

I don't have enough **FAITH**
to be an **ATHEIST**

with Dr. Frank Turek **PODCAST**

The Fascinating Origin of Christmas Traditions | with Bill Federer

(December 23, 2021)

Can you believe that 2022 is almost here? I don't know about you but the older I get the faster years go by like months used to go by. We're getting closer, at least I am... well, we all are getting closer and closer to seeing Jesus directly as the time just clicks by. Now, today's show is going to be absolutely fascinating because I'm doing very little of the talking. I'll explain what that is here in a minute. But before I introduce the topic for today's show I gotta tell you that in 2022 we've got a lot on the calendar. And I just want to thank everybody that supported us financially because we couldn't do what we do without your help. In fact, here's what's on the calendar. Just in terms of universities, for the spring of 2022 we have UT Dallas, University of Kentucky, University of Louisville, Winthrop University. That's by early February we've already been there. Lenoir Rhyne, Ohio State, Boise State, and Louisiana Christian. And there's a couple of high schools sprinkled in there as well. We're just getting ramped up again to do college campuses since COVID. You know, we did about five this past fall semester, fall 2021, and we've got eight scheduled for the spring of 2022, and more hopefully for the fall.

By the way, if you ever want us to come to your college, or your university, just go to CrossExamined.org, click on contact us and we'll figure out a way to get there. Because that's really what we're focused on doing. We're focused on going to places where Christianity is least represented, in fact, where Christianity is often mocked. We want to go in there, we want to throw a lifeline to Christians, we want to encourage them, and we want to put a stone in the shoe of the skeptics. That's why we go to college campuses because the truth of Christianity is very infrequently given in these places. In fact, it's often mocked as being false and nonsense and all this. So, that's where we want to go. That's what we do. So, thank you for your support and any sort of donation you give us goes 100% toward ministry and 0% toward buildings. We are completely virtual. You don't come to us, we come to you. And that's what powers this podcast and radio program as well as our TV show all the events on college campuses and high school campuses. Everything you see online is donor funded, everything that Jorge and the great social media team does, that's all funded by you. So, thank you for your donations.

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Now, today's program is going to be a little bit of a throwback because it's one of the most popular shows we've ever done, and it was with my friend Bill Federer. We're going to replay something that we did in 2018 about Christmas. Because you look at the Christmas origin, or you looking at Christmas traditions, you go where does this stuff come from? Where does Santa, stockings, reindeer, Christmas trees, North Pole, 12 Days of Christmas, the Santa suit, and St. Nicholas: Where do all these things come from? Actually, many of them are grounded in Christianity. They've been embellished since then. And there's nobody that tells the story better than our friend, Bill Federer. It's recorded on the 23rd of December, but a live show where you can see this visually, the origin of Christian traditions, just go to our YouTube channel and watch it, because we'll have some visuals on that program as well. But we'd like to play something for you that we recorded in 2018 with Bill Federer. It's evergreen, which is perfect for Christmas, there's nothing dated here.

There's one point where Bill references the former president. It's not a political show, but he's talking about something [and] he references our former president. If you hear that in this program, he's talking about President Obama, not President Trump. Anyway, I start by asking Bill: Who is St. Nicholas? Was St. Nicholas a real person? And then he's just going to start with St. Nicholas and we're going to go through so many of these other Christmas traditions that you hear about and many of us practice. And we were going to talk about: Should we even celebrate Christmas? Isn't that a pagan holiday and all this? We're gonna get right into it with my friend Bill Federer. Here he is.

Bill:

Well, St. Nicholas is the most popular Greek Orthodox saint. He is to the Greeks what St. Patrick is to the Irish. And he lived during Roman times. So, for the first three centuries of Christianity there are 10 major persecutions, Christians are thrown to the lions, and Nicholas was born around 280 AD in a town called Patara, Asia Minor today, that's Turkey. And his parents died when a plague swept through town and leaves him a lot of money. And a movement was going through Christianity at the time called pietism, beginning of the monasticism movement. And it was this idea that, if you were really sincere about being a Christian you should give away all your money and join a monastery. And so, Nicholas decides he's going to give away all the money he inherited from his parents. And so, he wants to help the poor, but he doesn't want to

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get the credit for it, so he sneaks into town at nighttime and throws the money in the window of four people. Supposedly, it lands in a shoe, or a stocking that's drying by the fireplace.

And one of the stories that was very popular, you see it on a lot of Middle Ages churches in stained glass windows and Greek Orthodox churches mosaics, and you'll see Nicholas on his tippy toes. You know, he's a saint with a halo around his head, and he's reaching up and he's throwing some money in the window and inside is a man with three daughters. And so, the story is that this man was a merchant, and he had gone bankrupt. And back then the creditors would, not only take your house and land, they would take your children. This merchant had three beautiful daughters and knew if they were taken it would be an unfortunate life of trafficking and so forth. So, he had an idea. He thought if he could hurry up and marry the daughters off, the creditors couldn't take them. Unfortunately, he did not have money for a dowry, which was needed in that area of the world for a legally recognized wedding.

