, the annual celebration of Christ's birth is also silent in scripture. Thus, it falls into the same category as wedding anniversaries (i.e., no scriptural command to celebrate). Of course, wedding anniversaries pale in comparison to the birth of Christ, but both events are God sanctioned and approved. Because of this, we are free to annually celebrate both. So then, what does the word "Christmas" mean?

The English gave this celebration the name *Cristes mæsse*, literally, Christ's mass ... and from that we have inherited the word Christmas. It can also mean simply a mass of religious services in commemoration of the birth of Christ. In other words, "mass" stands for festival involving a number of religious activities. We will now read about the very first Christmas depicted in the Bible.

Angels Sent From God To Announce The Birth of Christ!

"And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. And in the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields, and keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. And the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.' And it came about when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds began saying to one another, 'Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.' ... And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them." Luke 2:7-15, 20

God's messengers (angels) assembled to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. They raised their voices in exaltation of God for His glory, for His Son, and for His plan to save the world. This response of exaltation becomes the great thread of worship that began that first Christmas and continues in our worship today.

This message of hope to the shepherds was a message of hope to all of mankind. "These simple men," writes commentator Adam Clarke, "having satisfactory evidence of the truth of the good tidings, and feeling a divine influence upon their own minds, returned to the care of their flocks, glorifying God for what He had shown them, and for the blessedness which they felt."

"And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them." Luke 2:20

Two thousand years later, we continue to celebrate the birth of Christ, joining the angels and shepherds who were the first to do so. Our great challenge today is to remember the real reason behind the Christmas celebration, which has become increasingly secular and commercial. We have now discussed two celebrations that are not commanded in scripture -- wedding anniversaries and the birth of Christ. Both celebrations are motivated by love and approved by God. Therefore, Christmas is an appropriate Christian celebration.

For your consideration, the following are quoted materials concerning other Christmas-related topics.

The Date – December 25

As early as the second century that we know of, men have been trying to ascertain the day of Christ's birth. Some of this information may be a tedious read, for some, but the revealing is well worth the effort. Church father Clement of Alexandria has this to say:

Clement of Alexandria (153-217) - The Stromata ...

Translated by William Wilson

Book I, Chapter 21

Thirdly, while it is true that Christmas (the birth of Christ) was not listed as one of the chief Christian festivals in the first two centuries of the Church's existence, it is not exactly true that the first Christians never observed the birth of Christ until the time of Constantine. Actually there is evidence of the feast being celebrated in Egypt prior to 200 A.D. The Church father Clement of Alexandria tells us that certain theologians had claimed to have determined not only the year of the Lord's birth but also the day; that it took place in the 28th year of Augustus and on the 25th day of Pachon (May 20) (*Stromata*, I, 21). He also added that others said that he was born on the 24th or 25th of Pharmuthi (April 19 or 20). Another piece of evidence is *De Paschae Computus* of 243, which states that Christ was born on March 28, because, it says, this was the day that the sun was created. Clement also tells us that other Christians were in the custom of celebrating the Baptism of Christ (his Epiphany) on the 15th day of Tubi and others on the 11th of the same month (Jan. 10 or 6). This is significant because it became customary in many places for Christians to celebrate both Christ's epiphany and his birth at the same – a practice of the Armenian Church to this day.

Evidence of Shepherds Outside In Winter

By J. Hampton Keathley III

The Mishnah tells us the shepherds around Bethlehem were outside all year and those worthy of the Passover were nearby in the fields at least 30 days before the feast which could be as early as February (one of the coldest, rainiest months of the year). So December is a very reasonable date.

James Keiso, an archaeologist who spent a number of years living in Palestine and who has done extensive research there says this:

“The best season for the shepherds of Bethlehem is the winter when heavy rains bring up a luscious crop of new grass. After the rains the once-barren, brown desert earth is suddenly a field of brilliant green. One year when excavating at New Testament Jericho, I lived in Jerusalem and drove through this area twice every day. At one single point along the road, I could see at times as many as five shepherds with their flocks on one hillside. One shepherd stayed with his flock at the same point for three weeks, so lush was the grass. But as soon as the rains stopped in the spring, the land quickly took on its normal desert look once again.”

Since there seem to have been a number of shepherds who came to see the Christ child, December or January would be the most likely months (*James Keiso, An Archaeologist Looks At The Gospels, p. 23-24*).

The Winter Solstice Celebration ...

