

## Is Christmas a ... ?

Is Christmas a consumer holiday?

Is Christmas a replacement for the winter solstice?

Is Christmas a replacement for a pagan holiday?

### Is Christmas a Consumer Holiday?

Whenever we read about Christmas nowadays, the mainstream media and special interest groups go out of their way to paint it as a commercialised holiday, whose sole purpose is to sell products without any inherent value to society. They even gloss over Christmas, and try to include as many non-Christian holidays as possible, to erase it from the public consciousness. Thus, creating a self-fulfilling environment, where secularising the Christmas season, into a series of holidays with a syncretistic intent, leads it to become nothing more than an opportunity to sell as many products as possible to the largest set of religious and non-religious groups.

But what does Christmas mean to Christians? Is it a consumer holiday? or is it a religious celebration? In short, it is a deeply religious celebration of the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ in the flesh. In our Syriac Maronite Tradition, we literally call the feast "eedo dyaldeh dmoran babsar" (The Feast of the Birth of Our Lord in the Flesh). Thus, calling it a "consumer holiday" is gravely offensive to Christians.

For us Christians, when we celebrate the birth of our Lord, we are celebrating our salvation. The Incarnation of our Lord, is part of God's plan of salvation for humanity. In His Name we gather, we who are part of His mystical Body, because through His Incarnation He has united His divinity to our humanity and our humanity to His divinity. Thus, linking His Incarnation with His Passion and Resurrection, which is celebrated at every Qurbono (Mass).

Don't Christians buy gifts for Christmas? Yes we do, but buying gifts for Christmas doesn't make it a consumer holiday. It's a time of giving, when we remember the Holy Family, who couldn't find an inn, yet after the Virgin Mary gave birth to the Christ child in a manger, the Magi brought gifts and adored Him, and the shepherds also adored Him. This act of corporal and spiritual giving, lives on in the Christian heart and the Christmas experience.

In the lead up to Christmas, Syriac Maronites observe a strict fast, during which acts of giving are common. And on Christmas eve, Syriac Maronite families have a dinner followed by midnight Qurbono (Mass), and in the morning of the 25th, the children wake up and open their gifts. Thus, for us, the family getting together for a meal followed by midnight Qurbono, unites us with the Holy Family. We adore the Christ child, just like the angels and shepherds and the Magi had done.

## Is Christmas a Replacement for the Winter Solstice?

The short answer is no, it's not. The Winter Solstice occurs on the 21st of December, whereas Christmas occurs on the 25th of December.

## Is Christmas a Replacement for a Pagan Holiday?

The short answer is no, it's not. The most common pagan holiday that is offered, is that of "Dies Natalis Solis Invicti" (The Day of the Birth of Sol Invictus), celebrated by the Romans on the 25th of December. A problem with this pagan holiday, is that the Romans started celebrating it in the mid-4th century, whereas Hippolytus of Rome, in the beginning of the 3rd century, describes Christians celebrating Christmas on the 25th of December. Thus, Christmas doesn't occur on the Winter Solstice nor does it try to replace a pagan holiday.

From the 1st century to about 313AD, Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire. During which time, the Church was underground, as such some traditions maintained in the Western Church had been lost in the Eastern Churches, and vice versa. In the West the physical birth of Christ was kept, whereas in the East the feast of the Theophany (Epiphany), January 6th, was used to celebrate the Incarnation and the Divine Manifestation (Baptism). The source of the new birth for mankind. It became common in the East, to celebrate one's Baptism date, instead of one's physical birthday. After Christianity had become legal, and the bishops were free to travel, these various traditions spread in both directions. Thus, today, we have the various ancient feasts being celebrated in both the West and the East.

In the Syriac Maronite Church, we celebrate the Incarnation on the 25th of December, the Circumcision on the 1st of January, and the Theophany on the 6th of January. Christ took on human flesh (25th of December) to redeem us, because no human is holy enough to do so. Christ was circumcised on the 8th day (1st of January), to fulfil the requirements of the law. He did so, because no human was able to fulfil the Law. Humans, according to Genesis, were created on the 6th day in God's image, but because of the sin of Adam and Eve, they put on the skin of animal. Christ through His Baptism (6th of January), manifested the image of God, and made it possible for the creation of a new man, in the image of God (i.e. the new 6th day of creation), through which humans can become again the children of God.