Nicholas hears the problem, late one night throws the money in the window, provides the dowry, the oldest daughter gets married, big buzz, talk of the town, throws some money in for a second daughter. By the third time, the dad is expecting it. Nicholas throws the money in, the dad runs outside and catches him. And Nicholas makes the father promise not to tell where the money came from. Why? Because he wanted to glory go to God and not to him. And so, this is the origin of the tradition of secret gift giving on the anniversary of Nicholas's death, stockings by the fireplace, midnight visits. And once he does give away all his money, he does decide to join a monastery, the monastery of Zion. Now all this history is Greek Orthodox history. And believe me, they've got lots and lots of stuff. There are more Greek Orthodox churches named after St. Nicholas than anybody else. And so, he was going to the Holy Land, and it's the monastery of Zion.

And by the way, those three bags of gold he throws in the window to help up those family, he ends up being considered the patron saint of pawnbrokers. So, pawnbrokers hang three gold balls outside of their shop to represent the three bags of gold that Nicolas throws in. And they say, well, we help families out in their time of financial need. It's like, yeah, that's a little bit of a stretch, but whatever.

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Frank:

Now Bill, at the time, you're talking early 300s AD, right? Where is he living, St. Nicholas?

Bill:

Well, it's Patara, Asia Minor. Today that's Turkey.

Frank:

Turkey. Okay. Okay. Patara, okay. All right.

Bill:

And so, he goes over to the Holy Land, is going to join this monastery of Zion, but before he does, the Lord tells him not to hide his light under a bushel. So, he decided to go back to Asia Minor, but not before visiting the church and the Nativity in Bethlehem. And so, the picture of Santa Claus kneeling at the baby Jesus crib, there's actually a little historical precedent for that. He visits and so Mark Twain visits the holy land in the 1860s and writes a book about it called, *Innocence Abroad*. And he says, this spot where the first Merry Christmas was uttered in all the world, and from whence the friend of my childhood Santa Claus departed on his first journey to Gladden and continue to Gladden the roaring firesides on wintery mornings and many a distant land forever and forever. So, he leaves goes back to Asia Minor today, that's Turkey, gets off in a busy city called Myra. Unbeknownst to him, the bishop of Myra had died, and the church leaders could not decide who the next Bishop is going to be. And one of them has a dream that the first person to church the next day would be named Nicholas and he was to be their next Bishop.

Well, Nicholas was not too excited about this. He goes there and they break the news to him. He was not too excited because the Roman Emperor, Diocletian, was arresting bishops and killing them. So, it was sort of like, you be the bishop. No, no, no, I insist, you first. So anyway, he does agree to be the bishop, he is arrested, he's put in prison, he's awaiting death. And suddenly Diocletian, the Emperor that's trying to exterminate Christianity...I mean, this guy was terrible...he lost some battles with Persia, asked his Generals: Why? They said, well you've neglected the Roman gods. So, he says, okay, military worship the Roman gods. Well, by this time there were a lot of Christians in the military, they're all forced out. Then he decides to take the military and force the entire Roman Empire to return to worshiping the Roman gods. And

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they go province by province tearing down churches, burning scriptures, cutting out tongues. Anyway.

So, Nicolas is in jail awaiting death, Diocletian is struck with an intestinal disease so painful he abdicates the throne, steps down, May 1, 305 AD. This is unheard of, an emperor stepping down. And you have to appreciate the political humor. Emperors had been declaring themselves a god, sprinkling gold dust in their hair, and demanding that their image be worshipped. So, this was sort of like a god resigning. I just think that's sort of funny. But the next day, Emperor Galerius, he continues the persecution of Christians. He is struck with an intestinal disease, must have been something in the water, he dies in 311 AD, and now it's confusion in the Roman Empire and four generals decide to fight it out as to who's going to be the next emperor. Two are quickly defeated. It comes down to Constantine and Maxentius. Constantine is a general stationed in York Britain, and when his men get the news they surround them and yell, Hail Caesar, we're with you.

And so, he marches toward Rome and it's the Battle of a Milvian Bridge, October 28, 312 AD. And the story is that Constantine saw the sign of Christ in the sky, puts down all of his shields and symbols and wins. And what's the sign of Christ that he saw? It was the first two Greek letters for the name Christ. So, Christ is a Greek name and the Greeks spell it in phonetically. The letter the Greeks write as a big X is called Chi, and the R sounding letter is called Rho and is written as a big P. So, you see the Chi Rho, these X and P on all the early Roman fourth century art. And then Constantine legalizes Christianity in 313 AD. But I hear the music, and I'll come back...

Frank:

We're gonna come right back. We're talking to the great Bill Federer. We're talking about: Where did Christmas traditions come from? You're going to be more surprised right after the break. I'm Frank Turek. Don't go away, we're back in two.

