

## Santa, Christmas Trees, and Reindeer: Pagan or Christian? |with Bill Federer

(December 22, 2023)

### FRANK:

Ladies and gentlemen, Merry Christmas. This is going to be a fun show. We've done a program like this before. It was many years ago. And we got so many great comments on it, we're doing it again. And I'm going to introduce our guest in a minute. But what we're going to talk about is, when was Jesus born? What does the Bible say? What is the real meaning of Christmas? And where do Christmas holiday traditions come from? How about St. Nicholas, Santa Claus, gift giving, presents, stockings, Christmas. You know, X-mas, Nativity scenes, the North Pole, reindeer, elves? Where does it all come from? Is it all pagan? Is there any Christian truth to any of these traditions?

Well, there's nobody in the world better to talk about, more qualified to talk about than my guest today, Bill Federer. Bill has been on the program many times, although not recently. He's written over 30 books. In fact, one of the books he's written is called, 'There Really is a Santa Claus.' And he is the most well-informed historian I know on so many issues. And so, we're just going to jump right in with the great Bill Federer. Bill, it's wonderful having you on the program. The first question is, was Jesus really born on December 25? What do we know about that?

### BILL:

So, the early Church was concerned about the date of Passover. And so, that's when they would go to the rabbis once Passover this year. As a matter of fact, the Hebrews did not celebrate birthdays, which is fairly common in Asia. But when the Greeks started converting to Christianity, they did celebrate birthdays. And around the second century is when the interest is, when was Jesus born? And we have a detective story, and it goes to the book of Luke. Luke says, in the time of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zachariah who belong to the priestly division of Abijah. Now, what is that? King David divided the Levites into 24 family groups, and Abijah is number eight.

And also, we want to make note that group number one is Jehoiarib, and that'll come in in a moment. So, we have these 24 groups, but we don't know when and how they were serving. And so, the Dead Sea Scrolls are discovered. And in 1962 in Caesarea, the Hebrew University discovers the sacerdotal system. It's the document with the 24 families. And lo and behold, each family served two weeks a year, six months apart. And the eighth and the 32nd week was the one that Abijah was serving. But we still don't know when it actually started, until we go to when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. And the records are, it was the first week of August of 70 AD.

First week of August is the ninth of Av in the Jewish calendar. And the Jerusalem Talmud said that the ninth of Av, it was Johoiarib that was on duty. And it said the Levi family that was on



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

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

duty when the Temple was destroyed was Jehoiarib of the first course. And so, if Jehoiarib is on duty the first week of August, and we know that Abijah was the eighth family group, then it would be the end of September, right? Yeah, four weeks in August, and four weeks in September. So, the last week of September is the in the month of Tishri in the Hebrew calendar. It's a very important week. The Day of Atonement is at the first of the week, and the Feast of Tabernacles is at the end of the week. And this would have been the week that Zachariah is ministering in the Temple. It says, the angel appears to him, tells him that his wife's going to conceive. He goes back home, and Elizabeth conceives.

So, the last week of September is the date that the Byzantine Rite Church celebrates the conception of John the Baptist. And the Greek Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican all celebrate June 24 as the birthday of John the Baptist. So, John the Baptist says conceived that last week of September. Now, why is this important to know? Because the book of Luke says that the angel appeared to Mary, and she conceived by the Holy Spirit. And the angel says, your cousin Elizabeth is in her sixth month. So, if Elizabeth conceives the last week of September, six months after that is the last week of March. And so, March 25, has been celebrated as the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit. It's called the Annunciation, when the angel announced to Mary.

And so, nine months after March 25, is December 25. And so, St. John Chrysostom, who was an early Church Father, counts off the months of Elizabeth's pregnancy, and then dates Mary's conception to the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, then counts off another nine months to arrive at the birthdate of Christ. And it's sort of interesting, another book in the fourth century on solstices and equinoxes says that our Lord was conceived in the month of March, March 25, which is the day of The Passion of the Lord, and of His conception. For on the day He was conceived, is the day He suffered. And so, Andrew McGowan wrote 'How December 25 Became Christmas: The Biblical Archeological Review. He says it was a common belief that the Messiah fulfilled his mission on the anniversary of its inception.