From Babylon to Rome, for thousands of years, virtually every culture has had some sort of celebration for the solstice. The winter solstice is the darkest, shortest day of the year, and since it marks the time at which the glorious light returns, the solstice has long been an occasion for great celebration and rejoicing.

On the surface, the solstice celebration is often a rejoicing of the return of the sun with the promise of the greening of the earth and the warming of the days. But on a deeper spiritual level, the solstice celebration honors the birth and rebirth of the glorious Holy Light which guides and sustains all of creation, the One Light that illuminates every heart and promises new growth, the warmth of loving-kindness and the brilliance of illumination to all of mankind. This celebration of the return of the light is a wonderful time to honor and remember the highest of ideals, the greatest of principles and the glorious gift of illumination, the One Light that illuminates every heart. And for this reason, a wide variety of cultures all around the globe have long enjoyed celebrations at this time of year.

For millions of people worldwide, Jesus Christ represents the highest of ideals, the greatest of principles and the most wonderful of holy Light, so it's hard to imagine a better time to celebrate Jesus' birthday, regardless of when it actually is.

The sun god Mithra (Mithra in Persian, Mitra in Sanskrit) was highly honored and well known across the entire region from India to Rome. In the ancient Vedic hymns of India, Mitra is often invoked together with Varuna so that the two are combined as 'Mitravaruna': Varuna is lord of the cosmic rhythm of the celestial spheres, while Mitra brings forth the light at dawn, which was covered by Varuna.

In the Zoroastrian religion, the sun-god Mithra was highly honored as a major deity, and interestingly, the birth of Mithra is celebrated at the eve of the winter solstice called Shab-e Yalda in Farsi (Persian).

The Romans had a great number of temples dedicated to Mithra, and the winter solstice celebration dedicated to the sun god Mithra was indeed a major event in their lives.

In the ancient world, much of the day to day life was centered on a keen awareness of the sun, the stars and the seasons. For thousands of years, the return of the sun at the time of the winter solstice has been a time of good cheer and great celebration, both secular and spiritual.

Within a few years of Emperor Constantine's conversion to Christianity, he had the altars and temples of Mithra destroyed. They were replaced and quickly rededicated to the activities of the Church. Just that suddenly the winter solstice which was perhaps the greatest celebration known to the ancient world, was transformed into a matter of church doctrine.

Although Constantine converted to Christianity, remnants of his old religion stayed around. For many, incorporating Mithraic or solstice rites into the celebration of Christmas was easy to justify: Christ represents life, triumph over death and darkness, and restored hope and light; rather than celebrating the sun as before, people would be celebrating the Son of God. Simply put, the birth of Christ replaced the birth of the sun as a cause for celebration.

As a theologian asserted in 320, "We hold this day holy, not like the pagans because of the birth of the sun, but because of him who made it."

The so-called "barbarian invasions" of the Roman Empire that began in the fifth century brought the Nordic and Germanic peoples in direct contact with Christianity, and thus with Christmas. In northern and western Europe, the Germanic and Celtic peoples had their own solstice rituals, which were later incorporated into Christmas. The December Julmond festival (Jul later became Yule) was a celebration of harvest and rebirth, with wheat representing life triumphing over death. Anything made of wheat, such as bread or liquor, was consumed heartily, and also given as gifts. Evergreens were used as a symbol of life, and what we would call the Yule log was lit in this time of darkness to symbolize the eventual triumph of light over darkness. The festive meal was boar's head. These traditions have been presented in centuries-old carols, including wassail songs, holly carols, and boar's head carols still widely sung today.

Christianity gradually made its way across Europe, bringing Christmas with it. It came to England via St. Augustine, the first Archbishop of Canterbury, who supposedly baptized more than ten thousand English on December 25, 598 AD.

Acting under the direction of Pope Gregory I, Augustine was also instrumental in bringing the celebration of Christmas to that area. At the end of the sixth century the pope instructed Augustine to make the midwinter Yule festival over into Christmas observances, emphasizing the importance of condoning any customs from the festival that could be found to contain Christian significance. It was a well-tested strategy, and it worked. (There are some who believe, however, that King Arthur had the first English Christmas in 521 AD, with his Knights of the Round Table, without the input of either Augustine or Gregory.)

Christmas came to Germany in 813 AD, via the Synod of Mainz, and was brought to Norway in the mid-900s by King Hakon the Good. By the end of the ninth century, Christmas was observed all over Europe with trees, lights, gifts and feasts. The items that had held significance for the old religions were either tossed aside or altered to fit within a Christian context.

Today Roman Catholics and Protestants celebrate Christmas on December 25, but not by most European churches, which continue to combine Epiphany and nativity celebrations on January 6.

