



THE TRIUMPH OF CHRISTMAS

Posted on December 1, 2021 by Brother André Marie



Today's skeptics, who seem to reject something traditional just because it's traditional, cannot sit still during the holy season of Christmas without mocking the notion that Christ would have been born on December 25th. If it were just the unbelievers who engaged in this mockery, it would be expected, since unbelievers, by their very nature, are not expected to believe.

More troubling is the fact that, like evolution and all other modern atheistic fantasies, this one has seeped through the all-too narrow wall separating Catholics from the rest of the world. The anti-Christmas myth, which makes a myth out of Christmas, is being foisted on Catholic children as fact. To benefit these, and any Christian who respects piety, history, Scripture, and Tradition, we present our defense of Christmas.

Since there is no date for the Nativity recorded in Holy Scripture, we rely on the testimony of the Church Fathers and of history to get an answer to the question, "When did Christmas take place?"

First, let us see the essential significance of the Savior's birth at the time usually attributed to it. The winter solstice, the astronomical event which recurs every year, is traditionally said to be the birthday of the Messiah. To elucidate the meaning of this fact, we will turn to Saint Gregory of Nyssa (+ 385 or 386):

"On this day, which the Lord hath made, darkness decreases, light increases, and night is driven back again. No, brethren, it is not by chance, nor by any created will, that this natural change begins on the day when He shows Himself in the brightness of His coming, which is the spiritual Life of the world. It is Nature revealing, under this symbol, a secret to them whose eye is quick enough to see it; to them, I mean, who are able to appreciate this circumstance, of our Savior's coming. Nature seems to me to say: "Know, oh man! that under the things which I show thee, mysteries lie concealed. Hast thou not seen the night, that had grown so long, suddenly checked? Learn hence, that the black night of Sin, which had reached its height, by the accumulation of every guilty device, is this day, stopped in its course. Yes, from this day forward, its duration shall be shortened until at length there shall be naught but Light. Look, I pray thee, on the Sun; and see how his rays are stronger and his position higher in the heavens: Learn from that how the other Light, the Light of the Gospel, is now shedding itself over the whole earth." (Homily On the Nativity)

Saint Augustine, a Western Father, concurs with Gregory, the Easterner:

"Let us, my brethren, rejoice, this day is sacred, not because of the visible sun, but because of the Birth of Him Who is the invisible Creator of the sun. He chose this day whereon to be born, as He chose the Mother of whom to be born, and He made both the day and the Mother. The day He chose was that on which the light begins to increase, and it typifies the work of Christ, who renews our interior man day by day. For the eternal Creator, having willed to be born in time, His birthday would necessarily be in harmony with the rest of creation" (On the Nativity of Our Lord, iii).

Similar sentiments are echoed by St. Ambrose, St. Leo, St. Maximus of Turin, and St. Cyprian.

To further the beauty of this mysterious agreement between grace and nature, Catholic commentators have shown this to be a marvellous fulfilment of the utterance of St. John the Baptist, the Voice who heralded the Word: "He must increase, but I must decrease." Literally fulfilled by the ending of the Precursor's mission and the beginning of the Savior's, this passage had its spiritual fulfillment in the celebration of John's feast on the 24th of June, three days after the summer solstice. As St. Augustine put it: "John came into this world at the season of the year when the length of the day decreases; Jesus was born in the season when the length of the day increases." (*In Natali Domini*, xi).

Lest anyone find all this Astronomy to reek of paganism, we remind him that in Genesis, it is recorded: "And God said: Let there be lights made in the firmament of heaven, to divide the day and the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years: To shine in the firmament of heaven, and to give light upon the earth. " Further, the Magi, those holy men from the East, who came to greet the Expectation of the Nations, were led thence by a star.

