

Christmas and The Solstice

SUNDAY 22nd DECEMBER STUDY GROUP



“It would be a distinct advantage to the Cause of Truth, of the Wisdom of all Prophets, if the story of the origin and development of the Christian festival were to be known by all. The Church Fathers of the fourth century proclaimed the 25th of December as the day for celebrating this festival. It is not the birthday of Jesus Christ, but the very ancient Festival of the Winter Solstice, observed by the entire pagan world. The psychical and spiritual aspects of the seasons, and therefore of the Winter Solstice, were known to the Sages of every civilization. The festival was meant to bring to the mind of the masses the fact that the world of the Psyche and of the Nous affected the Psyche and the Nous in man. The early Church Fathers rightly took advantage of the ancient knowledge, but their successors wrongly interpreted it and made it sectarian. Esoterically the Sun stands for the Christos. One grand function of this Divine Power is to hold forth the Light of Hope, centred in its manifestation in the mortal world as the Great Sacrifice. Therefore in the Jewish-Christian tradition It represents the Messiah. That Macrocosmic truth has a Microcosmic, or human, psychological and mystical aspect. The realization of the Divine Presence and seeking Its aid in the daily routine of life must begin one day for every man: it is his real Winter Solstice. Cosmically, in the evolutionary process, in accordance with cyclic law, Divinity manifests as Divine Men. We know them as *Avataras* or Divine Incarnations. When a man manifests his innate Divinity, having found it in his “inner man” as Paul taught, then verily has he become spiritually awakened, and is nearing his Second Birth.” (B. P. Wadia, “Thus Have I Heard,” p. 106-107)

“Let no one imagine that it is a mere fancy, the attaching of importance to the birth of the year. The earth passes through its definite phases and man with it; and as a day can be coloured so can a year. The astral life of the earth is young and strong between Christmas and Easter. Those who form their wishes now will have added strength to fulfill them consistently.” (H. P. Blavatsky, “1888”)

“We are in the Winter Solstice the period at which the Sun entering the sign of Capricornus has already, since December 21st, ceased to advance in the Southern Hemisphere, and, cancer or crab-like, begins to move back. It is at this particular time that, every year, he is born, and December 25th was the day of the birth of the Sun for those who inhabited the Northern Hemisphere. . . . It is also on December the 25th, Christmas, the day with the Christians on which the “Saviour of the World” was born, that were born, ages before him, the Persian Mithra, the Egyptian Osiris, the Greek Bacchus, the Phœnician Adonis, the Phrygian Athis.” (HPB, “The Year is Dead, Long Live the Year!”)

“Christ – the true esoteric SAVIOUR – is no man, but the DIVINE PRINCIPLE in every human being. He who strives to resurrect the Spirit crucified in him by his own terrestrial passions, and buried deep in the “sepulchre” of his sinful flesh; he who has the strength to roll back the stone of matter from the door of his own inner sanctuary, he has the risen Christ in him.” (HPB, “The Esoteric Character of the Gospels”)

FROM HPB'S ARTICLE "CHRISTMAS THEN AND CHRISTMAS NOW"

Though now universally observed by Christian nations as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus, the 25th of December was not originally so accepted. The most movable of the Christian feast days, during the early centuries, Christmas was often confounded with the Epiphany, and celebrated in the months of April and May. As there never was any authentic record or proof of its identification, whether in secular or ecclesiastical history, the selection of that day long remained optional; and it was only during the 4th century that, urged by Cyril of Jerusalem, the Pope (Julius I) ordered the bishops to make an investigation and come finally to *some* agreement as to the *presumable* date of the nativity of Christ. Their choice fell upon the 25th Day of December, – and a most unfortunate choice it has since proved! It was Dupuis, followed by Volney, who aimed the first shots at this natal anniversary. They proved that for incalculable periods before our era, upon very clear astronomical data, nearly all the ancient peoples had celebrated the births of their sun-gods on that very day. “Dupuis shows that the celestial sign of the VIRGIN AND CHILD was in existence several thousand years before Christ” – remarks Higgins in his *Anacalypsis*. As Dupuis, Volney, and Higgins have all been passed over to posterity as infidels, and enemies of Christianity, it may be as *well* to quote, in this relation, the confessions of the Christian Bishop of Ratisbone, “the most learned man that the middle ages produced” – the Dominican, Albertus Magnus. “The sign of the celestial Virgin rises above the horizon at the moment in *which we fix the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ*,” he says, in the *Recherches historiques sur Falaise, par Langevin prêtre*. So Adonis, Bacchus, Osiris, Apollo, etc., were all born on the 25th of December. Christmas comes just at the time of the winter solstice; the days then are shortest, and *Darkness* is more upon the face of the earth than ever. All the sun Gods were believed to be annually born at that epoch; for from this time its Light dispels more and more darkness with each succeeding day, and the power of the *Sun* begins to increase.