Where do Christian traditions come from? Christmas Christian traditions, or the traditions that we celebrate now here in the United States, where are all these come from? And our friend, Bill Federer, is giving us a great overview of the history of St. Nicholas and some of these Christmas traditions. And before we go back to Bill, he mentioned that gift giving really was something

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done by St. Nicholas. And at this time of year, in addition to giving gifts to your loved ones, if in any way, we have benefited you and you feel led to give us, we are a 501(c)3 organization, CrossExamined.org. 100% of your donations goes to ministry, 0% to buildings I want to mention, we have a \$20,000 matching grant given to us by a generous donor, any dollar you give up to \$20,000 will be matched. So, if you give \$100 it'll be matched \$200. You give \$1,000 it'll be matched \$2000. You get the idea. All the donations are tax-deductible at CrossExamined.org. As you know, we spend most of our time in high schools and colleges to try and show people young people why Christianity is true. And particularly when we go to high schools and colleges, we don't charge students a dime to be there. And the only way we can go is if you provide the necessary funds for us to go. So, if you think that's a worthwhile mission, and I hope you do given the fact that three out of four young people who are brought up in the church walk away from the church once they go to college, then please, as you give your year-end donations, consider CrossExamined.org.

Alright, let me go back to our guest, Bill Federer, who has an amazing breadth of knowledge when it comes to historical events. And Bill, just before the break, we got up to Constantine, who won the battle and became the Holy Roman Emperor. Why don't we just pick it up right there, start right there, and keep going on these Christmas traditions.

Bill:

Right. Well, now he was just a plain Emperor. The holy didn't happen until later.

Frank:

Yeah, that's true.

Bill:

But nevertheless, he sees the sign of Christ in the sky, it's called the XP Cairo, and over the centuries it got shortened just to the Chi, or the X, and it was called a Christ cross or crisscross. And that's where you get the X-mas. It's not the X crossing out Christ, it's X Chi, the Greek letter that stands for Christ. And that came down as a written oath. So, you'd sign a document and swear before Christ that it's true. You'd sign it the Christ cross, sign it the X, or put your X here. Or I swear, cross my heart. What's that? That's the Chi. And then they would kiss the document after they signed it to show sincerity and that's come down to us as the X's and the O's on the

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bottom of a valentine. Right? The X, you're sworn before Christ to keep your pledge, and the O's you're kissing it to show sincerity. Anyway, that's the Cairo. At this time, Nicolas is let out of jail. And now that Constantine made it okay...so this is the first time in history that the government is not persecuting Christians.

Frank:

Alright friends, we got to stop right here for a second, Bill, because I don't think many people realize that Christianity spread in spite of the sword being used on it. I mean, people think that Christianity spread through use of the sword, as if the Crusades began right from the very beginning, people who don't have a good clear view of history. The Crusades don't begin until about 1095 AD, friends. It wasn't until, what, 311 or 312 AD, Bill, that Christianity basically got a reprieve from the persecutions?

Bill:

Right, right. 312 AD is the battle of the Milvian Bridge with Constantine, and then he officially issues the Edict of Milan in 313 AD. And now Nicolas is out of prison, he preaches publicly against paganism. What's that? Nearby is the Temple of Diana at Ephesus, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. This thing is twice as big as the Parthenon in Athens. It has 127 huge pillars and temple prostitutes. It was the Las Vegas of the Mediterranean. And the Apostle Paul preached against Diana worship in Acts chapter 19. And so, Nicholas preaches against it and the people tear the temple to Diana down. So, he would have been a fire and brimstone preacher today. During this time, they end the Olympics, right. I went to school in Rome, we went to Olympus and saw where they ran them, and it was basically just a foot race, a javelin, discus throw, and some wrestling, but they did it without clothes on, I won't get into it all, but it was pretty pagan. And so, they outlawed the Olympics.

And then Nicholas preaches against exposure of unwanted infants. What's that? The Roman tradition was the mother would bear the child and lay it at the father's feet. If he picked it up and liked it, thought they could afford it, they'd keep it. If not, she had to put it in a basket and set it outside the house and let it die. And so, a lot of the Christians would hear these babies crying and rescue them. This is where you get those stories of, you know, a mother putting the baby in a basket on the doorstep of some old couple and knocking on the door and then running away, and the old couple comes out and sees his baby in a basket raises him, right. And

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so, this is called exposure of unwanted infants. And so, the Christians and Nicholas preached against it. So, he would have been a pro-life preacher. I mean, it was their version of abortion, the Romans. And so, Nicholas would have been a pro-life preacher today.

Frank:

Hang on one sec, Bill. I just want to bring people up to date, because as you know, radio is a stream, not a pond. Some people are coming in and out. You're listening to CrossExamined with Frank Turek. And my guest is Bill Federer. His website is AmericanMinute.com. Go there. Not only can you read just about everything we're talking about here, but Bill has an entry for almost every day of the year up on his website, and so many great historical nuggets there that you can learn from Bill Federer. So, check that out. Right now, we're talking about: Where did the Christmas holiday traditions come from? And when Bill's referring to Nicholas, he's talking about St. Nicholas, who was a real person who lived in the late two hundreds early three hundreds AD. And he actually had something to do with the Nicene Creed, believe it or not. Pick it up right there, Bill.