So, lo and behold, a lot of these early Church Fathers, even St. Augustine wrote in 417 AD on the Trinity, for Jesus is believed to have been conceived on the 25th of March upon which day He also suffered. So, Augustin goes on, so the womb of the Virgin in which he was conceived, where no one of mortals was begotten corresponds to the new grave in which He was buried, wherein was never man laid neither before Him or since. So, Jesus goes into the womb, March 25, and Jesus goes into the tomb on March 25. That's the traditional way of calculating it. People say well, wasn't it the Roman Saturnalia? Saturnalia was on December 22, and that was the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year.

There was no Christian writer prior to the 12th century that suggested December 25 was picked to replace the Sol Invictus, the worship of the sun. Matter of fact, many Church Fathers one was St. Hippolytus of Rome, he wrote this in 204 AD. He says, for the first advent of our Lord in the flesh when He was born in Bethlehem was December 25, a Wednesday while Augustus was in his 42nd year. So, in the year 204, you have a Church Father saying it's December 25. It was in

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
ORG**



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

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

274 that Roman Emperor Aurelian instituted the cult of Sol Invictus. And so, maybe it's the other way around. Maybe the Roman emperors picked December 25 to try to stamp out the Christian date. But one of the other things people say is, what about sheep in the field? It was wintertime.

Well Bethlehem is six miles from Jerusalem, and they needed sheep every day to sacrifice for the daily, and morning, and evening sacrifices. And lambs are often born in the winter. I went online just to double check and Westminster, Maryland in America, there's a Carroll County Farm. They have an article, 'Why Lambs Are Born in the Winter.' I have another article. It's called 'The War Horse Valley Country Farm Park in England, UK.'

And it says lambs are born 145 days about 4.5 months after the ewe falls pregnant. Lambing can start as early as December and go as late as June. And the temperature of Jerusalem is very moderate, a low of 42 in December, and the high of close to 60. So, whatever the date was, we don't want to get dogmatic because there's enough things for Christians to argue about. But there is legitimate evidence and timeline that it very well could be December 25.

**FRANK:**

I just love the way you piece that all together. It's a great detective approach you need to take to figure this out, Bill. The Bible doesn't explicitly say it. Yet, when you talk about all this other information that you piece together, you do make a great case that it really was December 25, or thereabouts. Now, when we come back from the break with the great, Bill Federer, we're going to talk about St. Nicholas, Santa Claus, gift giving, stockings, X-mas, Nativity scenes, the North Pole, reindeer, elves, the whole nine yards, ladies and gentlemen. You're not going to want to miss it. 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 back in just two minutes. Don't go anywhere.

Welcome back to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist this Christmas season. You're probably listening on the American Family Radio Network. For those of you that are, this is also a podcast. It's called I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. So, you can also listen to our midweek podcast, which is not on the American Family Radio Network. Just wherever you find podcasts, go to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist, and you will see all of the podcasts that we do, whether they're broadcast on the radio or not. My guest today is the great, Bill Federer, who is just a wonderful historian and can tell a story in order to inform you about something regarding history.

And we just in the previous segment talked about why December 25 became Christ's birthday. Even if we don't have the date precisely down, there's pretty good evidence it was about that time. Now, we want to transition and talk about St. Nicholas. Was there really a St. Nicholas? And then maybe we can get into talking about how did St. Nicholas become Santa Claus? Bill, talk about this St. Nicholas character. Where did he come from? Was he a real person? And I know you unpack that in your book, 'There Really is a Santa Claus.' But kind of give us a summary of that, would you?

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
.ORG**



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

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

**BILL:**

So, the Church was born into a one world, anti-Christian government, the Roman Empire. I mean, if you and I were going to start a group, it'd be like, give them a couple years of reprieve. No, immediately they're persecuted. Eleven of the 12 apostles are martyred. And there's three centuries of persecution. Christians are thrown to the lions. I went to church in Rome, Italy, and toured the catacombs. And for three centuries, they'd meet in these caves they dug out of the earth. Every time you met you were risking your life.

And so, it was during this time that Nicholas was born. And he is in Asia Minor. Today, that's Turkey. And the emperor is Diocletian. Diocletian lost some battles with Persia, and he asked his generals, why? And they said, well, it's your fault. You've neglected having the Roman army worship the Roman gods. So, Diocletian says, okay. Everybody in the army, worship Roman gods. Well, there's a problem. There's Christians in the military. Because the previous emperor, Galenius had been lax, been a little tolerant.

