

The Easter Story

This is from "Heathen Holidays" by Denise Snodgrass

CHAPTER III

EASTER: THE GODDESS OF SPRING

The name of this festival, itself, shows its heathen origin. "Easter" is derived from Eastre, or Eostre, the Anglo-Saxon Goddess of spring and dawn. There also is some historical connection existing between the words "Easter" and "East," where the sun rises. The festival of Eostre was celebrated on the day of the Vernal Equinox (spring). Traditions associated with the festival of the Teutonic fertility Goddess survive in the Easter rabbit and colored eggs.

Spring is the season of new life and revival, when, from ancient times, the pagan peoples of Europe and Asia held their spring festivals, re-enacting ancient regeneration myths and performing magical and religious ceremonies to make the crops grow and prosper.

From "The American Book of Days," by George William Douglas we read: "As the festival of Eostre was a celebration of the renewal of life in the spring it was easy to make it a celebration of the resurrection from the dead of Jesus. There is no doubt that the Church (of Rome) in its early days adopted the old pagan customs and gave a "Christian" meaning to them.

From "Easter: its Story and Meaning," by Alan W. Watts is found: "The story of Easter is not simply a Christian story. Not only is the very name "Easter" the name of an ancient and non-Christian deity; the season itself has also, from time immemorial, been the occasion of rites and observances having to do with the mystery of death and resurrection among peoples differing widely in race and religion."

From "Easter and its customs," by Christina Hole is found: "Vernal Mysteries (spring heathen rites) like those of Tammuz, and Osiris and Adonis flourished in the Mediterranean world and farther north and east there were others. Some of their rites and symbols were carried forward into Easter customs. Many of them have survived into our own day, unchanged yet subtly altered in their new surroundings to bear a "Christian" significance."

TAMMUZ AND THE VERNAL MYSTERIES

The rites connected with the death and resurrection of the gods Tammuz, Osiris, and Adonis are the Forerunners of the "Christian" Easter; they are the first East services.

Let us look in the Word of God in Ezekiel 8:13-16

(13) He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do. (14) Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and behold, there sat women **WEEPING FOR TAMMUZ** (15) Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these (16) And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the **EAST**; and they **WORSHIPPED THE SUN** toward the **EAST**.

Here the people of God, Israel, had back-slid into idolatry. Tammuz was a Babylonian god. Like Christ Mass and New Year's, Easter, too, began in Babylon.

Let us look into the Mythologies of the death and resurrection gods, such as Tammuz from "Easter: its Story and Meaning."

"Wife and beloved of Tammuz was the goddess Inanna, or Ishtar, in whose person is represented she whom we now call Mother Nature of Mother Earth -- she who, when refreshed with the spring rains, with the water from heaven, brings forth the fruits of life. We are told that when Tammuz died, Inanna was so stricken with grief that she followed him to the underworld, to the realm of Eresh-Kigal, Queen of the Dead, a "land from which there is no returning, a house of darkness, where dust lies on door and bolt." In her absence the earth was deprived of its fertility; crops would not grow; animals would not mate; life was in danger of coming to an end.

"O my child!" at his vanishing away she lifts up a lament; "My Damu!" at his vanishing away she lifts up a lament; "My enchanter and priest!" at his vanishing away she lifts up a lament, At the shining cedar, rooted in a spacious place, In Eanna, above and below, she lifts up a lament.

This ancient text is called "The Lament of the Flutes for Tammuz." He had gone away to the underworld, and this was why there was winter. "The Lament of the Flutes for Tammuz" describes the grief which moved Ea, god of water

and wisdom, to send a heavenly messenger to the underworld to rescue the goddess whose absence was removing life from the earth. Assenting reluctantly to his supreme will, Eresh-Kigal allowed the messenger to sprinkle Inanna and Tammuz with water of life--a potion which gave them power to return into the light of the sun for six months of the year. But for the other six months, Tammuz must again return to the land of death, whither Inanna would again pursue him, and once more with her lamentations move Ea to give the water of life so that year after year the miracle of resurrection and spring would recur."

In the course of centuries, the story and the yearly rites connected with the death and resurrection of Tammuz moved westward to Phoenicia and Syria on the extreme east of the Mediterranean. Here the name of Tammuz was changed to Adon or Adonai, and the name of Inanna to Astarte. In Greece the two names are Adonis and Aphrodite.

The myth underwent some changes in passing from Sumeria to Syria.