Bill:

Right. So, the same way you got Patrick in Ireland confronting the Druids, and he stood up for the Trinity, well, you have Nicholas. And so, a guy named Arius says that Jesus is a little less than God. He's a created being. And Arius writes this catchy song and the Visigoths, who were a people grew that immigrated into Rome, they converted in mass to Arianism. And now it's splitting the church. And since Constantine made Christianity the de facto religion of the state, now it's splitting the state and the Roman Empire. So, Constantine is like, what's up? So, he orders all the bishops to come to Nicaea and settle it. This is the first time in history that all the Christian leaders come together at one place. Constantine foots the bill. There are about 500 bishops, and all together about 1500 with their staff. And they settle it. They write the Nicene Creed, and the story is that Nicholas was so upset at areas for starting this heresy that Nicolas slapped Arius across the face. So, jolly old St. Nick, that little temper. You'd better watch out; he's coming to town. [laughing]

Frank:

Is that where that comes from? Okay.

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Bill:

So, not only did he confront heretics, he confronted corrupt politicians. So, there was a Roman governor doing corrupt stuff and he was going to blame some innocent soldiers and have them be executed to cover up his corruption. Nicholas hears about it, rushes down to the execution square, breaks through the crowd, grabs the sword out of the executioner's hand, throws it down, and then by the power of the Holy Spirit tells every corrupt thing that the governor was doing. The governor realizes nobody could know all this except God, gets on his knees and begs Nicolas to pray for him. And so, there's lots of stories the Greeks have, and some have a miraculous aspect. One is, there was a storm, and Myra being a port city, the sailor's fishermen couldn't get back, they get Nicolas to pray, the sea becomes calm, they can come back. So, he's considered the "patron saint of sailors". And so, through the Middle Ages, artwork on churches, you'll see storms and then there'll be in the clouds a Nicholas, or he'll be a statue holding a boat.

And then there was a famine in the area. Nicolas supposedly went down talk some sailors into unloading some of their grain that's going from North Africa to Rome, to unload it to feed his people, promising God would bless them for doing it. On their return trip, they say the grain that was left had multiplied, sort of like Elijah and a little widow's meal barrel in the Book of Kings. He dies December 6, 343 AD. The Roman Emperor Justinian builds a big church and named after Nicholas. And then it gets a plug with Vladimir, the Emperor of Russia, 988 AD. He converts to Eastern Orthodox Christianity and adopts Nicholas as the patron saint of Russia. So, there are more St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox churches than any other name for a Russian Orthodox Church. That's the most popular, St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church.

Frank:

And can we pause here for just a second? I just want to ask you kind of a broad, theological question now because, we in the West, many of us don't have a decent handle on what Greek Orthodox or Russian Orthodox people believe that's different from say, the church in the West, whether it's the Roman Catholic Church or Protestant churches. What's unique about a Greek Orthodox church, just generally, in terms of their theological beliefs?

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Bill:

Well, when Diocletian split the Roman empire into the east and the west, with Rome is the capital of West, Constantinople. Constantine originally did it, but Diocletian furthered it. The Greek's speak Greek...

Frank:

Diocletian was before Constantine, though, right?

Bill:

But as far as the church goes, 1054 AD, there's a divorce. The Greeks say, in the Nicene creed, that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, and the Catholic west says the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. And the Muslims couldn't care less, they want to kill them all. But there's other differences. The Greek Orthodox priests can marry and the Catholics, you know, don't. But the Greek Orthodox think that epiphany, January 6, is the holiest day of the year, and the Catholic West thought that December 25, Christmas, is the holiest day of the year. And so, at the Council of Tours in 567 AD, they tried to patch up the East and the West by making all 12 days between December 25 and January 6 the 12 days of Christmas. So, the 12 days of Christmas is not the 12 days leading up to Christmas, it's the 12 days between December 25 and January 6, and it was a patch of efforts tried to get the East and West to still stay hooked together. And so, they call them holy days, and over the years holy days got pronounced holiday. Isn't it funny when they said well, we don't want to say Merry Christmas, just say happy holidays? Well, what are the holidays other than the 12 days of Christmas? Okay?

Frank:

Now, how much of a difference is there between the Greek Orthodox church and the Russian Orthodox church theologically?

Bill:

My understanding is very little. It's mostly just the hierarchy with each of them having their main Archbishop, which would be the equivalent of a pope. They just have a different hierarchy. But theologically pretty similar. But now it's important to the East and the West. So, the East is being invaded by Islam. And Turkey used to be the Byzantine Christian empire. And

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all seven churches mentioned in the book of Revelation are wiped out, all the letters to Ephesus, the city of Ephesus, and Colossae, Galatia, Philippi, Corinth, all those cities are wiped out by the Muslim Turks who are invading. And so, the Christians don't want the grave of St. Nicholas destroyed, because as they would come in, they would destroy the graves, and the churches, and artwork. The Muslim Mohammed said, leave no high grave standing nor a work of art without obliterating it. And so, in 1087, they move the bones of Nicholas over to Italy, a little town called Bari. They built a church and Pope Urban the Second dedicates the church, the same Pope the Second that calls for the First Crusade.