And the Christians couldn't return to worshipping the Roman gods, so they were purged. We're sort of familiar with purging the military. Once the Christians are out of the military, Diocletian decides to use the military to force the entire Roman Empire to worship the Roman gods. And he sends them province by province, arresting pastors, closing churches, burning the Scriptures, cutting out their tongues, boiling them alive. And this is the time Nicholas lived.

So, a movement swept through Christianity called pietism. Now, for those not familiar, St. Nicholas is the most popular Greek Orthodox Saint. He is to the Greek Orthodox what St. Peter is to Roman Catholics. He's sort of the founding father of the Greek Orthodox Church. There are more Greek Orthodox Churches named after Nicholas than anybody else. And the story is that this pietism movement swept through Christianity. And it was, if you really became a Christian, you would give away all your money, and live in a cave the rest of your life as a hermit, enjoying your personal relationship with Jesus.

Or you'll join a monastery and even take vows of silence, so you'll just enjoy your own personal relationship with Jesus. And so, Nicolas is in this. He gets saved. He decides to give away all his money, but he doesn't want to do it and get the credit for it. So, he decides to go into town at nighttime and throw money in the window at poor people. And he would throw it in. Maybe it landed in a shoe or a stocking that's drying by the fireplace. One story that became popular was a merchant in the town had gone bankrupt. The town is Patara, Asia Minor.

The merchant is bankrupt. The creditors were going to come and not only take his house and lands, but they would take his children, sort of sex-trafficking. And the father had three daughters. He knew if they were taken, it would be a terrible life. And so, he had an idea that he would hurry up and marry him off. But he didn't 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 money in the window, provides the dowry. The oldest daughter gets married. Big

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
.ORG**



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

with Dr. Frank Turek      PODCAST

buzz talk of the town, throws money in for the second daughter. She gets married. When he throws it in from the third, by this time the dad is expecting it. He runs outside, catches Nicholas, and Nicholas makes the father promise not to tell where the money came from because he wants the credit to go to God and not to him. That is the origin of the tradition of secret gift giving on the anniversary of Nicholas's death, which was December 6, 343. AD.

The midnight visits, the stocking by the fireplace, and so forth. And so, the three bags of money that Nicolas threw in the window, he is often depicted in church artwork as holding three bags of gold, or three gold balls. And so, Nicholas became the patron saint of pawnbrokers. A pawnbroker shop will have three gold balls hanging outside to represent the three bags of gold that Nicholas threw in the window. And they say, well, we're helping families out in their time of financial need. It's like, it's a little bit of a stretch. But whatever. [Laughter]

Anyway, so Nicholas has given away his money. He decides to join a monastery in Zion in Jerusalem and take his vows of silence. But right before, somehow the Lord tells him not to hide his light under a bushel. So, he goes back to Asia Minor. Today, that's Turkey. And he lands at this city called Myra. Today, that's Demre, Turkey. There's a lot of ruins there. And unbeknownst to him, the bishop had died. And the church leaders could not decide who the next bishop was going to be. And one had a dream that the first person to church the next day would be named Nicholas, and he was to be their bishop.

Well, Nicholas, sure enough is the first one in the door. They asked his name, and they say you're supposed to be the bishop. Well, he was not too thrilled because the Roman Emperor Diocletian was arresting bishops and killing them. You be the bishop. No, no, no. You first. You be the bishop. [Laughter] But he finally agrees. He's arrested. He's put in jail. And while he's in jail, Diocletian is struck with an intestinal disease so painful he abdicates the throne on May 1, 305 AD.

You have to appreciate this. Emperors had been declaring themselves a god. They would have the imperial cult. And they would sprinkle gold dust in their hair and demand their image be worshipped. And so, this was sort of like a god resigning when Diocletian stepped down. The next emperor was Galerius. He continues the persecution. He's struck with an intestinal disease. He dies in 311 AD, now there's no emperor. Four generals decide to fight it out. Two are defeated. It comes down to Constantine and Maxentius.

Constantine is a general in York, England. Britain had been a Roman colony since Julius Caesar 55 BC. And so, Constantine starts marching with his army toward Rome. And it's the Battle of the Milvian Bridge against Maxentius. And the day before the battle, Constantine reportedly sees the sign of Christ in the sky. And this was the first two Greek letters of the name Christ. And we abbreviate states oftentimes with two letters. Well, the Greeks abbreviated names with two letters. And Hebrew is Messiah. But in Greek, Christ is a Greek word. And so, the letter that makes the "kuh" sound is written as an X, and it is called the chi. And the letter that makes the "er" sound for Christ is written as an R, and it's called rho.