A Greek myth tells of Demeter, like Inanna, the goddess of the earth, and her daughter, Kore (Persephone). The girl was abducted by Pluto, the ruler of the underworld, and her absence brought about a famine on earth through the failure of the crops. Pluto was therefore moved to restore Kore to her mother, but because she had eaten a pomegranate in the underworld she was bound to return to Pluto for as many months of each year as there were seeds of the pomegranate caught in her mouth. In joy at her annual return, the earth (Demeter) brings forth her fruits and flowers.

Adonis (Greek god) was the child of Myrrha, the myrtle tree. (It seems that almost all the gods of death and resurrection are associated with a tree.) When the infant Adonis was born, Aphrodite was so charmed with his beauty that she adopted him and concealed him in a chest, which she gave for safekeeping to Persephone--the counterpart of Eresh-Kigal, the Babylonian Queen of the Dead. In the underworld Persephone opened the chest, and was herself so enchanted with the babe that she decided to keep him. This led to a dispute between Aphrodite and Persephone, between love and death, in which Zeus (taking the place of the Babylonian Ea) had to intervene. Zeus decreed that for four months of the year Adonis should belong to Aphrodite, for four to Persephone, and for the remaining four he should do as he wished--Adonis chose to spend them with Aphrodite.

When he had grown to young manhood, Adonis roused the envy of Artemis, the forest goddess of the hunt, or according to another account, or Ares, the god of war. Thus, while he was out hunting, Artemis slew Adonis with an arrow--the arrows of Artemis being the cause to which sudden death was generally ascribed--or in the version, he was gored by Ares in the form of a wild boar. He died, and where the earth had received his blood, Aphrodite sprinkled the ground with nectar, so that the blood turned into anemones and other flowers of the field. But the grief of Aphrodite was so piteous that the gods of the underworld allowed Adonis to return to her every spring for six months of the year.

In Asia Minor the Phrygians believed that their omnipotent deity went to sleep at the time of the winter solstice and they performed ceremonies with music and dancing at the spring equinox to awaken him.

Of the same essential pattern is the great Egyptian myth of Osiris. The common elements in all these stories are so apparent that one may think of them as a single drama performed again and again by different actors.

It would be tedious to describe in detail all that has been handed down to us about the various rites of Tammuz, Adonis, Kire, and many others. Their rites had many basic elements in common. Their universal theme--the drama of death and resurrection--makes them the forerunners of the "Christian" Easter, and thus the first easter services. Many of the customs and ceremonies of the "Christian" Easter resemble these former rites, for instance, the present day "Sun Rise Services." Easter descended from pagan sun worship. Catholic Doctrine simply paralleled the pagan death and resurrection myths of the gods with the story of Christ's crucifixion and Ascension. Christ now rises from the dead with the ascending sun at the time of the Vernal Equinox when plant life and all forms of vegetation appear again on the Earth, and is celebrated with the same customs as that of the Heathen rites namely, rabbits, chickens, and colored eggs!

COLORED EGGS

The Easter egg takes us back to some of the oldest known civilizations on earth where the symbol of an egg played an important part in mythical accounts of the creation of the world. According to this tale heaven and earth were formed from the two halves of a mysterious World-Egg. The Easter egg is associated with this World-Egg, the original germ from which all life proceeds, and whose shell is the firmament. So there is a heathen connection between the egg and the ideas or feelings of birth, new life, and creation.

Easter eggs do have a very long ancestry. In their modern chocolate or cardboard form they date only from the later years of the last century, but giving real eggs, colored or gilded at Easter and also at the pre-Christian spring celebrations are infinitely older.

Long before the Christian era, eggs were regarded as symbols of continuing life and resurrection. The ancient Persians and Greeks exchanged them at their spring festivals when all things in nature revived after the winter. To the early pagans converted to "Christianity" under Emperor Constantine's rule, eggs seemed the obvious symbols of the Lord's resurrection and were therefore considered "holy" and appropriate gifts at Easter time. Pope Paul V appointed a prayer in which the eggs were "blessed." The eggs could then be eaten in thankfulness to God on account of the resurrection of the Lord. The custom of coloring eggs at Easter continued from paganism with only a change of dedication. These eggs are often red. Scarlet eggs were given in the spring by pagan peoples centuries before the birth of Christ. It is probably the favorite color because, like the egg itself, it is an emblem of life.

THE EASTER RABBIT

The hare is the true Easter beast, not the rabbit. He was sacred to the Spring-Goddess, Eostre. Hares were sacrificed to her. The hare was an emblem of fertility, renewal, and return of spring to the heathen. The egg, in modern American

folklore, is the production of the rabbit or the hare. The story is that this hare was once a bird whom Eostre changed into a four-footed creature.