Frank:

Alright, hold the thought, Bill. We're talking to Bill Federer who, as you can see, just wonderfully strings together, history, so you can see where some of these Christmas holiday traditions come from. And his website is AmericanMinute.com. Our website is CrossExamined.org. We got a lot more with Bill Federer right after the break. I'm Frank Turek. Don't touch that dial.

Ladies and gentlemen, Frank Turek with you, doing an encore show with my friend, Bill Federer. And before we go back to Bill, I want to mention there are two fantastic online courses starting in January, at least I think they're fantastic. On January 17, the great Dr. Gary Habermas is going to be starting an online course called, The Resurrection of Jesus. It's actually Dr. Gary Habermas and Dr. Michael Patten. They're going to be our hosts for that course. And it's mostly Gary Habermas, who, as you know, is the top guy in the world on the resurrection. So, if you want to learn about the most important fact in Christianity, that Jesus died and rose again, just as He predicted, you want to take the resurrection course with Gary Habermas. That starts January 10.

The week before that, I'm going to be teaching, How To Interpret Your Bible. How often have you seen anybody at church teach, How do we actually interpret the Bible? It seems to me that's one of the most important things we ought to know how to do as Christians. And so, if you take the premium course, you'll be with me on at least six occasions for Zoom sessions, live Q&A Zoom sessions, for How To Interpret Your Bible. You can also take it self-paced, but that does not include the live Zoom session. Same thing is true with the resurrection course. If you take the premium version, you'll be on some Zoom sessions with both Gary and Michael Patten.

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So, you want to check all that out. Just go to CrossExamined.org, click on online courses to start 2022 off.

Well, now let's go back to the great Bill Federer. Go ahead, Bill.

Bill:

Actually, Muslims are invading Greece. They move the most popular Greek Saint over to Italy. Pope Urban the Second builds a church named after him, Cathedral Nicola de Bari. And we know Pope Urban because he went to the console of Claremont in 1095 AD and begs the kings of Europe to send help to these Greeks that are being killed by this invasion. And they sent help. It's called the First Crusade. So, the same Pope that welcomes Nicholas traditions of Western Europe is the one that calls for that First Crusade. So, in a backward sense, we may not have had a St. Nicholas in western civilization if it had not been for jihad in the East.

Now the traditions of gift giving really catch on and the Italians really love it so much so that, sort of in protest, St. Francis of Assisi in 1223 AD, comes up with the first nativity scene, the crèche scene. The Jesus, Mary, Joseph, donkeys, and the manger saying, look, we're getting too materialistic, we need to get back to the real reason for the season. Jesus was born in the manger, the Son of God, Emmanuel, God with us. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. So, some of these struggles that you talked about at the beginning of the program, this was faced in the 1200s.

And then the Reformation starts 1517. Martin Luther. By this time there's a Saints Day for every day of the year. Churches are filled full of statues, Martin Luther considers this a distraction, so he ends the Saints days in Protestant countries, including the popular St. Nicholas day. Well, the Germans like the gift giving, so Martin Luther moves all the gift giving to December 25, and says all gifts come from the Christ child. And the German pronunciation of Christ child is Christkindl; Chris meaning Christ, Kindl, like KinderCare, kindergarten, means child. So, Christkindl ends up being pronounced Chris Kringle. So, Chris Kringle is really Christkindl, which means Christ child.

Frank:

This is fascinating stuff, Bill. By the way, you can get an email from Bill every day. Just go to AmericanMinute.com and sign up for the email. You can get one email from us a week at

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CrossExamined.org, click on Subscribe. But Bill, this is such fascinating stuff. I want to pause on just a couple of things that you had mentioned there. You'd mentioned the First Crusade was ordered, or at least asked for, by Pope Urban the Second in 1095 AD. And a lot of people think the Crusades, at least as initially conceived, were kind of these offensive ways of trying to convert people by the sword. Why is that not the case?

Bill:

Well, the Muslims took over Egypt, and the Coptic Christians beg the West for help, and they were going to send help until the Emperor got his head broken...a soap dish over his head in a bath. But for centuries, the different Christians in these countries where Christianity originated, were crying out for help. And the West would sit on their hands. And sort of like today. Under our previous president, there was a genocide of millions of Christians in the Middle East. And even John Kerry had to admit it was a genocide. And what did we in the West do? Nothing. Now it finds out that we were actually giving guns to the ones doing the killing. And so, this is a typical thing where the Christians are begging for help and the West isn't. Finally, Pope Urban said enough, we need to send help to these Greek Christians.

Now back to the Nicholas story. You know, the Catholic saying, St. Peter's at the gates of heaven? Well, the Greeks do a saying, and it's based on the book of Revelation, that Jesus will return at the end of the world to judge the living and the dead, riding a white horse, and the saints will come back with him riding white horses. And St. Nicholas is a saint, after all, so he will be one of those riding a white horse. But he's so special to the Greeks they have him coming back once a year for a little mini-Judgment Day, a little checkup on the kids to make sure they're on the right tracks. See who is naughty and who is nice. And saints come from where? Heaven. The celestial city, new Jerusalem. It turns into the North Pole. And in Norway, they didn't have horses, they got him riding a reindeer. And in the Lamb's Book of Life, Book of Works turns into the book of the naughty and the nice, and the angels turn into the elves. And so, you can see what started as a biblical idea is embellished with a lot of the additions there.