"But," you may say, "the winter solstice is on the 21st of December, not the 25th." Correct. But if, from the time of the Council of Nicea (325) to that of Gregory XIII's reform of the calendar (1582), there was a 10 day discrepancy between the calendar and the actual astronomical pattern governing it, then it is entirely possible that a four-day discrepancy had occurred between our Lord's birth and the Council. We illustrate this possibility as follows: The calendar that many of the Greek schismatics still follow (the Julian calendar), is presently fourteen days off from the Gregorian. This additional four day discrepancy from Gregory's time has happened over about 400 years.

But now for the meat of the issue: when did it happen? According to St. John Chrysostom, the foundation for the Nativity occurring on the 25th of December is a strong one. In a Christmas Sermon, he shows that the Western Churches had, from the very commencement of Christianity, kept the Feast

on that day. This fact bears great weight to the Doctor, who adds that the Romans, having full access to the census taken by Augustus Caesar (Luke 2, 1) — which was in the public archives of the city of Rome — were well versed in their history on this point. A second argument he adduces thusly: The priest Zachary offered incense in the month of Tisri, the seventh of the Hebrew calendar, corresponding with the end of our September or the beginning of our October. (This he most likely knew from details of the temple rites which were transmitted to him by a living tradition, supported by Holy Scripture.) At that same time, St. Luke tells us that Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist. Since, according to the Bible, Our Blessed Lady conceived in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy (the end of March: when we celebrate the Feast of the Incarnation), then she gave birth nine months later: the end of December.

Having no reason to doubt the great Chrysostom, or any of the other Fathers mentioned; in fact, seeing objections issued only by heretics and cynics, we agree with the learned Doctor and conclude that, by God's Providence, His Church has correctly commemorated the Feast of His Nativity.

Further, as the continuity of the Old Testament with the New Testament was preserved in two of the principal feasts of the New: Easter corresponding to the Pasch and Pentecost to Pentecost (same name in both dispensations), it would have been unlikely for the Birth of the Eternal God into our world not to have had a corresponding feast in the Old Testament.

Until the time of the Machabees, when the temple was re-dedicated after its desecration by the Greek Antiochus IV, Antiochus Epiphanes (see 1 Machabees 4). One hundred and sixty-seven years before Jesus, the commemoration was instituted according to what was written: "And Judas, and his brethren, and all the church of Israel decreed, that the day of the dedication of the altar should be kept in its season from year to year for eight days, from the five and twentieth day of the month of Casleu, with joy and gladness" (I Macc. 4, 59). To this day, Jews celebrate the twenty-fifth of Casleu (or Kislev, as they say) as the first night of Hannukah. This year (5757 in the Jewish calendar), 25 Casleu was on December 12. Even though the two calendars are not in sync, Christmas and Hannukah are always in close vicinity. With the Festival of Lights instituted less than two centuries before Our Lord's advent, the Old Testament calendar joined nature in welcoming the Light of the world on his birthday.

As for the objection, "Jesus couldn't have been born in the winter, since the shepherds were watching their flocks, which they couldn't have done in winter": This is really no objection. Palestine has a very mild climate, and December 25 is early enough in winter for the flocks and the shepherds to be out. The superior of our monastery, [Brother Francis Maluf](#), grew up 30 miles from Beirut, which has the same

climate as Bethlehem, both being near the Mediterranean coast, and he has personally testified to this fact.

For almost 2,000 years, the Church has been defending Christmas against a concerted, diabolical attack.

No, it's not another wacko conspiracy theory; it's a fact. Since the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us, the truth that God was born a Baby at Christmas has been assaulted with relentless demonic fury. Saint John, the very Apostle of Love, tells us: "For many seducers are gone out into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh: this is a seducer and an Antichrist" (2 John 1:7).

What the Apostle was condemning in those strong words were the earliest of the gnostic heresies, those strange amalgamations of Christianity and pagan mystery religions. Their sectarians fancied that they were little sparks of divinity trapped in matter, who could only be liberated by the *gnosis*, the secret knowledge.