HOT-CROSS BUNS

Eating hot-cross buns is one of the Good Friday customs that has taken root in America. They are pagan in origin, for the Anglo-Saxon savages consumed cakes as part of the jollity that attended the welcoming of spring. Early missionaries from Rome despaired of breaking them of the habit, and got around the difficulty by blessing the cakes, drawing a cross upon them. but the cross was a pagan symbol long before the crucifixion. Bread and cakes were sometimes marked with it in pre-Christian times. Two small loaves each with a cross on them were discovered under the ruins of Herculaneum, a city overwhelmed by volcanic ash in A.D. 79. It is probable that the crosses here had a pagan meaning like those which appeared on cakes associated with the worship of Diana.

There are other pagan customs associated with Easter, but we have discussed the most common ones.

Information for writing this chapter was obtained from: "Easter: its Story and meaning," by Alan W. Watts; "The American Book of Days," by George William Dougolas; "Easter and its customs,": by Christina Hole; "The Book of Religious Holidays and Celebrations," by Marguerite Ickis; "Funk & Wagnall's New Encyclopedia."

Chapter III from HEATHEN HOLIDAYS by Sister Denise Snodgrass.

The Xmas Story Part 1

This is from "Heathen Holidays" by Denise Snodgrass - part1

Forward

Jeremiah 10:2-4 Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at them. (3) 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. (4) They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not.

The prophecy of Jeremiah the prophet was: Thus saith the LORD, Learn not the way of the heathen... the customs of the people are vain ...

This book sets forth the truth taken straight from history on the origin of the holidays and the origin of the customs associated with their celebration. Throughout this book I will be using sections taken directly from various encyclopedias and books on the holidays. history reveals that Christmas, New Year's, etc. all originated in BABYLON as festivals celebrated by the heathen in honor of their pagan gods, but were given "Christian" meaning by the Catholic Church in order to convert the idol worshippers to Constantine's new "christian" religion. The catholic church simply took these seasonal feasts and festivals celebrated by the idolatrous heathen and "transformed" them into "christian" celebrations, or "christianized" them, in order to make Christianity more meaningful to pagan converts.

The same philosophy responsible for the development of the trinity doctrine is also responsible for the transformation of these pagan feasts, and no One-God worshipper of Jesus Christ will again take up the celebration of these idolatrous holidays after reading this book. God said through the prophet: learn not the way of the heathen!. Rev. 18:4 says: And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, come out of her. My people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

CHRISTMAS: Throughout this chapter, I will be referring to and sometimes printing the exact information found in "Christmas and its Customs," by Christina Hole; "Christmas Traditions," by William Muir Auld; "Celebrations," by Robert J. Myers; "4000 years of Christmas, " by Earl W. Count and "1001 Christmas Facts and Fancies," by Alfred Carl Hottes.

It's beginning in Mesopotamia:

The celebration of Christmas actually outdates Christianity itself by about 4000 years!. It began in an ancient Babylonian festival thousands of years before the birth of Christ in Bethlehem. From "4000 Years of Christmass" we read: "Christmas began there in Mesopotamia over 4000 years ago as the festival which renewed the world for another year. The "Twelve Days" of Christmas; the bright fires and probably the Yule log; the giving of presents; carnivals with their floats; merrymakings and clownings; the mummers singing and playing from house to house; the feastings; church processions with their lights and song-- all these and more began there centuries before Christ was born."

This ancient Babylonian festival moved westward through Greece into Rome, merging with the Roman Saturnalia festival, where finally under the "Christian" influence of the new religion of the Robam Empire (Constantine had united church and state making Christianity the official state religion) it became "Christianized." There still remain the merrymaking, the giving of gifts, the feasting, and the special log, but now these are with praise to the Christian god.

The Xmas Story Part 2

This is from "Heathen Holidays" by Denise Snodgrass - part2

The Zgmuk

To the Mesopotamians, New Year's was a time of CRISIS. They believed their chief god Marduk had created the world and man, but to create the world he had to fight the monsters of chaos. He had built out of a "world without form and void" an orderly world, and had created man. But the order remained an uneasy one: it ran down, so to speak, during the year; toward its close, after the crops had been harvested. The empty brown of the fields told that life was dying. So then Marduk again had to do battle with the monsters of chaos, so that death might not become complete. And thus he renewed the world every year. It was a grim battle, fought in the regions below, and every time Marduk almost lost his struggle.

It was the duty of man, in his puny way, to help as well as he could; and much of the festival of the New Year constituted his lowly support of his god. His leader and commander was the king, who held his power and his title by the grace of the god.