However it may be, the Christmas festivities, that were held by the Christians for nearly fifteen centuries, were of a particularly pagan character. Nay, we are afraid that even the present ceremonies of the church can hardly escape the reproach of being almost literally copied from the mysteries of Egypt and Greece, held in honour of Osiris and Horus, Apollo and Bacchus. Both Isis and Ceres were called “Holy Virgins,” and a DIVINE BABE may be found in every “heathen” religion. We will now draw two pictures of the Merrie Christmas; one portraying the “good old times,” and the other the present state of Christian worship. From the first days of its establishment as Christmas, the day was regarded in the double light of a holy commemoration and a most cheerful festivity: it was equally given up to devotion and insane merriment. “Among the revels of the Christmas season were the so-called feasts of fools and of asses, grotesque saturnalia, which were termed ‘December liberties,’ in which everything serious was burlesqued, the order of society reversed, and its decencies ridiculed” – says one compiler of old chronicles. “During the Middle Ages, it was celebrated by the gay fantastic spectacle of dramatic mysteries, performed by personages in grotesque masks and singular costumes. The show usually represented an infant in a cradle, surrounded by the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph, by bull’s heads, cherubs, Eastern Magi, (the Mobeds of old) and manifold ornaments. The custom of singing canticles at Christmas, called Carols, was to recall the songs of the shepherds at the Nativity. “The bishops and the clergy often joined with the populace in carolling, and the songs were enlivened by dances, and by the music of tambours, guitars, violins and organs. . . ” We may add that down to the present times, during the days preceding Christmas, such mysteries are being enacted, with marionettes and dolls, in Southern Russia, Poland, and Galicia; and known as the *Kalidowki*. In Italy, Calabrian minstrels descend from their mountains to Naples and Rome, and crowd the shrines of the Virgin-Mother, cheering her with their wild Music.

In England, the revels used to begin on Christmas eve, and continue often till Candlemas (Feb. 2), every day being a holiday till Twelfth-night (Jan. 6). In the houses of great nobles a "lord of misrule," or "abbot of unreason" was appointed, whose duty it was to play the part of a buffoon. "The larder was filled with capons, hens, turkeys, geese, ducks, beef, mutton, pork, pies, puddings, nuts, plums, sugar and honey." . . . "A glowing fire, made of great logs, the principal of which was termed the 'Yule log,' or Christmas block, which might be burnt till Candlemas eve, kept out the cold; and the abundance was shared by the lord's tenants amid music, conjuring, riddles, hot-cockles, fool-plough, snap-dragon, jokes, laughter, repartees, forfeits, and dances."

In our modern times, the bishops and the clergy join no more with the populace in open carolling and dancing; and feasts of "fools and of asses" are enacted more in sacred privacy than under the eyes of the dangerous argus-eyed reporter. Yet the eating and drinking festivities are preserved throughout the Christian world; and, more sudden deaths are doubtless caused by gluttony and intemperance during the Christmas and Easter holidays, than at any other time of the year. Yet, Christian worship becomes every year more and more a false pretence. The heartlessness of this lip-service has been denounced innumerable times, but never, we think, with a more affecting touch of realism than in a charming dream-tale, which appeared in the *New York Herald* about last Christmas. An aged man, presiding at a public meeting, said he would avail himself of the opportunity to relate a vision he had witnessed on the previous night. "He thought he was standing in the pulpit of the most gorgeous and magnificent cathedral he had ever seen. Before him was the priest or pastor of the church, and beside him stood an angel with a tablet and pencil in hand, whose mission it was to make record of every act of worship or prayer that transpired in his presence and ascended as an acceptable offering to the throne of God. Every pew was filled with richly-attired worshippers of either sex. The most sublime music that ever fell on his enraptured ear filled the air with melody. All the beautiful ritualistic church services, including a surpassingly eloquent sermon from the gifted minister, had in turn transpired, and yet the recording angel made no entry in his tablet! The congregation were at length dismissed by the pastor with a lengthy and beautifully-worded prayer, followed by a benediction, and yet the angel made no sign!"

