

“Is Christmas Pagan?”
Luke 2:8 – 20

Well here we are some 29 days out from Christmas – how are you tracking? Have you put up the lights, and the tinsel and the Christmas tree yet. There’s no judgment here, but shame on you if you have 😊.

With that in mind, this morning I’ll be going for what I’ll call ‘sermon lite’. Not light on content but light in length.

From now on you will be bombarded with via the letter-box, the television, your inbox and social media (if you haven’t already) – to buy, buy, buy. Buy to feel alive. Buy to get that perfect present. Buy to get into the Christmas spirit.

Alongside this there will be other voices via the internet and again through the means of social media saying something completely different.

The main means of this message is through memes. Who knows what a meme is?

A meme is usually an image with a simple tag line with humorous (and sometimes pointed intent).

But rather than give a definition a picture paints a thousand words:



This circulated during the initial Covid lock-downs:

**When COVID-19 is over and you
can finally go finish the 8th grade.**



So not only will you be bombarded by the consumeristic powers of our age, there is a chance if you are unfortunate enough you will face memes like this:



Not only that there will be a bunch of posts from a bunch of Christians saying, no true Christian should celebrate Christmas because Christmas is a pagan holiday.

So is Christmas actually a pagan holiday that Christians have repurposed?

Now, for you, you may not care.

However there are some who are keenly and want nothing to do with anything that might possibly dishonour the Lord.

And there are also groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses who will zero in on this.

So to begin:

The Christmas Tree is a Pagan Symbol – FALSE

There we have a wonderful Christmas tree:



So these people will say what the Christmas tree really represents is an ancient symbol of the fertility goddess.

Then they will point to Jeremiah 10:1 – 4:

Hear what the Lord says to you, people of Israel. ² This is what the Lord says:

“Do not learn the ways of the nations
or be terrified by signs in the heavens,
though the nations are terrified by them.

³ For the practices of the peoples are worthless;
they cut a tree out of the forest,
and a **craftsman shapes it with his chisel.**

⁴ They adorn it with silver and gold;
they fasten it with hammer and nails
so it will not totter.”

Surely that is a clear description.

So every Christmas that you set up a tree you are setting up an idol.

And every time you get down on your knees and you either get a gift from the tree or put a gift under the tree, you are given the tree worship.

“How would you respond to this?”

So first up:

- Jeremiah wrote some 500+ before Jesus was born. This is not a prophecy and can't possibly be referring to Christmas trees because it is addressing the Israelites in the present tense.
- It needs to be read in context which includes verse 5 which states:
"Like a scarecrow in a cucumber field,
their **idols** cannot speak;
they must be carried
because they cannot walk.
Do not fear them;
they can do no harm
nor can they do any good."

This is about trees being cut down and then shaped by a chisel and other tools into an idol.

- Worship needs intentionality.

If you are bowing before to give it reverence and worship then you *are* guilty of idol worship.

The logic of the idea that by getting your knees to get a Christmas present from under the tree just doesn't make sense.

So why and when were Christmas trees adopted as a Christmas tradition?

The first mention of Christmas trees is in Europe in 1561 AD.

In those days that would perform plays called "Paradise Plays". These plays helped to educate and retell the Christian story.

The play would share the story of Adam and Eve's creation, sin, banishment, and God's forgiveness.

The one prop consistently used was an evergreen fir adorned with bright red apples. This tree was known as the "Paradise Tree."

This tree came to represent humanity's fall – the trees of the knowledge of good and evil – but also our redemption through Christ – the tree of life.

Over time people began to bring these into their homes.

SO... the Christmas tree is a definitely Christian symbol.

The star atop the tree *does* represent the star that guided the wise men.

The angel *does* represent the angel that announced Jesus' birth.

If there was one image that popularised Christmas trees it was this:



This was published widely in 1848 and shows Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and their children gathered around their Christmas tree.

"Queen Victoria and Prince Albert brought the tree into Windsor Castle on Christmas Eve and they would decorate it themselves. They would light the candles and put gingerbread on the tree and the children would be brought in."¹

The prince also sent decorated trees to schools and army barracks around Windsor.

Christmas Day, December 25th, comes from Pagan Roots – FALSE

Sometimes people claim that December 25th was chosen as the date of His birth because it coincided with a Roman feast day called Saturnalia.

Saturnalia was dedicated to the Roman god, Saturn.

It feature feasting, the giving of gifts and going door-to-door singing.

For example, singing door-to-door is the same a carolling that we have today. So the claim is that December 25th and the traditions that came with it, were taken over by Christians.

Emperor Constantine chose the date to make it easier for pagans to carry over the celebrations to Christmas.

¹ [Where Did Christmas Trees Come From? - How Queen Victoria & Prince Albert Made a Holiday Tradition \(townandcountrymag.com\)](http://townandcountrymag.com)

First up, the giving of gifts is a feature in all sorts of settings and in all sorts of cultures.

Two, the feasting was very much around debauchery and orgies – not at all what Christians practiced.

And the singing from door-to-door– like carolling – was done... naked.

It was all very sexualised.

Not only that but this feasting dedicated to Saturn went from December 17th to December 23rd *never* December 25th.

The biblical reference to shepherds tending their flocks at night when they hear the news of Jesus' birth (Luke 2:8) might suggest the spring lambing season; in the cold month of December, on the other hand, sheep might well have been corralled.

No one is exactly sure when Jesus was born.

We arrive at December 25th via the interest of early believers.

Many Christians were already recognising Christ's birth in the mid-200's.

The early church simply calculated December 25th as Jesus' birthday because it was nine months from the day they believed to be the date of His conception and death: March 25th.

Yes the date was designated by Emperor Constantine BUT only because it was already being recognised and perhaps celebrated.

In Celebrating Christmas we are simply following the traditions of men.

So some will say that:

- Celebrations of Jesus' birth are not mentioned in the Gospels or Acts.
- The date is not given nor even the time of year.
- We are not commanded anywhere to commemorate Jesus birth but we have been given the act of communion.
- We know that at different times in history Christmas has been banned by Christians around the world.

(They did so because they still had influence and the meaning of Christmas was being lost and giving way to drunken festivities.)

So do not have to celebrate Christmas.
There is no command to celebrate Christmas.

But neither is there a command to not to celebrate.

There are many, many traditions we follow that do not have their genesis in the Bible as long as they do become too important or entrenched, or go against a clear, are fine.

So

Christmas was and is a specifically Christian celebration.

Christians **did not** adopt pagan beliefs and ceremonies and make them their own nor are we participating in idolatry as we are directing our worship toward Jesus.

(There increasing pressure to celebrate pagan ceremonies, that is, the worship of other gods but that is completely different to a celebration that always has been Christian).

So some takeaways:

- Don't base your beliefs on memes and one paragraph stories.
- Do your research.
- So if you do celebrate Christmas, own it!!!
Remember the angels announcement: it is a message of good news of great joy!!!
Our saviour became like us and lived among us to redeem us.
The shepherds glorified and praised God for all the things they had heard and seen – and you can do the same this Christmas.
You can tell of all that God has done for you through His Son.