As the Mesopotamians saw it, in the struggle of the New Year man faced a threefold problem: to purify himself of the evils which his sins of the past year had brought upon him; to renew the strength which the year had drained away; and, if possible, to find a substitute who could take the consequences of the sins which he had committed.

The first and last problems were solved by the notion of a "scapegoat."

The "scapegoat" in this case was a substitute for the king.

Let us see what happened to the Babylonian king in this crisis when the world was dying. The New Year's festival lasted twelve days, as our Christmas season is supposed to do; in it the king repaired to Marduk's temple, to the court of the gods. The chief priest stripped from him his insignia of rank, and thus disposed of his power, he knelt before Marduk's image and swore that he had done nothing against the god's will. The chief priest, speaking for Marduk, said comforting words; and in the name of the god he re-invested the king, in token that the kingdom was restored to him by the grace of the god.

A very important part of the festival lay in the story of the Creation--how Marduk had created the world and its order. The drama of the Creation epic was re-enacted. In theory, the king must die at the end of the year, for he should then accompany Marduk into the underworld and battle at his side, while a new king took his place on earth. But here enters the idea of a substitute or "mock" king, which saved the life of the real king. A criminal, real or fancied, was dressed in royal garb. He was given all the homage and indulgence which is the king's right, while the people about him held celebration. Soon his mock reign was over; he was stripped of his kingly trappings and slain in the place of the real king.

At last, as the festival went on, came the moment when Marduk began to prevail. The people, who had been supporting and encouraging him in the battle, turned to rejoicing. They drew wagons down the great avenue. They launched regattas on the Euphrates, and the custom of exchanging visits and gifts took place.

This was the ancient Babylonian "Zagmuk" festival. Another festival, which both Persians and Babylonians celebrated, was called the "Sacaia."

All peoples learned from this tremendous land of Mesopotamia, which is called the Mother of Civilization. Everything happening there was in the course of time imitated by its neighbors--imitated, yet never copied exactly. Thus it traveled westward--through Greece to Rome. But it also took another road which led from Asia Minor through the Balkans, up the Danube Valley into the heart of Europe. So the idea of this festival, originating in Babylon, reached the Roman Empire through Greece and penetrated the Northland through at least two different routes; Rome and the Danube.

In Greece there was an old god, Kronos. He is, by the way, Father Time. His festival was the old "sacaia" gone westward. In ancient Babylonia it was Marduk who conquered the monsters that lived before our world was created; in Greece it was Zeus who fought and overcame Kronos and his Titans. The figures in the drama changed, the incidents also; but the plot remained.

The Romans believed in an ancient god of seed-time, Saturn, who had ruled their country ages before their own day, before he was overthrown by Jupiter. Whenever the Romans thought that one of their gods resembled a Greek god, they concluded that the two were the same. The Romans then took over the forms of worship which the Greeks already had observed. So Kronos came to Rome; the "Sacaia" entered into the "Saturnalia."

Saturnalia

Let us try to visualize the Roman Empire before Christianity became its official religion. The city was wholly given over to idolatry. The first day of the Saturnalia began on December 17 and continued through the Kalends of January, beginning on January 1. The Kalends of January ushered in the new year. together they converted the closing and opening of the year into one continuous and uproarious carnival.

The approach of the feast was hailed by Romans in the Empire with wild joy, and began when a pontiff standing in front of Saturn's temple exclaimed, "Ho Saturnalia! Ho Saturnalia!" Sandwiched in between the Saturnalia and the Kalends of January was December 25, the day, as the Romans calculated, when the sun was at its lowest ebb, ready to increase again and impart its strength to the growing things of the earth.

The Xmas Story Part 3

This is from "Heathen Holidays" by Denise Snodgrass - part3

The Winter Solstice

Recall the prophecy of Jeremiah." and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them."

Before Man learned to measure time in twelve month cycles time was measured by seasons. They celebrated the seasons with feasts and festivals to make the gods happy. But then Man began to gear the beginning of seasons and cycles to fixed astronomical phenomenon--that is, to the position and movement of the sun, moon, and stars. The heathen did worship the entire solar system.

December 25 is the winter solstice. It is the time when the sun after having been at the lowest point in the heavens, begins to rise over the world with renewed vigor and power. It was the time of heathen festivities in worship of the sun.

The vernal equinox is the point where the sun crosses the celestial equator, about March 20, making day and night of equal length everywhere. This was the time of pagan spring festivals.

The day of December 25 acquired a new significance under the rule of Emperor Aurelian. He proclaimed this day as "Dies Natalis Invicti Solis," or the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun. This was because of a strange Eastern religion, Mithraism, whose god Mithras was identified with the Unconquered Sun. During the Saturnalia work of every kind ceased. Schools were closed.

