

Father's Notes

December 22 and 29, 2024

The two most significant Church feasts are Christmas and Easter. But unlike Easter, Christmas did not begin to be celebrated until around 330 A.D. And unlike Easter, it was not a date of the year transferred from the Jewish calendar (e.g. Passover-Easter). In fact, there is no exact knowledge of the day, month or season—or even the time of day—in which Jesus was born.

It seems Christmas found its place on the calendar based upon the widespread pagan festivals of the winter solstice, which celebrated having gotten over the hump of the shortest day of the year, anticipating a gradual return of light with each successive day. That's a way we understand the moment at which Jesus was born. He was (and is) the sliver of light that breaks into the darkness of human history and with each successive day we find a gradual increase of light.

Christmas is not merely a celebration of the historical birth of the baby who would be named Jesus. It's that for sure, but it's also a celebration that expresses the joy of knowing that we have entered into the dawning of God's kingdom.

A Christian poet by the name of Coelius Sedulius (D. 450) authored a poem called *A Solis Ortus Cardine* (meaning “from the hinge of the rising sun”). It speaks of the tenderness of God's gracious act in Jesus' birth, but also the saving affect it bears for all people, all things:

From lands that see the sun arise, to earth's remotest boundaries, the virgin born today we sing, the Son of Mary, Christ the King. Blest Author of this earthly frame, to take a servant's form He came, that liberating flesh by flesh, whom He had made might live afresh.

In that chaste parent's holy womb, celestial grace hath found its home: and she, as earthly bride unknown, yet call that Offspring blest her own. The mansion of the modest breast becomes a shrine where God shall rest: the pure and undefiled one conceived in her womb the Son.

That Son, that royal Son she bore, whom Gabriel's voice had told afore: whom, in his Mother yet concealed, the Infant Baptist had revealed. The manger and the straw He bore, the cradle did He not abhor: a little milk His infant fare who feedeth even each fowl of air. The heavenly chorus filled the sky, the angels sang to God on high, what time to shepherds watching lone, they made creation's Shepherd known...

We praise God for the Light that has entered our world. May it ease our anxieties in this life and overcome our fears. May it help us to know a greater peace—within and among one another. Merry Christmas!



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