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
ORG**





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

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

So, it's called the chi rho. It's written as an X and a P. And so, supposedly, Constantine heard the words in hoc signo vinces. In this sign, you'll be invincible. So, he puts this XP, this chi rho on all of his shields and symbols. He wins and a little rabbit trail. Over the centuries, the chi rho got shortened to the chi, just the X. It was called the Christ's cross, or as we say, today, criss cross. And that's where you get X-mas. So, X is not crossing out Christ. It is the Greek letter chi that stood for Christ. And it became an oath where you would swear to tell the truth, cross my heart. What's the cross? Well, that's an X, that you were swearing before Christ. And then it became a form of a written oath.

So, you would sign your name at the Christ cross to show you were going to keep your pledge in this document. And so, today that sign is the x. And then it's on the bottom of the Valentine's, the x's and the o's. You're swearing before Christ you're going to keep your pledge to this person. And the O was just to show sincerity. Anyway, back to the story. Constantine wins the battle. And in 313 AD, he issues the Edict of Milan stopping the persecution of Christians. Nicholas is let out of jail.

Now that he's out of jail, Nicholas preaches against paganism. Nearby is the temple to Diana. It's one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, twice as big as the Parthenon, 127 huge pillars and temple prostitutes. It was the Las Vegas in the Mediterranean. The Apostle Paul preached against Diana worship in Acts 19. Nicholas preaches against this so much that the people tear the temple to Diana down.

**FRANK:**

Is this in Ephesus, Bill?

**BILL:**

Well, he was in Myra. And he tore the local temple to Diana down. And then John Chrysostom, sort of a contemporary, preaches. And that's when they tear the big one down. And so then, Nicholas preaches against exposure of unwanted infants. It was their version of abortion. The Roman practice was the mother would bear the child and lay it at the father's feet. If he picked it up and liked it, they'd keep it. But if the father did not pick it up, thought it looked unhealthy, they didn't have enough money, the mother would have to put the baby in a basket and set it out in the woods, and expose it to the elements, and let it die.

And as the Christians became more prevalent, the Roman women would put their baby in a basket and lay it on a Christians doorstep, and knock on the door, and run away. And so, the Christians were rescuing these babies. They were sort of like the pro-life movement today. Nicholas preached against exposure of unwanted infants. He preached against the Olympics. Why? Because they ran them naked. Gym is the Greek word for naked. And the Greeks were into all these naked statues. Then there's the Arian heresy.

So, first three centuries of Christianity, you didn't really live long enough to argue over doctrine. But now that Constantine stopped the persecution, a Bishop named Arius started the first

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
ORG**



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

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

heresy. He said that Jesus was a little less than God, a created being. And it's splitting, not just the Church. It's splitting the Roman Empire since Constantine had made the Christian church the de facto religion. And so, Constantine orders and pays for all the bishops to meet and settle it. It's called the Council of Nicaea. They write the Nicene Creed, and they excommunicate Arius. And then in the artwork he's like thrown in a pit when they draw the painting. And the tradition is that Nicholas was there, because Nicaea is close to Myra, and that Nicholas slapped areas across the face for starting the Arian heresy. So, Jolly old St. Nick had a little temper. You better watch out. He's coming to town.

Then the Greeks have lots of stories. Some are more believable than others. One is there was a famine. He goes down to the docks. Talks the sailors into unloading grain to feed his people, promising God would bless them. On their return trips, the sailors say what grain was left had multiplied, sort of like Elijah and the little widow with their meal barrel. And then another story is there was a storm. The sailor's fishermen could not get back to the dock. They get Nicholas. He prays. The sea becomes calm. So, he's the patron saint of sailors in addition to pawnbrokers.

And there was a corrupt governor, who was going to execute some soldiers to cover up his corruption. We're familiar with corrupt politicians, and a body count list of people suspiciously being suicided. And Nicholas hears about this execution, goes down to the square, breaks through the crowd, grabs the sword out of the executioner's hand, throws it down. And in front of everybody, by the Holy Spirit, tells what the corrupt governor was doing. And anyway, so he dies on December 6, 343 AD.