Saturn, in whose honor this feast was held, was the oldest and most benign deity in ancient Italy and was fabled to have reigned during the Golden Age. This was conceived by the Romans as an era in which plenty abounded and nothing had appeared to corrupt and mar the peace and happiness of mankind. But since that time the world had gone from bad to worse. The lust of gold and the lust of blood had brought disastrous evils. The dream of an Age of Gold was widespread in the pre-Christian world. The Greeks taught men to think of it as followed by the Silver, Bronze, and Iron Ages. These ages marked the steady declension and degeneration of mankind. But they looked for the eventual return of a Gold Era. This spirit of Gentile expectancy was that of a millennial, and King Saturn would reign.

As the Saturnalia returned each year it brought with it thoughts of the peaceful reign of Saturn long, long ago, when all men were happy and all men were good.

The Roman Saturnalia was boisterous. But whatever the behavior of some Romans, others were simply merry. They ate big dinners, visited their friends, etc. The halls of the Romans were decked with boughs of laurel and of green trees, with lighted candles and with lamps--for the hovering spirits of darkness were afraid of light. Bonfires were lit in high places to strengthen the reviving sun in his course. Candles and green wreaths were given as presents, the streets were crowded with noisy processions of men and women carrying lighted tapers, and public places were decked with flowers and shrubs. The practice of giving and receiving presents was almost as common then as it is now at Christmas. Our present day "Christmas spirit" is actually the spirit of this old Roman festival.

During the Kalends of January, which lasted for three days, Roman houses were adorned with lights and greenery, and presents were given to friends and children and to the poor.

We can see how that the exchanging of gifts was an important feature of this Roman festival from the writings of Libanius, an ancient Sophist. He might be writing about Christmas in the modern world from the way it reads: The festival of the Kalends is celebrated everywhere as far as the limits of the Roman Empire extend. The impulse to spend seizes everyone... People are not only generous towards themselves, but also towards their fellow-men. A stream of presents pours itself out on all sides... The Kalends festival banishes all that is connected with toil, and allows men to give themselves up to undisturbed enjoyment. From the minds of young people it removes two kinds of dread: the dread of the schoolmaster and the dread of the stern pedagogue... Another great quality of the festival is that it teaches men not to hold too fast to their money, but to part with it and let it pass into other hands.

Now I have described the ancient Babylonian festival, the "Zagmuk," where Christmas had its beginning and the Roman "Saturnalia," which was the merging of the Zagmuk and "Sacaia." The Greek festival in honor of Kronos was the ancient Babylonian and Persian "Sacaia."

Emperor Aurelian had proclaimed Mithraism as the official state religion of the Roman Empire, but "Christianity" becomes the new religion under Constantine, and the Catholic Church becomes faced with the struggle to convert the pagans. We will answer these two important questions: (1) Why did the idea of celebrating the birth of Christ arise and how? (2)

Why was the date of December 25 chosen for this celebration?

The earliest "Christians" were not interested in Jesus' birthday, but by the fourth century they had become very much interested. While interested in the Man Christ Jesus, their thought and affection did not as yet include the Child Jesus. But they came to focus their eyes upon Jesus the infant and Mary His mother. Many people were coming to the notion that his birthday should be observed. This idea came about as the "Church" began to regard Mary, the mother of Jesus, in a new light. She had long been revered along with the saints and Apostles, but only along with them. But now in this same fourth century she emerges as the QUEEN OF HEAVEN. There never would have been a Christmas except the worship of Mary had emerged. They now put her in Heaven, not merely as an intercessor, but a Queen.

The Xmas Story Part 4

This is from "Heathen Holidays" by Denise Snodgrass - part4

CHRISTMAS AND PAGANISM The Winter Solstice

Why did the catholic church choose December 25 for the birth date of Christ? It was chosen in order to compete with the pagan winter solstice festivals. It was not chosen because it is the correct historical date for the birth of Jesus. When was Jesus born? No one knows. There seems to have been too many calendar errors for anyone to be exact. The traditional date of the year 1 A.D. for his birth stands greatly in need of correction. Before the mode of reckoning time "by the year of our Lord," or A.D., which was introduced by Dionysius Exiguus, a Roman, time was computed from the founding of the city of Rome, usually designated by A.U.C. Dionysius made his New Era to begin on the first day of January in the 753rd year from the building of Rome; because in that year he supposed Christ to have been born. St. Matthew says Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the King. According to the best authorities this monarch died a short time before the Jewish Passover 750 U.U.C. Some place the birth of Jesus between the years 748 and 747 A.U.C., this is, 5 and 6 B.C. Others go as far back as 8 B.C.

