

My Neighbor Said:

“Christmas Is a Pagan Holiday”

Is this possible? Probable? Or complete fiction? Don't worry, Virginia. Christmas is Christian!

Story #1: “The Christmas tree is an adaptation of pagan rituals.”

Fact: The first recorded use of a tree in Christmas celebrations was in 1576—over 1,500 years later than pagan times!

Story #2: “Christmas was invented by Emperor Constantine to replace the Roman Saturnalia.”

Fact: The Church was celebrating Christmas on December 25 long before the reign of Constantine (306–337 AD). For example, Hippolytus of Rome in his *Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (c. 204 AD) said that “the first advent of our Lord in the flesh, when he was born in Bethlehem, was December 25th, Wednesday, while Augustus was in his forty-second year.” So the birth of Jesus was associated with December 25 more than 100 years before the reign of Constantine.

Story #3: “If it wasn't Saturnalia, it was Sol Invictus.”

Fact: The earliest mention of **any** pagan god being celebrated on December 25 comes in a document called *The Chronography* in 354 AD. It mentions a holiday in honor of Sol Invictus (the “Unconquered Sun”) on that date—but the cult of Sol Invictus was introduced by the Emperor Aurelian only in 274 AD. And as we saw in #2, Christians had already recognized December 25 as the birth of Jesus at least 70 years before that.

Story #4: “Did I say Sol Invictus? I meant Mithras!”

Fact: The followers of Mithras (originally a Persian sun god) often associated him with Sol Invictus, but unlike Sol Invictus, Mithras never made it onto the Roman calendar. There is no record of the birth of Mithras being celebrated on December 25 prior to the introduction of the Sol Invictus holiday in 274 AD—again, 70 years after Christians had identified that date with the birth of Christ.

As Pope Benedict XVI has explained, “The claim used to be made that December 25 developed in opposition to the Mithras myth, or as a Christian response to the cult of the unconquered sun promoted by Roman emperors in the third century in their efforts to establish a new imperial religion. However, these old theories can no longer be sustained” (*The Spirit of the Liturgy*, p. 107).

MERRY CHRISTMAS!!

For further reading: “[Why Is Christmas on December 25?](#)” (Jon Sorenson); “[The Chronography of 354](#)”; “[Was Jesus Born on December 25?](#)” (Jimmy Akin); “[Two ‘Pagan Roots of Christmas’ Claims You Can Refute](#)” (Shaun McAfee).

Do you have questions about God, faith, life, the Church, or other related topics? Drop them into the Question Box next to the Parish Bulletin Board. We will answer them ASAP and post them in FlockNotes and on the Bulletin Board each week.