There was also an early heresy, called docetism, which said that the Word did not assume real flesh, but took the *appearance* of a man (*dokein* in Greek, means "to appear"). Rebuked by St. Ignatius of Antioch and condemned by the Church, docetism would return in more subtle forms, admitting that our Lord was man, but denying that he had a real human soul (Apollinarianism), a true human nature (Monophysitism), or a human will and operation (Monothelitism). The last of these heresies was so repulsive to St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662), that he preferred to have his hand cut off, his tongue sliced out, and to die in exile rather than submit to a corrupt bishop who professed it.

Then there were the denials of our Lord's divinity in heresies like Arianism, which still persists in sects as divergent as Unitarianism and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Finally, there was Nestorianism, the heresy that denied the union of the two natures in the one Person of Christ. The heretical Patriarch Nestorius had it that there were two persons in Christ, the divine Person of the Word and the person of Jesus Christ the man. Consequently, he asserted in a sermon that

Mary should not be called the Mother of God; she was only the mother of a human person.

The Fathers of the Church have left us heroic professions of truth against these blasphemies, and all of them impress upon us that the little Inhabitant of the Christmas Crib was Almighty God come in the flesh to save us. St. Athanasius made the point, against Arianism, that since Christ was supposed to *divinize* us by grace, He could not perform this mission if He were not Himself divine by nature. St. Gregory Nazianzen professed, against the Apollinarians, that "What has not been assumed has not been healed," i.e., our Lord did not *redeem* human nature unless he *possessed* a human nature. Far from being satisfied with artful turns of phrase in their polemics, these Fathers, like St. Maximus the Confessor, suffered for their confession at the hands of the antichrist heretics.

The entire Catholic Faith is summed up in the image of the Madonna and Child: She, the Immaculate Conception, was conceived full of grace to be Mother of God; and He is One of the Holy Trinity come down to take her Flesh as true Man in order to save us. So much do heretics hate this beautiful scene that the Iconoclasts, who inherited many of the earlier eastern heresies, cut off St. John Damascene's hand for painting it! That hand was miraculously restored to him by our Lady.

Orthodoxy has always been attacked by antichrists. (Yes, there will be one Antichrist at the end — "the man of sin" of 2 Thess 2:3 — but St. John speaks of many "antichrists" in 1 John 2:18.) Is it any wonder that certain nefarious elements in society "have issues" with Christmas? As the early heretics wished to "dissolve" Jesus by destroying the union of two natures in one divine Person, so too, modern antichrists wish to dissolve the divine Babe from our public square: "And every spirit that dissolveth Jesus, is not of God: and this is Antichrist, of whom you have heard that he cometh, and he is now already in the world" (1 John 4:1).

According to St. Robert Bellarmine, the focus of the devil's attack in the second millennium has moved away from the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. Instead, the old goat has taken aim primarily at the Church, giving us the Great Eastern Schism and the Protestant Revolt. And he has been refining his approach ever since. In our own day, he has given us the "deadly error" of *indifferentism* (to quote [Pope Gregory XVI](#)), the heresy that says one religion is as good as another. He has caused an even worse pandemonium: an identity crisis within the Church herself. *Some of our very own ecclesiastics do not know what the Church is.* They have "dissolved Jesus" in His Mystical Body.

But even in the midst of such a crisis, we find consolation: "Behold, I make all things new!" (Apoc. 21:5).

All the historical triumphs against error won by the martyrs and confessors will be renewed in grand style. The victories of the devil and his antichrists continue to mount, but the Triumph of the divine Babe will be all the sweeter because of it. It will mark the victory of our Lord, His Church, and His Vicar. What's more, to the eternal confusion of Antichrist and Satan, Christ's Triumph will be the Triumph of His Mother, the Woman who will crush the head of the ancient serpent!

And that should give us all a Merry Christmas.

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The [featured image](#) shows, "The Nativity," by Matthias Stomer, painted ca. 1640.