But the Season in which he was born definitely was not winter. The Gospels tell us that at this time Caesar Augustus had decreed that all the world should be taxed. We may be assured that Rome would not order a census to be taken at the worst possible period for travel; but Luke's account that the shepherds were abiding in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night lets us know that Jesus was born in summer or early fall. Since December is cold and rainy in Judea, it is likely the shepherds would have sought shelter for their flocks at night. So December 25 is no more the correct historical date for the birth of Jesus Christ than any other date.

December 25th was sacred, not only to the pagan Romans, but to the religion from Persia, Mithraism, whose followers worshipped the sun and celebrated its return to strength on that day. Mithras had attained such popularity and favor in the eyes of the emperors that Aurelian proclaimed the cult of Sol Invictus the Roman Empire's official state religion. December 25 fell between the week long feast of the Saturnalia and the Kalends of January, and it coincided more or less closely with all those mid-winter festivals at which the primitive peoples of Europe and Asia had celebrated, from time immemorial, the sun's rebirth at the Winter Solstice.

To the pagans, the Saturnalia were fun. To the "Christians" the Saturnalia were an abomination in homage to a disreputable god who had no existence anyway. The "Christians" were now dedicated to the slow task of converting the pagan Romans. There were many immigrants into the ranks of the Church by this time, but the Church Fathers discovered that they were facing an invasion of pagan customs. Christianity and Paganism began contending, and for a while Mithraism was Christianity's greatest contender. But how did the catholic church convert the pagans with their December 25th sun-worship festival? It became the policy of the church to "transform" pagan festivals wherever possible instead of trying to abolish them and give the ancient practices a "christian" significance. It definitely was a clever trick. The Church, in choosing December 25th to celebrate the birthday of Christ, would persuade the followers of Mithras to forsake him and turn to Christ as the true "light of the World." The Catholic Church chose this date to celebrate the rising of the sun of Righteousness that she should thus strive to draw away to His worship the adorers of the god whose symbol and representative was the earthly sun!. The Church Fathers sought to point the pagan festival in worship of the sun toward the "Christian" Sun of Righteousness, and if these could be done then the festival in its turn must of necessity grow worthy of him it celebrated. The Church finally succeeded in taking the merriment, the greenery, the lights, and the gifts from saturn and given them to the babe of Bethlehem.

By choosing December 25th, the indications are, that the Catholic Church grasped the opportunity to turn the people away from a purely pagan observance of the winter solstice to a day of adoration of Christ the Lord. She simply made the old heathen festival of the sun analogous to the birth of the "sun of Righteousness" The birth of Christ as the "Light of the World" was linked to the rebirth of the sun. The Church by making the pagan festival also the Feast of the Nativity, "sanctified" it, and thus as Christianity gained ground slowly but surely changed its ancient worship of the material sun into that of the true Light of the World.

That the new festival should not be lacking in splendor and appeal the days between December 25 and January 6 (the days between the Saturnalia and the Kalends of January) were caught up into one "holy" season, with the birth of the divine Child at the beginning and the coming of the Magi (the three Wise Men) at the end. The days between Christmas and Epiphany became known as the Twelve Nights of Christmas.

The word, "Christmas," came into use through the medieval custom of celebrating MASS at midnight on Christmas Eve, the only time in the year when this was permitted. BECAUSE OF THE OPPOSITION TO THE TRACES OF PAGANISM SURVIVING IN THE CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS, THE CHURCH CREATED SPECIAL MASSES TO BE PERFORMED AT MIDNIGHT, DAYBREAK, AND MORNING. Hence, the word, Christmas.

The Xmas Story Part 5

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CHRISTMAS AND PAGANISM The Winter Solstice

When the feast of the nativity first arose there were no bells, no greenery, and no "good cheer"" The Fathers tried strenuously to keep Christmas strictly a churchly celebration as a Worship of the MADONNA AND CHILD. But they could not abolish the pagan customs of the winter solstice. Christmas was caught up with and carried away in pagan merrymaking.

The Mithraism passed away leaving few marks on the nativity celebration, being the successful rival. But the same thing cannot be said of certain other festivals which closed and opened the year among Romans and Germanics, the Saturnalia and the Yule. For many a day the church fought bitterly the superstitions and excesses bound up with the Kalends and Yule. But burning denunciations and threats of excommunication failed to wean the barbarians from their heathen modes of rejoicing. Those customs which could not be uprooted and destroyed were given a "christian" name and interpretation, and as such survive in many instances to the present day. So what the Church couldn't extricate, it sought to "consecrate" and "purify." These heathen contributions to the celebration of the nativity are what make Christmas what it is. When the season calls to mind crackling fires on the hearth, lighted candles, rooms adorned with evergreens, fruits and nuts, feast and frolic-- these are the genuine pagan elements which the catholic church could not uproot. When once drawn within the circle they were loath to leave.