So, we look at England. So, Martin Luther brings the Reformation to Germany, and Henry the Eighth brings the Reformation to England, but not because he had a spiritual experience, he just wants another wife. Pope won't recognize his divorce, he makes himself his own Pope, and he brings back an old Roman Holiday, because Britain used to be a Roman colony. And the holiday

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is Saturnalia and it's feasting and plenty of merriment. And if you've ever seen the Christmas carol with Charles Dickens, there's the spirit of Christmas present. And he's this big guy with robes that [unintelligible] his goblet of wine, the Ho-Ho happy party guy. And you're scratching your head saying who is he? He sort of looks like Santa, but he also sort of looks like some Roman god. Well, that's what he was. He was Saturn, but they Christianized him and called him Father Christmas. They couldn't call him St. Nicholas because St. Nicholas was sort outlawed in England after the Reformation.

And so, during Henry VIII time, Christmas in England becomes sort of like a party time, sort of like a Mardi Gras. People forget Mardi Gras used to be a religious day. It was the day before Lent when you would fast 40 days before Easter. Now it's this lewd party in New Orleans. That's sort of what happened with Mardi Gras. It was drinking carousing, wassailing, where you take a drink of booze and throw the rest of it on some plant hoping for a nice harvest the next year. And so, when the Puritans took over England in 1642, they outlawed Christmas. They even tore down Shakespeare's Globe Theatre because they said it was a place for, you know, lewd activity taking place. And the Puritans settle Massachusetts, and they had a five shilling fine for anybody caught celebrating Christmas. Puritan leader, Cotton Mather said, can you and your conscience think that our Holy Savior is honored by bad mirth, long eating, hard drinking, lewd gaming, rude revelry fit for a Bacchus or a Muhammad and Ramadan. You cannot possibly think so.

And so, it was the Dutch that loved Christmas and loved St. Nicholas and the Dutch settled New York in 1624. And so, that's where we get our traditions from. So, the Dutch still to this day, have St. Nicholas coming once a year as a saint, as a bishop, with his mitered hat, his staff, and his robes, and he's writing a white horse. And they have him coming from Spain and he has with him a little Moorish costumed helper, Zwarte Piet. Well, the Moors are the Muslims and Zwarte Piet, Black Peter, is this little helper of St. Nicholas. Now, the Dutch pronunciation of St. Nicholas is Sinnterklaas (sinn-ter-klaas). So, basically when we say Santa Claus, you're saying the Dutch pronunciation of St. Nicholas.

And, so anyway, in Holland they tell the kids if you're good St. Nicholas gives you a present. If you're naughty Zwarte Piet will put you in a gunny sack, take you back to Spain and sell you into Muslim slavery. So, often when you tell little kids that Sinnterklaas is coming they start crying. I

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actually talked to a guy from Holland, he said, yeah, in my neighborhood the night before St. Nicholas visited all the little boys would go to sleep at night with pocketknives in their pockets. I said: Why is that? He goes, that's to cut ourselves out of the gunny sack in case Zwarte Piet took us. Anyway, so people forget the Muslims enslaved over a million Europeans. There were entire Catholic orders through the Middle Ages called a Trinitarians, the head of the order was called, The Ransomer, and they would collect alms and donations at church services to try to get your friend back, who was captured by Muslim pirates or whatever.

And so, anyway, the Dutch settled New Amsterdam, which became New York, and the first Dutch Reformed Church is the St. Nicholas Dutch Reformed Church. And it ends up becoming this enormous church there at 48th and 5th Avenue. But as it turns into a financial district, the people move out, and it's this big cavern with nobody going there, and they sell it to Sinclair Oil Company in 1948. They tear it down and build an oil building. But the church moved out to a different location. They called it the Marble Collegiate Church, and it had Norman Vincent Peale as a pastor, and among the attendees was Donald Trump. How do you like that? The Roosevelt's, Dutch name, they went to this St. Nicholas Dutch Reformed Church. And, you know, Teddy Roosevelt went to St. Nicholas Dutch Reformed Church. Anyway, so in New York, you see a transformation. Washington Irving, we know him because he wrote Legend of Sleepy Hollow Rip Van Winkle and he wrote Dietrich Knickerbocker's, History of New York, from the Dutch settlement to the end of the Dutch Dynasty in 1809. In there he named the city, Gotham City, and it stuck. And then Dietrich Knickerbocker became such a popular book that it turned into the New York Knicks the basketball team.

Frank:

Yeah, I was always wondering: What's a Knickerbocker?

Bill:

Yeah, and so, that was a Dutch name. And so, he describes St. Nicholas visiting the Dutch children, riding in his wagon over the treetops, throwing out presents once a year to his favorites. But he describes him, not dressed as a bishop, but in a typical Dutch outfit of long trunk hose, leather belt boots, and a stocking hat. And then in New York, you have Clement Moore. His family donates land for the Episcopal seminary. He's a Hebrew professor. And

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there's a Clement Moore Park at 10th and 22nd in New York right now. And anyway, he writes a poem in 1823 for his six children titled, A Visit from St. Nicholas. It goes,

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there.

