

The Dawning of the Christmas Holiday

The New Testament never commands us to celebrate Christ's birth, neither does it provide the precise date. And yet, from the earliest days of the Church, believers revered the miracle of the Incarnation.

They knew that the birth of Jesus was no ordinary moment in history—it was the hinge on which the entire redemptive story turns.

One sign of this is found in the Gospels themselves. Matthew and Luke, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, open the story of Jesus with nativity narratives—angelic messengers splitting the night sky, shepherds startled on Judean hillsides, a virgin mother and a faithful carpenter, a child laid in a manger, and a multitude of the heavenly host praising God for the newborn King.

In the ancient world, biographers rarely lingered on a birth unless it signalled destiny. By highlighting Jesus' nativity, the evangelists made a theological claim: the arrival of this Child was essential to His story.

He was the fulfilment of Israel's long-awaited hope (Is. 7:14; Micah 5:2). The very inclusion of these narratives is itself evidence that the earliest Christians already viewed Christ's birth as worthy of proclamation, meditation, and celebration.

As the church matured in the second to fourth centuries, leaders reflected more deeply on the meaning of the Nativity. Their aim wasn't to mimic surrounding cultures but to confess, through worship and remembrance, that the living God Himself had stepped into creation.

The birth of Jesus was no peripheral curiosity—it was the gateway to the Gospel.

Writings from figures such as Clement of Alexandria and Hippolytus of Rome show that early believers pondered the Incarnation with awe. They didn't treat it as quaint nostalgia but as cosmic Christology—the moment when the eternal "Second Adam" entered the fallen world to reverse the curse of the first Adam.

From such reflection grew the impulse to establish a feast in honour of the Incarnation, not because they were commanded to, but because they couldn't remain silent.

Whether marked on December 25, January 6, or another date, the purpose was always the same: to remember and rejoice—through Scripture, prayer, and song—that the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

The question of when to celebrate arose later; the question of whether to celebrate was already settled.

Why December 25?

Some object to the celebration of Christmas on December 25, pointing out that we don't know the exact day Jesus was born. And that's true—we don't.

And since Scripture doesn't specify a date, there is, biblically speaking, no right or wrong day to mark the miracle of the Incarnation. In fact, the absence of a commanded date leaves room for intentional worship.

"One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord" Paul writes (Romans 14:5-6a).

For the early church, the question wasn't about imitating pagan customs—it was about proclaiming Christ to the world. The Light of the World had come, and they chose a day to say so.

By the early third century, Hippolytus of Rome (c. AD 200) suggested December 25 as the date of Jesus' birth. His reasoning was symbolic, rooted in what some early Christians called the "integral age" tradition: the belief that prophets lived in complete life cycles, dying on the same date as either their birth or conception.

Since the death of Jesus was believed to have occurred on March 25 Hippolytus concluded that this was also the date of His conception. Nine months later—December 25—He would have been born.

Clement of Alexandria, writing even earlier, mentioned Christians of his day attempting to calculate Jesus's birth based on similar ideas.

Though speculative, these reflections arose not from Roman mythology but from a desire to honour the Incarnation with theological coherence.

By the mid-fourth century, we find firm evidence of December 25 as a liturgical feast. A Roman document known as the *Chronograph of 354* records under that date: "Birth of Christ in Bethlehem of Judea." Here we see the church formally commemorating Christ's nativity with worship, Scripture, and song.

Contrary to modern myths, this choice wasn't an effort to "Christianise" a pagan festival. The early church stood firmly against all forms of paganism. Their goal wasn't syncretism but distinction.

December 25 became their chosen day to proclaim that the true Light had entered the world, and that is what they celebrated.