We will look at various Christmas customs individually after first looking at how Christmas was introduced into other parts of Europe through Catholic missionaries.

The Germans, Gauls, and Britons celebrated Brumalia on December 25, and the Norsemen held Yule feasts between December 25 and January 6. Their Germano-Celtic pastoral feast was known by various names such as Jiuleis

and Guili; in Scandinavia it was Yule. Many of the customs of these festivals as well as the Roman Saturnalia and Kalends of January became a part of Christmas.

The name Yule can be traced back to the Anglo-Saxon word for wheel, because it bore some relationship to the circular course of the sun through the wheeling points of the solstices and equinoxes. The Church sent out an army of missionaries, but even before the missionaries brought ideas of "Christian" Rome to them, the Germanic peoples had learned a good deal from pagan Rome. But the Near East (Mesopotamia--Babylon) had long influenced the Northland via the Balkans and the Danube valley. For instance, St. Nickolas may first have reached the heart of Europe not from the South but from the Southeast. But the Germanics had no way of measuring solstices and equinoxes until they learned it from the Romans. They also learned of the Romans' Saturnalia. After the barbarians were christianized all the customs and superstitions which had belonged from ancient times to their own yuletide, and all that they had imbibed from the Romans, began to cluster about it.

To the old pagan Germanics the year began with winter, but what they called winter included our late autumn. By October or November the harvest was in and the cattle bedded down. With the long months of snow ahead and barely the provender on hand for the beeves and swine, they considered it wise to thin out the herds lest later all the animals starve. A great slaughter was followed by feasting. This feasting was in thanks to their gods, Thor, Odin, Njord, and Frey. The god who cared for the fertile herd was Frey (after whom Friday is named) and his animal symbol was the boar. Even after the pagan gods had passed away the boar sacrifice to Frey was too enjoyable to be forgotten. It survives in the feast of "Merrie Old England, in which the boar is treated as if it were some royal personage. The show of slaughtered beasts adorned with green garlands in an English town just before Christmas reminds some strongly of these ancient gory feasts, and the same thing can be said for the American marts with their hecatombs of turkeys. Their ancestors worshipped a god to whom they sacrificed, but they themselves probably never heard of Frey.

It was discovered by the Catholic missionaries that the heathen were more ready to abandon their gods and the dates of their festivals than to change their habits and manners. The festive board proved the least susceptible of all to transformation. So the Yule table remained a part of Christmas.

The Christianizing work went on. The pagan deities were all slain and entombed in the days of the week and in the months of the year. Friday was named for Frey. Wednesday is literally, "Woden's Day", and once Woden was chief among the Northern gods. How Woden became Santa Clause will be explained later in this chapter.

-to be continued-

The Xmas Story Part 6

This is from "Heathen Holidays" by Denise Snodgrass - part6

We will now turn to various surviving pagan customs associated with the celebration of Christmas.

The Yule Log

This is a pagan custom from the Yule festival of the Teutonic and Celtic tribes, which Yule festival was in honor of the god, Thor. The Saxons and Goths burned the Yule log at their festival of the winter solstice. Each year a brand was saved to rekindle the new fire. The remnants were believed to have magic powers, and the log symbolized protection against evil spirits.

Fortunes were told by the Yule log, and it slight was considered sacred. To the ancestors of the Catholic faith Christmas was called the Feast of Lights. The lights and fires, incorporated into the Nativity celebration, were made to symbolize the fact that the darkness of the world was past and true light now shone. This background explains the lights on the Christmas tree. Everything about the Christmas fire and lights was considered very sacred. The blaze of the fire was made to symbolize Christ as the Light of the World.

Christmas Candles

The Yule candle was burned as a companion to the Yule log. The modern candles set in windows have their origin in the Yule candle.

The tradition was brought to this country by the Irish. In Ireland, during the years of religious suppression, candles were put in the windows to attract fugitive priests who would know it was safe to enter the houses and to say mass.

Modern candles used for decoration, though electric and not waxen, incorporate the same principle the catholic church set forth as Christ the Light of the World.

Evergreens

You have already read how houses and public places were decorated with evergreens during the Saturnalia and Kalends of January. They were never sought merely for their decorative capabilities. The evergreens were used as defense against demons and witches they thought were especially prevalent during this time of year. They thought the winter demons were afraid of the greens because they stayed green all year. Green belongs in the realm of summer and life; winter kills most of summer's vegetation, but the evergreens remain steadfast. They were symbols of everlasting life to the heathen.