So, he's still a saint, but he shrunk. He's "a right jolly old elf, And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself". But then in the middle 1800s it gets something else added on. [During the] Civil War, Harper's Weekly magazine has an illustrator named Thomas Nast. We know him because he invented the Republican elephant and the Democrat mule for his cartoons.

Frank:

Hold the thought right there, Bill. Because, man, we're covering the waterfront here, aren't we? We're looking at the origin of Christmas holiday traditions. And you can see that you go back far enough, you get to Christianity. They kind of get convoluted as they go through history but there really is a Christ in Christmas. And we'll get back to that and see if Phil thinks we ought to worship on this day. I'm Frank Turek. Back in two.

Merry Christmas, ladies and gentlemen, you're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek, on the American Family Radio Network. We're giving you an encore presentation today from my friend Bill Federer. And we're going through the Christmas traditions. Where do these things come from? How did they get to where they are today? Are they in any way related to Christianity? Things like Santa, stockings, reindeer, Christmas trees, all that, that's what we're talking about today. So, let's go back to Bill Federer and hear the rest of what he has to say. And I will see you again in 2022. All right, going back to Bill. Here we go.

Bill:

Thomas Nast, he's an illustrator for Harper's Weekly magazine, and he invented the Republican elephant and Democrat mule. He does a cover of St. Nicholas visiting the Union troops and he's sitting on his wagon full of toys. And in the background, you see a little north pole sign. Lo and behold, that's the first time St. Nicholas is coming from the North Pole. Prior to that it was

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always, you know, celestial city, new Jerusalem, and so forth. But the last installment is, Coca Cola hires an artist, Haddon Sundblom.

Frank:

Now wait. I see in the in the email you put out...by the way, you can get an email from Bill every day. [Go to] AmericanMinute.com. You'll get one about Christmas, this one we're talking about today, maybe on Christmas. I don't know. But it was coming from the North Pole because, was that a jab at the Confederates in the south during the Civil War?

Bill:

Right. Right. So, he was a political cartoonist. And so, it was a political jab at the south, the Confederate south, to say St. Nicholas is associated with the North. And prior to that, St. Nicholas came from the celestial city, new Jerusalem, heaven.

Frank:

Even Santa Claus is being politically maneuvered here. He's being exploited. Okay, go ahead.

Bill:

So, Haddon Sundblom, is an artist who developed Quaker Oats man, and Aunt Jemima, and he is hired by Coca Cola in 1930 to do a painting of St. Nicholas, Santa Claus, drinking Coke. [He] does a new picture every year for 33 years and Coca Cola pioneered mass marketing, so this is the most recognizable image. He's full grown now. He's not a little elf. He's got rosy cheeks, [unintelligible] big huggable hands, a grandfather character. But we have to realize, if you peel back in time, there really was a Saint Nicholas. He lived in Asia Minor, today that's Turkey, and he loved Jesus, and he became a Christian, and even went into the ministry and was imprisoned awaiting death from Roman Emperor Diocletian. He was led out, he preached against sexual immorality, he's been a pro-life preacher, stood up for the Trinity, confronted corrupt politicians. But above all, he was generous, and he gave to the poor, but he wanted to do it anonymously, because he wanted the credit to go to God and not to him. So, it's a fascinating story. I wrote a book, and the title of the book is, There Really is a Santa Claus - History of Saint Nicholas & Christmas Holiday Traditions. Some of the other traditions I get into is: Why December 25?

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Frank:

Yeah, why that? Start there, because a lot of people think that's in the Bible, and they think that, well, you know, Jesus really wasn't born then, so the Bible's wrong. They don't even realize it's not in the Bible. But where does this December 25...you know, I've heard the winter solstice was celebrated. Christians just kind of put that Christmas, let's call it Christmas...How did this come about, this December 25 issue?

Bill:

So, the gospel of Luke has John the Baptist's dad, Zacharias, in the temple, and the people are praying outside. The angel appears to him, says he's going to have a son, he's supposed to name him John. And there's a little line you just get past. And it says, he is of the course of Abijah. What's that? King David divided the sons of Aaron, Eleazar, and Ithamar, divided them into 24 family groups, and gave them each two turns a year at the temple to offer the incense and the family of Abijah, his turn at the temple, the descendants, is the end of September. And it was known in the church calendar, but it was confirmed when the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered. And in 1958 Israeli scholar, Shemaryahu Talmon, publishes research from the Qumran Dead Sea Scrolls parchment number 321. And he was able to reconstruct the sacerdotal rota system. What's that? That's the calendar that shows what families are supposed to be ministering at what days.