"Attended still by the angel, the speaker left the door of the church in rear of the richly-attired congregation. A poor, tattered castaway stood in the gutter beside the curbstone, with her pale, famished hand extended, silently pleading for alms. As the richly-attired worshippers from the church passed by, they shrank from the poor Magdalen, the ladies withdrawing aside their silken, jewel bedecked robes, lest they should be polluted by her touch."

"Just then an intoxicated sailor came reeling down the sidewalk on the other side. When he got opposite the poor forsaken girl, he staggered across the street to where she stood, and, taking a few pennies from his pocket, he thrust them into her hand, accompanied with the adjuration, 'Here, you poor forsaken cuss, take this!' A celestial radiance now lighted up the face of the recording angel, who instantly entered the sailor's act of sympathy and charity in his tablet, and departed with it as a sweet sacrifice to God."

A concretion, one might say, of the Biblical story of the judgment upon the woman taken in adultery. Be it so; yet it portrays with a master hand the state of our Christian society.

FROM "SOLSTICE," THEOSOPHY MAGAZINE, DECEMBER 1949

What is the significance of the Christmas cycle? What will give man himself a key to it? Is there a sense in which each incarnated being enacts the sun-god rite, and adheres to a yearly cycle like the Sun's? How can the Real Man celebrate on December 21-25?

Let us take H. P. Blavatsky's account of one three-day ceremony of initiation, called the "Sleep of Siloam" in the traditions of Asia Minor, Syria and even higher Egypt to this day.

"The initiated adept {H.P.B. writes}, who had successfully passed through all the trials, was *attached*, not *nailed*, but simply tied on a couch in the form of a *tau* . . . of a *Swastica* without the four additional prolongations . . . {and} plunged in a deep sleep. He was allowed to remain in this state for three days and three nights, during which time his Spiritual Ego was said to confabulate with the "gods," descend into Hades, Amenti, or Patala (according to the country), and do works of charity to the invisible beings, whether souls of men or Elemental Spirits; his body remaining all the time in a temple crypt or subterranean cave. In Egypt it was placed in the Sarcophagus in the King's Chamber of the Pyramid of Cheops, and carried during the night of the approaching third day to the entrance of a gallery, where at a certain hour the beams of the rising Sun struck full on the face of the entranced candidate, who awoke to be initiated by Osiris, and Thoth the God of Wisdom. . . . Then appeared the Hierophants-Initiators, and the sacramental words were pronounced, ostensibly, to the Sun-Osiris, addressed in reality to the Spirit Sun within, enlightening the newly-born man." [See "The Secret Doctrine" Vol. 2, p. 558-559 for the full passage]

How different this "Crucifixion" from the tragic fable of the "only Son of God"! Is there not a God in every man who comes each day into the darkness of a world where souls are still asleep? Does not man's daily cycle – to say nothing of his year – invariably include an interval of god-like existence, a solstice when the soul is still, in its own place? "Swapita," said the ancients, at a death: "he is gone to his own place." So might it be said of all the lesser intervals when the soul retires and the body sleeps.

The sleep of living things, of Great Nature, is longer than man's, and one purpose of observing the season cycle is that mind-beings enrich the awakening in the Spring by "works of charity" in the time of solstice. The thoughts and deeds of men are reflected in all the spheres of being, since man, having achieved the consciousness of self – individuality – is the prototype, the microcosm, the goal, the initiator and the guide of the rest of Nature. But while man has a more responsible part in evolution than life in the state of class-consciousness, the human evolution is yet only a transition stage. Beyond self-consciousness is Selfhood – the realization of the Self of all. Man, when he sacrifices the sense of separateness by service to forms of life which cannot respond in kind, removes also the barrier of selfishness between himself and the full beneficence of Self-realizing Beings.

The dedication of a particular day each year to the "giving of gifts" – whether things or thoughts – does not mean that the gifts of wise goodwill to all that lives are ever out of season. He who knows the "ultimate divisions of time" will mark not only the great cycles, but all their smaller correspondences, as well as their analogies in states of consciousness. The "seasons" inhere in the interval of a day, from morning to night and night to morning. Even an hour, and perhaps also a moment, has its solstice, its spring, another solstice and its autumn. There is always an auspicious time, when man can move with the cycle's whole force and draw upon the peak of his own power. Thus "Christmas comes but once a year," yet its meaning may be made manifold throughout the year.

If man aspires, the gods "descend to meet" – and the cycle of the "Spirit Sun within" is not limited by human days, nor earthly seasons.