At first the Church frowned upon this intrusion of paganism into the sacred season on account of the superstitious sentiments which were bound up with them. But it was too deeply rooted for prohibitions to have permanent effect, and in due course they were annulled or forgotten. Instead of banning them she more often permitted their continuance, directing her efforts toward investing them with a new "sanctity" and meaning. While they were often made to represent higher and "holier" things, the older notions were not always discarded; hence, the mixture of ideas, pagan and

"christian" which became entwined with the greenery of the season. The plants, which more than any others, entwined themselves about the festival are holly, ivy, mistletoe, and rosemary.

Holly

Holly was admired by the heathen Druids, who believed that its evergreen leaves attested to the fact that the sun never deserted it, and since the sun was held in worship, holly was sacred. Holly was supposed to be hateful to witches, and was therefore placed on doors and windows to keep out evil spirits. Under the influence of "christian" thought and sentiment holly became very sacred. But ivy remained for a longer time on the pagan level. The red berries on the holly once had a pagan meaning, being the blood drops of the beautiful Balder, the ill-fated darling of Valhalla. Given its new "christian" meaning, the berries now speak of the blood drops which the cruel crown of thorns drew from the Savior's brow.

Mistletoe Gift of the Gods.... kissing under the mistletoe a Scandinavian myth involving Frigga the counterpart for Venus and Balder the counterpart for Apollo Rosemary ... the catholic legend to wean people from their old beliefs Laurel the Christmas Tree.....

The Xmas Story Part 7

This is from "Heathen Holidays" by Denise Snodgrass - part7

We will now turn to various surviving pagan customs associated with the celebration of Christmas.

Exchanging gifts.

The exchange of gifts and greetings at or near Christmas time began long before the Catholic Church put their new "christian" meaning to the custom. You have already read how gifts and visits were a part of the Babylonian festival and the Roman Saturnalia and Kalends of January in pagan Rome rich men gave generously to their poorer neighbors during the Saturnalia and at the Kalends of January gifts were even more plentiful.

Gift-giving was an essential part of the pagan celebrations. The church frowned upon it as sternly as upon other New Year customs, and in the first centuries Christians did not give each other presents in the Christmas season, or if they did, it was without ecclesiastical sanction. But the Church, rather than abolishing the custom, simply pointed the gift-giving away from Saturn to the Babe in Bethlehem to commemorate the gifts of the Magi (the three Wise Men) to the infant Jesus!

REVELATION 18:3 "For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. (v. 11): And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: (v. 15) The merchants of these things which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, (v. 23) ... for thy merchants were the great men of the earth; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

Anyone ought to know that Christmas time is the biggest spending time of the entire year and the most profitable time of the year for businesses. Merchants make more money during these heathen holidays than any other time of the year, and the Catholic Church makes it possible.

Santa Claus

Santa Claus was created by merging Woden, one of the gods of the Northland with a Roman Catholic Bishop, who was "canonized" a saint.

Woden was chief among the Northland gods. He came from the near east (Mesopotamia--Babylon) and made his way northward into Scandinavia, where his name was pronounced, Odin. When the Germanics adopted him they acquired some new and more exalted ideas of what a god could or should be. For gradually Odin grew into a very wise god who knew everything that was going on in the world. On each of his shoulders perched a sharp-eyed wag-tongued raven who flew forth to the ends of the earth and came back to prattle everything it saw. Sometimes Odin himself toured the world on his white horse, Sleipnir, who had eight legs to give him greater speed. At other times Odin preferred to hike, wrapped in his blue cloak and wearing his broad-brimmed hat, carrying his wander's staff.

What is amazing about Woden is his capacity for becoming someone else, or for merging with someone else to make a new person. As we trace the roots that Woden has struck into the life of the Germanic peoples, we find him turning up in the most unexpected places. He merged into the legend of a great king who has never died but now sleeps inside a mountain while the ravens fly about outside, a king who will wake up some day, when his nation needs his help to fight off the enemy. But of most interest, however, is the fact that Woden has become Santa Claus by merging in the legend of this Catholic saint.

Who was St. Nicholas? He lived during the reigns of the Roman Emperors, Diocletian, Maximillian, Constantine, late in the third century and into the fourth. When he was still a young man Nicholas was consecrated Arch-bishop of Myra, a seaport town. He died on December sixth. This is his feast day. Varied and numerous legends gathered about his life on earth and his life as a saint after his death.