The eventual choice of December 25, made perhaps as early as 273, reflects a convergence of Origen's concern about pagan gods and the church's identification of God's son with the celestial sun. December 25 already hosted two other related festivals: *natalis solis invicti* (the Roman "birth of the unconquered sun"), and the birthday of Mithras, the Iranian "Sun of Righteousness" whose worship was popular with Roman soldiers. The winter solstice, another celebration of the sun, fell just a few days earlier. Seeing that pagans were already exalting deities with some parallels to the true deity, church leaders decided to commandeer the date and introduce a new festival.

Western Christians first celebrated Christmas on December 25 in 336, after Emperor Constantine had declared Christianity the empire's favored religion. Eastern churches, however, held on to January 6 as the date for Christ's birth and his baptism. Most easterners eventually adopted December 25, celebrating Christ's birth on the earlier date and his baptism on the latter, but the Armenian church celebrates his birth on January 6. Incidentally, the Western church does celebrate Epiphany on January 6, but as the arrival date of the Magi rather than as the date of Christ's baptism.

Why December 25?

By J. Hampton Keathley, III

(1) The first theory holds that after careful research, Julius (337-352), Bishop of Rome, determined that Christ had been born on December 25; or at least he determined that December 25 was the best authenticated date in the Tradition. John Chrysostom states this in one of his writings (John Chrysostom, *Homil. Diem Natal.*, 2; PL, 49, 552ff.). Chrysostom claims that Julius, after he had been requested by Cyril of Jerusalem, had the official records of the Roman census examined and determined that December 25 was the correct date. As Weiser points out, however, there is no evidence to back this up; in fact, "it was expressly stated in Rome that the actual date of the Saviour's birth was unknown and that different traditions prevailed in different parts of the world" (F. Weiser, *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs* - New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1958, 61.).

(2) The second theory states that the Church of Rome deliberately chose December 25 as the date of Christ's birth to turn people away from a pagan feast that was observed at the same time. Since the time of the Roman emperor Elagabalus (218-222), the god *Sol Invictus* (Unconquered Sun god), had been one of the chief deities worshiped by the Romans. When Emperor Aurelian (270-275) came to power, he sought to restore the worship of the Sun god to prominence and make him the chief deity. In the last years of his reign, *Sol* was hailed as "The Lord of the Roman Empire." *Sol*, along with Jupiter, appeared on the coins Aurelian had minted. In 274, the emperor built a magnificent temple to Sun god, and established a new college of senators which he named "the priests of the Sun god." Finally, December 25 was observed as "the birthday of the Sun god" (*natalis solis invicti*). Because the Sun god was identified with Mithra, a popular Persian god that also was viewed as the Sun god, pagan celebrations occurred throughout the empire on Dec. 25 (see Clement A. Miles, *Christmas*, New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1912, 23). The Church at Rome seems to have chosen this date to counteract this pagan feast of the sun god and turn people instead to the "Sun of Righteousness with healing in His wings" (Malachi 4:2; Luke 1:78). Or put another way, Julius chose December 25 so that the Son of God rather than the Sun god would be worshiped. Though there no direct evidence that proves that the Church of Rome deliberately chose December 25 so that Christ's birth would replace "the

birthday of the sun," we do have sermons from fathers of the church who soon after this used this line of reasoning. For example, Augustine (354-430) in his sermon 202 and Leo the Great (440-461 -- PL 54 Sources chrtiennes 22) gives this line of reasoning.

Therefore, the second theory seems to be the probable one. December 25 was chosen not because it had somehow been proven from extra-biblical sources that Christ was definitely born on December 25. Rather the date was chosen to counteract a very popular pagan holiday that already had been occurring on this date.

The Romans, like many other cultures at the time of the winter solstice, had various festivals. Saturnalia was a festival that honored Saturn, the god of agriculture, from Dec. 17-24. It was the most popular festival of the year and did involve merrymaking, gift-giving, relaxed morality, and temporary freedom for slaves, who were allowed to do and speak whatever they wanted. But not unlike many of our Christmas feasts today, by the early Fourth Century, the religious aspect of Saturnalia had faded, and the secular merrymaking had come to the fore. It is not likely, however, that Christians chose Dec. 25 to celebrate Christ's birth on the basis of Saturnalia.