THE SUN AND ITS SYMBOLISM

“It is the season of the birth of the Sun – the coming back and bringing into fructification those seeds and plants needing Sun energy for their growth and expression – but, it is more than that, because behind the Sun, as behind every single body, there is spirit, there is life, and there is intelligence.” (Robert Crosbie, “The Real Christmas”)

The Gayatri Mantra, also called the Savitri, of Hinduism is considered by historians the most ancient mantra currently known to the world. “The Eternal Verities – For Old Souls in Young Bodies” gives (p. 237) this loose but inspiring translation:

That which giveth sustenance to the Universe and to ourselves, from which all doth proceed and unto which all must return – That Thou Art. In the golden vase of thine earthly body may the pure Light of the Spiritual Sun shine forth, that thou may'st know the Truth, and do thy whole duty, on the journey back to the Sacred Seat!

In his article “A Commentary on The Gayatri” William Q. Judge renders it thus: “Unveil, O Thou who givest sustenance to the Universe, from whom all proceed, to whom all return, that face of the true Sun now hidden by a vase of golden light, that we may see the truth and do our whole duty on our journey to thy sacred seat.” A literal translation from the Sanskrit reads: “OM. We meditate on the effulgent glory of the true Divine Sun that pervades earth, sky, and the heavens, from whom all proceed and to whom all must return. Shine as the light of Consciousness in our intellects and burn away our ignorance with the wisdom of the highest Truth.”

“Do you know the Hindu legend that all the Avatars, or Saviors of the world, came from the Sun? If They did, then why not we? . . . It was the nature of Jesus – and so with Buddha – not the nature of his birth that made Him different. But it is evident that He belonged to a class of beings like Himself in nature – and that is the class of Avatars. . . . That inner Light which all men have the Avatars have in greater glory; it is the Fire or Sun of Knowledge. So, *that* is the True Sun behind the physical sun which we see, and . . . the ancients worshipped it only as a symbol of the Real. Now, of course, if all this is so, no one ever *came from* the Sun. He never left it. With his knowledge, he *is* always a ray of that True Sun of Life and Knowledge. In that case, no wonder the ancients celebrated the birth of their Sun-Gods.” (“The Eternal Verities” p. 262-263)



MISTLETOE

“In late winter, when the branches of the oaks were bare, tiny yellow flowers appeared on the mistletoe. Surely this meant that the sun drew its golden light from the plant. In the mistletoe, then, lay the life of their sacred oak. The missel thrush had brought it from heaven, the Druids believed, to feed on its berries and carry its seeds from tree to tree.

“The ancient Greeks, too, believed that the mistletoe could ward off evil. The Romans knew it as the “golden bough” of Aeneas, hero of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. On his winter visit to the underworld, Aeneas took the plant as a gift to Persephone, goddess of seasons. Long after Christianity replaced many older religions, faith in mistletoe lived on. Forbidden in churches as pagan it became a part of Christmas in people’s homes.” (from “Holly, Reindeer, and Colored Lights: The Story of the Christmas Symbols” by Edna Barth)

Five days after the first new moon following the winter solstice, Druid priests cut mistletoe with a golden sickle from a special oak tree and had to catch the mistletoe before it hit ground. The plant was distributed among the people to hang over their doors for protection against evil in the coming year.

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FROM ROBERT CROSBIE'S ARTICLE "THE REAL CHRISTMAS"

The Real Christmas can come to us in our hearts. We can realize that there has come once more the season we can rise with, if we make up our minds to do it. We can follow the Path of our great Predecessors – the great Saviors of the world, the great Saviors of all times, for They all come from the same Body, whether we call them Buddha, Jesus, or any other name. They are all Beings of the same nature who come among us, and, as was said of Jesus, in all things become like unto us that They may impart to us something of Their great knowledge and point us to the Path They followed. Always the object of Their coming was, that we in time might become even as They are. Always They left messages for us which were set down and known as the sayings of the Founders of all the great religions. Jesus for Whom the Christian nations celebrate Christmas, was one of a Body of perfected men. There were many others before Him; there have been others since; there will yet be others.

Christmas is a time for giving and also for receiving. But there is a giving that is not of things. There is a giving of the heart itself. There is a giving of service, of love, of brotherhood, of every thought that makes for good – a giving open to all, however poor our personal possessions may be. It is the feeling and the thought in our hearts which reach people and stir *their* hearts to a better perception, a better feeling, a wider and stronger action, for all our hearts are based in the same One Life, we draw all our powers and forces from the One Life. The Real Christmas means something to the Real Man, and it applies to the whole of man's nature. Let us take advantage of the resurgence of spiritual, mental, and moral force that comes with the Christmas time.



United Lodge of Theosophists, 62 Queen's Gardens, London, W2 3AH

www.theosophy-ult.org.uk