And the family of Abijah is supposed to be there on the 24th through the 30th of the eighth month, which would have worked out to the end of September. And so that's Yom Kippur. That's the Day of Atonement. And why is that important? Because it's normally around September 25. And so, if he went home and his wife Elizabeth gets pregnant around September 25, then we know when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary and by the power of Holy Spirit she conceives, and he says, your cousin Elizabeth is in her six month. Right? Mary goes to visit. And so, six months after September 25 is March 25. So, the traditional church date for the angel appearing to Mary is March 25, called the Date of the Annunciation. Well, nine months after March 25, is what December 25. And this was this was known as the church calendar, but it was confirmed after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. And in 1958, this Israeli scholar published his findings of the sacred old rota calendar, just a fascinating thing.

And then there's the Christmas tree, if we've got time for that.

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Frank:

Go ahead. Hit me with the Christmas tree. Yeah.

Bill:

So, the lights at that time first appear at Hanukkah. What's that? Jews are taken captive to Babylon, the Persian King Cyrus lets them go back, they rebuild, but then Persia is conquered by Alexander the Great, and he dies, his Empire is cut into four pieces and the general that takes Persia is Seleucus. And so, there's a Seleucus descendant who's a king and he decided he's going to just wipe out the Jews. [He] kills 80,000 of them and the Jews finally drive him out. It's called a Maccabean war. They go in around 164 BC, clean out the temple, and they're going to relight the candelabra, the menorah, but there's only enough oil for one day, but alas, eight miraculously. So, the word dedication in Hebrew is Hanukkah. And so, in John chapter 20 it says, Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Feast of Dedication. He was in there for Hanukkah. And so, this is when the lights would have been first seen at this time of the year, but then the tree.

So, Nicolas is the Greek saint and he's confronting paganism. You got Patrick, the saint to Ireland, and he's confronting pagan Druids. You have a saint from Britain, and he becomes the one to confront the Germans. And so, the Germanic tribes that came across the Roman borders worshipped Thor and that's where you get the word Thor's today. And so, those that are really stickler about not wanting to celebrate Christmas, you better not call the name Thor's day, because Thor is a pagan god. And, in fact, the Quakers refused to call it Thursday, and they call it fifth day, because they didn't want to say it was Thursday. And so, Thor was this pagan god. They also worshiped Woden who was another Germanic pagan goddess, where you get the word Wednesday. But Thor supposedly lived in a big oak tree in Geismar, Germany, and they would do human sacrifices in front of this tree. And so, this Saint, Boniface, around 788 AD, he goes to Geismar. He's also called Winfred.

So, Boniface, or Winfred, he takes a big axe, and he chops down Thor's tree. And so, then somebody says, well, you can't do that. Somebody else says, well if Thor's really god he can protect his own tree. And so, this is the beginning of the Germans becoming Christian. So, Boniface points at a little evergreen tree, because it was the night before Christmas, and he said, let this be the tree of the Christ Child. See how it points toward heaven. Its leaves are evergreen, symbolizing everlasting life. Let it shelter no deeds of blood, but life, because your

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houses are built of fir, and so forth. So, the Germans would take a little pine tree, and they would hang it upside down in their houses, and this was the symbolism that they defeated the pagan Thor and so forth. But Martin Luther is coming home around 1520, and it's a cold December sky, and the stars are twinkling, and he puts candles in the branches of the tree and says, this is like the sky above Bethlehem on the night of Christ's birth. It's just fascinating stuff but it's all in the book, *There Really is a Santa Claus*.

Frank:

Wow. And you have an entire book on this. So, if people really want to get into this, get the book by Bill Federer, *There Really is a Santa Claus - History of Saint Nicholas & Christmas Holiday Traditions*. But Bill before we go, with just about a minute or so to go, we've got to get to this question. You know, a lot of Christians say, oh, we can't celebrate Christmas because it has pagan roots. What do you say to that?

Bill:

We're celebrating the birth of Christ and Jesus came. I love the book of Mark. It says that the Son of God came not to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many. What's that? God is a just God. He has to judge every sin. It's his nature to judge sin. As a matter of fact, that's implanted in each of us so much that every NCIS episode, the first two minutes somebody is killed, you're held captive the rest of the hour knowing that the person that did it has to be judged. There's something in you that drives that, there's something in God that has to judge the sin. So, what did he do? He himself provided the lamb to take the judgment for the sin. And Jesus, the Word of God, became flesh. And he voluntarily submitted Himself to be the lamb and to take the punishment. So, God is just, that he has to judge every sin. He's love that he provided the lamb to take the judgment for this. And that's why we approach God through the lamb. So, are you good enough to go to heaven? No, you'll never be good enough. But he was good enough to pay for all your sins so your approach God through the lamb. Your debts have been paid.

Frank: And that's why we celebrate Christmas because God came into the world as a lamb. Despite the fact that some of these traditions may have been polluted a little bit with pagan ideas, what your intention is, is to bring people back to the real reason for the season. And that is Christ the lamb. Bill, it's been wonderful having you on. Thank you so much.

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Bill:

Well, thank you, Frank. And it's all in the book, There Really is a Santa Claus - History of Saint Nicholas & Christmas Holiday Traditions. And Merry Christmas to all and to all a good night.

Frank:

Merry Christmas, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you so much. I'll see you here next week. God bless you all.

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