The earliest extant record of Christ's birth being observed on December 25 is the Chronography in 354 A.D. This document was based upon a calendar that dated it to about 336 (Herman Wegman, *Christian Worship in East and West*, New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1985, 103). The Chronography was a document of the Church of Rome that listed the various martyrs' feasts for the year. By the time that Chrysostom was Bishop of Constantinople (398-404), Christ's birth was being observed on Dec. 25 throughout Christendom, though the Church in Armenia observed it on January 6.

Let us now focus on the "origin" that Christmas customs were pagan and therefore Christmas is pagan. Christmas customs were observed in pagan culture. Lights ... mistletoe ... trees ... gift-giving ... merry-making ... revelry ... yule logs ... holly ... and yes, Santa Claus. All found use or expression in ancient pagan religion and culture. Why is it assumed that because Christians use or do the same things other humans do (pagans), that it invalidates the activities of Christians? In other words, if pagan religions hug their kids, or drink milk, does that mean Christians who hug their children or drink milk are engaging in paganism? The answer is no. But this is the kind of logic used by the anti-Christmas crowd.

Is everything that was once used by paganism centuries ago, now off limits when Christians apply them to Christmas or other Christian festivals? Are we prepared to strictly apply that to everything we do? We need to remember that before pagans, centuries ago, God had given many of the things used in custom, as good gifts to be enjoyed by his people. It is sufficient to point out to people the origin of these customs, and distinguish these "winter customs" from the true Christmas celebration, which has to do with the birth of God's Son, Jesus Christ.

There is also nothing wrong with using some of the winter customs, provided you keep them in perspective and don't allow them to bury the celebration of Christ's birth.

**Message from Ralph Woodrow regarding the book
BABYLON MYSTERY RELIGION**

For a number of years my book BABYLON MYSTERY RELIGION was very popular, enjoyed a wide circulation, and was translated into various languages. To this day, we do not cease to receive orders and inquiries about it. Despite its popularity, several years ago we pulled it out of print and now offer a replacement book THE BABYLON CONNECTION?

So is it with the claims about pagan origins. What may seem to have a connection, upon further investigation, has no connection at all!

By this method, one could take virtually anything and do the same—even the “golden arches” at McDonald’s! The Encyclopedia Americana (article: “Arch”) says the use of arches was known in Babylon as early as 2020 B.C. Since Babylon was called “the golden city” (Isa. 14:4), can there be any doubt about the origin of the golden arches? As silly as this is, this is the type of proof that has been offered over and over about pagan origins.

By this method, atheists have long sought to discredit the Bible and Christianity altogether—not just the Roman Catholic Church.

By this method, one could condemn Protestant and evangelical denominations like the Assemblies of God, Baptist, Church of Christ, Lutheran, Methodist, Nazarene, etc. Basic things like prayer, and kneeling in prayer, would have to be rejected, because pagans knelt and prayed to their gods. Water baptism would have to be rejected, for pagans had numerous rites involving water, etc.

By this method, the BIBLE itself would need to be rejected as pagan. All of the following practices or beliefs mentioned in the Bible, were also known among pagans—raising hands in worship, taking off shoes on holy ground, a holy mountain, a holy place in a temple, offering sacrifices without blemish, a sacred ark, city of refuge, bringing forth water from a rock, laws written on stone, fire appearing on a person’s head, horses of fire, the offering of first fruits, tithes, etc.

By this method, the LORD himself would be pagan. The woman called Mystery Babylon had a cup in her hand; the Lord has a cup in his hand (Psa. 75:8). Pagan kings sat on thrones and wore crowns; the Lord sits on a throne and wears a crown (Rev. 1:4; 14:14). Pagans worshipped the sun; the Lord is the “Sun of righteousness” (Mal. 4:2). Pagan gods were likened to stars; the Lord is called “the bright and morning star” (Rev. 22:16). Pagan gods had temples dedicated to them; the Lord has a temple (Rev. 7:15). Pagan gods were pictured with wings; the Lord is pictured with wings (Psa. 91:4).

Here is a list of the some of the unsubstantiated claims that are made about the religion of ancient Babylon:

- The Babylonians went to a confessional and confessed sins to priests who wore black clergy garments.
- Their king, Nimrod, was born on December 25. Round decorations on Christmas trees and round communion wafers honored him as the Sun-god.

- Sun-worshippers went to their temples weekly, on Sunday, to worship the Sun-god.
- Nimrod’s wife was Semiramis, who claimed to be the Virgin Queen of Heaven, and was the mother of Tammuz.
- Tammuz was killed by a wild boar when he was age 40; so 40 days of Lent were set aside to honor his death.
- The Babylonians wept for him on “Good Friday.” They worshipped a cross—the initial letter of his name.

