



CHRISTMAS DAY STORY...

OVERVIEW

The Christmas Day story (birth of Jesus Christ) enjoys world-wide popularity and the occasion marks the advent of Christianity, in the framework of the Judaic theological expectation. Christianity is historically the second in the procession of the three religions of Abraham (Judaism, Christianity & Islam). The story of Christianity, and Christmas Day came to Europe, by way of the Roman Empire during the 4th century. History records that Roman Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity in 312 AD, after winning the battle to unify Rome. Rome was in civil war with competing armed forces. On the night before the

decisive battle, Constantine reportedly saw a cross in the sky which he interpreted as a sign of his victory. Subsequently, Constantine resolved to embrace the Christian religion following the success of his military campaign. In 313 AD Emperor, Constantine signed the “edict of Milan,” which outlawed the confiscation of property owned by Christians, hence forth. Thus, the three centuries wherein Rome persecuted the growing communities of Christian faithful came to an end.

Christianity and the Christmas Day story officially became the province of the Roman Empire more than 300 plus years after the fact. The Council of Nicaea (First Ecumenical Council 325 AD), convened by Constantine, consolidated Christianity under Rome’s domination. Rome subsequently, enjoyed more than twelve hundred years wherein the Catholic Church dominated and defined Christianity in Western Europe. Prior to Constantine’s the First Ecumenical Council and Constantine’s conversion to the faith, Rome had a barbaric, colorful and well documented history of persecuting Christians within its global realm. Early Christians that suffered under Roman’s footprint were people from the Middle East, Africa and Asia, regions wherein Rome was the occupying military force. There is great irony in the fact that Emperor Constantine was able to successfully convene the First Ecumenical Council of world Christianity, in the wake of his controversial and brutal history regarding the faith. Moreover, it is not difficult to imagine how the newly converted Emperor to the faith, was able to impose his ecclesiastical authority over the centuries old theological traditions of the diverse and eclectic Christianity. Be that as it may, the First Ecumenical Council and the controversial proceedings are a matter of historical record...

Rome subsequently introduced Christianity to the respective European countries under its control and the Roman Empire defined and interpreted the nature of Christianity in the western world. The European Christian monarchs, under the authority of the Holy Roman Empire undertook military campaigns of conquest and colonized the known world in the name of the Christendom.

The Roman Catholic Church and respective European monarchs enjoyed a 1200 year monopoly of Christianity in the western hemisphere, until the Protestant Reformation which occurred in the 16th century. The outcome of the Protestant Reformation divided Christianity between Catholics and Protestants in Europe.

Although Christianity in the West was divided between Catholics and Protestants, the essential Christmas Day story remained the same in both faiths, from then to current times. The Christmas Day story among Catholics and Protestants is observed and celebrated on December 25... However, from the 4th century to the 15th century the Roman Catholic Church observed Christmas Day on January 6. From the early days of the faith, Christmas Day was observed on January 6, among Christians in both the East and West. It was Pope Gregory who introduced the Gregorian calendar to the church in the 15th century which in effect changed the Christmas Day observance in the western hemisphere to December 25. But Eastern Orthodox Christianity continued observing Christmas Day on January 6.

Moreover, the essential Christmas Day story in the Orthodox Christianity is markedly different from the conventional story and observance of the occasion as practiced in America and Western Europe. Therefore the Christmas Day story in Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition offers a parallel account of the Christmas Day story to the conventional narrative in Europe and the New World rendition. But it is noteworthy that Eastern Orthodox Communion predates the advent of the Church of Rome by three centuries and they continue to observe Christmas Day on January 6, according to the Julian calendar. The Protestant Reformers adopted the Gregorian calendar and the December 25, observation of Christmas Day, among other traditions and concepts of the Roman Catholic Church. Needless to say, there is a historical dichotomy between the Christmas Day story in western tradition as compared to the tradition in the east. Hence, there are essentially two parallel stories of Christmas Day, and associated historical narratives.

For example, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's account of the Christmas Day story begins and with the visitation of the 3 wise men of the Magi to the infant Jesus. Balthazar is one of the wise men, who brought offerings to Jesus Christ, along with his colleagues Melchior and Gaspar. Balthazar's offering was myrrh, (a pungent sap from a thorny tree) to infant Jesus Christ which was symbolic of Christ's impending sacrifice... Following the presentation of his offering, Balthazar returned to Ethiopia and issued the "Nezgid" (call to worship), which was the beginning of the Judeo-Christian community in the country. Accordingly, the heritage of Balthazar is a covenant with establishment of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

Apart from the Eastern Orthodox observance of Christmas Day on the original January 6, Julian calendar day, the occasion also includes the "Feast of the Epiphany" as well as the "Adoration of the Magi" a/k/a 3 Kings Day), all are celebrated on the same day January 6, as a triumvirate. But when the Roman Catholic Church adopted the Gregorian calendar establishing Christmas Day on December 25, only the Roman Catholic's adopted the change. The Eastern Orthodox calendar continued observing Christmas Day, Feast of the Epiphany and 3 Kings Day, on January 6. The

Catholic Church only changed the Christmas Day observance to December 25, but they continue to observe 3 Kings Day on January 6. Following the Protestant Reformation, they adopted the December 25, Christmas Day observance, but the Protestants completely omitted the January 6, observance of 3 Kings Day. Hence, the Eastern Orthodox Christian communion continue to observe the three occasions on January 6, Christmas Day, Feast of the Epiphany and Adoration of the Magi.

Currently, in countries and communities wherein Roman Catholics have a significant presence, such as Latin America, the Caribbean, and in urban centers in America where Hispanic communities reside, 3 Kings Day is a major day of celebration on January 6. But on the other hand, Hispanics observe and celebrate Christmas Day is December 25.

The dichotomy that separates the Christmas Day observance in the east and west has existed for more than 5 centuries. It is noteworthy to observe that efforts in the western hemisphere to reconcile the Christmas Day observe between eastern and western Christianity have been creative. To this end, the popular Christmas Carol entitled “The twelve days of Christmas” has endured. Accordingly, the lyrics of the Christmas Carol, points out that the first day of Christmas begins on December 25, and continues until January 6, which accounts for the twelve days of Christmas...

There will be a dedication of the Podcast to the memory of prof. Kassa on December 6, and the first Podcast will be launched on January 6, 2017.

EPISODES

Historical Narrative from the East...

East vs. West Schism...

Roman Catholic Consolidation

Protestant Reformation

Denominational Christianity

Full Circle