It is amazing how unsubstantiated teachings like these circulate—and are believed. One can go to any library, check any history book about ancient Babylon, none of these things will be found. They are not historically accurate, but are based on an arbitrary piecing together of bits and pieces of mythology.

Hislop, for example, taught that mythological persons like Adonis, Apollo, Bacchus, Cupid, Dagon, Hercules, Janus, Mars, Mithra, Moloch, Orion, Osiris, Pluto, Saturn, Vulcan, Zoraster, and many more, were all Nimrod! He then formed his own “history” of Nimrod! He did the same thing with Nimrod’s wife. So, according to his theory, Nimrod was a big, ugly, deformed black man. His wife, Semiramis—also known as Easter, he says—was a most beautiful white woman with blond hair and blue eyes, a backslider, inventor of soprano singing, the originator of priestly celibacy, the first to whom the unbloody mass was offered! This is not factual history—it is more in the category of tabloid sensationalism.

Some claim that round objects, such as round communion wafers, are symbols of the Sun-god. But they fail to mention that the very manna given by God was round! (Exod. 16:14). Some are ready to condemn all pillars and historical monuments as pagan. But they fail to take into account that the Lord himself appeared as a pillar of fire; and, in front of his temple, there were two large pillars (Exod. 13:21,22; 2 Chron. 3:17).

Because Babylon had a tower (Gen. 11:4), some suppose this must be why there are church buildings with towers or steeples: they are copying Babylon! A newspaper reporter in Columbus, Ohio, wrote to me about this. In that city, and numerous other places, this claim has been made. Let me say it quite clearly: No church ever included a steeple or tower on their house of worship to copy the tower of Babel! Why discredit thousands of born-again Christians by promoting ideas that have no connection? If a tower in itself is pagan, God would be pagan, for David described him as “*my high tower*” (2 Sam. 22:3; cf. Prov. 18:10).

No Christian who puts a bumper sticker with a fish symbol on the back of his car has ever done so to honor the fish-god Dagon. No congregation has ever put a cross on a church building for the purpose of honoring Tammuz. No Christian has ever gone to an Easter sunrise service to worship Baal. No Christian has ever worshipped a Christmas tree as an idol. Claims that imply “all these things started in Babylon,” are not only divisive and fruitless, they are untrue.

The concern about not wanting anything pagan in our lives can be likened to a ship crossing a vast ocean. This concern has taken us in the right direction, but as we come to a better understanding as to what is actually pagan and what is not, a correction of the course is necessary in our journey.

The Magi

The Magi asked, where is the one born king of the Jews. They claim that they had seen His star, either a miracle or a combination of bright stars or a comet. These men may have been Jewish proselytes and may have known of the Messianic hope.

They came to worship the newly born king of the Jews. They had their own way of concluding that the star which they had seen pointed to the birth of this Messianic king. But one must be allowed to say that the birth of Jesus, if really God's only Son who has become Incarnate, is the greatest of all miracles.

When Did The Magi Appear?

Indeed the tone of Matthew 2:1 is that the Magi visited Christ soon after His birth. That Herod killed children up to two years old was only to be sure he got Jesus. This is not out of character with Herod. Therefore, the slaying of the children soon after Christ's birth is tenable. Charles Ryrie in his Study Bible, p. 1447, says:

“[i]nto the House ... the Child. These words need not indicate that the wise men came some time after the birth of Christ. The family would naturally have moved into a house as quickly as possible after Jesus was born, and ‘child’ can mean a newborn (John 16:21). We do not know how many wise men there were, but brought gold, frankincense and myrrh. These were gifts worthy of a king. The early church fathers understood the gold to be symbolic of Christ's deity; the frankincense, of His purity; and the myrrh, of His death (since it was used for embalming).”

Do Jeremiah and Isaiah Condemn Christmas Trees?

When reading any Bible passage, it is extremely important not to extract (pull) a scripture out of its context. However, that said, there are those who practice this behavior, and because of it, incorrectly interpret the passage and its meaning.

As a case in point (pulling scripture out of its original context and interpreting / applying it to a different subject altogether), there are those who interpret scriptures in Jeremiah and Isaiah to prove Christmas trees are biblically condemned. However, when we read these passages in their original context, God reveals the true meanings / purpose of these passages.

Is Jeremiah Chapter 10 telling us to avoid the customs of the nations? No. Jeremiah 10 is a denunciation of the making and worship of idols and not the decoration of evergreen trees in the home.

The passage is not a categorical denial of all the customs of the nations. It is only a command to avoid those customs that are contrary to the revelation of God to Israel. There were many customs that Israel and the nations had in common that were not wrong.

Passages in Jeremiah, Isaiah, and others had to do with idolatry. First, Jeremiah warns against astrological worship – the worship of the sun, moon, and the stars. Second, he warns against going into the forest to cut down trees to be carved into an idol in some form whether human or animal, and then worshipped and prayed to for guidance, for protection, and blessing ...

“Surely he cuts cedars for himself, and takes a cypress or an oak, and raises it for himself among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir, and the rain makes it grow. Then it becomes something for a man to burn, so he takes on of them and warms himself; he also makes a fire to bake bread. He also makes a god and worships it; he makes it a graven image, and falls down before it. Half of it he burns in the fire; over this half he eats meat as he roasts a roast, and is satisfied. He also warms himself and says, ‘Aha! I am warm, I have seen the fire.’ But the rest of it he makes into a god, his graven image. He falls down before it and worships; he also prays to it and says, ‘Deliver me, for thou art my god.’” Isaiah 44:14-17

The context of the passage has nothing to do with Christmas trees. It is communicating man’s idolatry of God’s creation.

Some have tried to tie the reference to the green trees in Jeremiah 3:6 and 3:13 to the scripture in Jeremiah 10:3-4 to further justify condemnation of the Christmas trees:

*“For the customs of peoples are delusion;
Because it is wood cut from the forest,
The work of the hands of a craftsman with a cutting tool.
They decorate it with silver and with gold;
They fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not totter.”* Jeremiah 10:3-4

But once again, this refers to the idolatrous groves of trees used as a place for idol worship and revelry. God is not communicating the prohibition on trees. God’s creation was to be enjoyed and appreciated. After all, He made everything for man’s benefit and something to be enjoyed. He surrounds us with beauty, whether trees, flowers, animals, mountains, luminaries, oceans, and the list is long. However, He did not make these things for us to worship, and that is what He is communicating in Jeremiah and Isaiah.

Pagans (Heathens, those who worship many gods) have been with us for centuries. They worship false gods, and do things God detests. They worshipped His creation instead of Him.

Looking deeper into pagan designs, we find how the days of the week were viewed. I find this very interesting. The names of the days of our week also had their origin in pagan beliefs. Thursday originally stood for the Germanic god of the sky or of thunder. Tuesday stood for Tiw, the god of war. Wednesday is derived from Woden, the chief god of Germanic mythology. Sunday and Monday were related somehow to the worship of the sun and the moon. Saturday is from Saturnus, or Saturn, and Friday comes from Fria, the goddess of love.

All of these ancient meanings with their beliefs and associations were lost long ago. So, when Friday rolls around, we don’t think about Fria, the goddess of love. On Saturday we don’t think about it as Saturn’s day, but as our day off.

If one observed the days of the week with their ancient associations in mind, certainly, it would be wrong from a Christian point of view. Christians however, do not live / observe / celebrate the pagan meanings of our days of the week. Everything man made has an origin. However, meanings differ from one century to another. Certainly, Christian worship on Sunday (pagan worship of the sun and moon) has nothing to do with pagan worship. That said, there may be those today that still worship the sun and moon on Sunday, but that by no means dictates why Christians go to church on Sunday. I call this Apples and Oranges ... one has nothing to do with the other.

The celebration of Christmas (worshipping the Son of God), in like manner, has nothing in common (spiritually speaking) with pagan worship.

The Christian Encyclopedia:

“Various symbolic elements of the pagan celebration, such as the lighting of candles, evergreen decorations, and the giving of gifts, were adapted to Christian signification. Later as Christianity spread into northern Europe, the Celtic, Teutonic, and Slavic winter festivals contributed holly, mistletoe, the Christmas tree, bonfires, and similar items.”

Unger’s Bible Dictionary:

“The giving of presents was a Roman custom; while the yule tree and yule log are remnants of old Teutonic nature worship. Gradually the festival sank into mere revelry ... The custom was forbidden by an act of parliament in 1555. And the reformation brought in a refinement in the celebration of Christmas by emphasizing its Christian elements.”

Conclusion

Man’s traditions versus how we, individually, respond/celebrate regarding God’s gift to the world (our Savior’s birth) is a personal matter. That said, however we respond, may we show as much enthusiasm as did God’s angels and shepherds. *“And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.’ And it came about when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds began saying to one another, ‘Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us.’ ... And the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.”* Luke 2:13-15, 20