**FRANK:**

Well, we're going to talk more about St. Nick, and how he turned into Santa Claus with the great, Bill Federer. Isn't it great listening to Bill go through all this? You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist with me, Frank Turek. We'll give you Bill's website right after the break. You'll want to sign up for what he puts out every day. It's amazing. Back in two minutes.

How did St. Nicholas become Santa Claus? Where did this come from? Well, we're talking to Bill Federer. You need to go to his website. It's called AmericanMinute.com. And if you sign up for his email, as I do, you will get this kind of teaching in an email. And it's just great stuff. It has a lot of graphics in it as well. So, it's easy to follow. Bill is a wonderful historian and storyteller, as you can see.

And if you want to know about history, and you just get a little dose of this every day or every week, whenever he sends his email, you'll find it very interesting, and very helpful. And right now, we're talking about the origins of Christmas, since this is the Christmas season. And in the last segment, we talked about the real Saint Nicholas, who as you say Bill, died in 343 AD. So, that's when the real Saint Nicholas died. How did this guy become Santa Claus? And what does Santa Claus even mean?

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
.ORG**



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

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

**BILL:**

Well, Santa Claus is the Dutch pronunciation of St. Nicholas. So, St. Nicholas, Sinterklaas, Santa Claus. So, basically, we're using the Dutch pronunciation of St. Nicholas. So, he dies December 6, and the Greeks give presents on the anniversary of his death because he's generous. The emperor Justinian in the sixth century, he's the one who has the Hagia Sophia that huge church in Constantinople. He builds a church in Myra, and it's dedicated to Nicolas. And then you have Vladimir the Great of Russia. In 988 AD, he decides to get rid of his pagan Russian gods and convert to monotheism. And he sends some ambassadors to Constantinople, and they walk in the Hagia Sophia.

And they say, we thought we were walking into heaven. It's 165 feet high, 102 feet across dome, four acres of gold mosaics. And they said, we speak Greek, the language of the New Testament. Anyway, so Nicolas, becomes the patron saint of Russia because of Vladimir the Great in 988 AD. So, there's more Russian churches and czars named Nicholas. And then the Muslims invade. And so, Mohammed and his men raided caravans. And then they would raid on the Mediterranean. And in 846 AD, 11,000 Muslims invaded Rome, Italy. And they trashed the Basilica of St. Peter, and they trashed the bones of St. Peter himself. Then they go outside of Rome. Saint Paul's outside the wall, and they trashed the bones of St. Paul.

So, now we got the year 1087 and they're coming through Asia Minor turning it into Turkey. And all seven churches mentioned the book of Revelation are wiped out. Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia Laodicea. And as they're coming through, the Christians move the grave of their famous St. Nicholas over to Italy, a little town called Bari. And the Pope, Urban II dedicates the cathedral there. It's still there to this day. I just talked to Richard Harris at Charis Bible school. And he said he had traveled over there, and he went in that little church.

And so, Pope Urban II dedicates this church. And you know him because he's the one that goes to the Council of Claremont in 1095 AD and begs these European kings to send help to the Greeks. They do. It is called the First Crusade. So, in a backwards sense, Western civilization would not have had St. Nicholas traditions had it not been for Islam invading. And so, the gift giving in Italy becomes popular, associated with St. Nicholas. So much so, that St. Francis of Assisi, sort of in protest in the year 1223, creates the Nativity Scene, the Creche scene, saying the gift giving is fine. But we need to get back to the reason for the season. Jesus, the Son of God, was born in a manger.

And then you have the Reformation, 1517 Martin Luther. By this time, there is a Saint's Day for every day of the year. And churches are filled full of relics, and sepulchers, and statues, and side altars. He decides this is a distraction from Christ. And so, he ends all the saints days in Protestant countries. But the Germans like the gift giving. And 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 Christ Kindle, like kindergarten, kinder care. Kinder means child. Chris means Christ. And over the years, Chris Kindle got pronounced Kris Kringle.

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
ORG**





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

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

So, Chris Kringle is really Chris Kindle, which means the Christ Child. And my daughter worked in Germany for several years. And the area she was at, they would say, oh, the Chris Kindle is coming on December 25. And then we have another little side trail. We're all familiar with St. Patrick from Britain evangelizing Ireland, using the three leaf clover to teach the Trinity. Well, from Britain in the seven hundreds, you have St Boniface. And he goes through the woods to Germany. And he brings the Gospel to these pagan German tribes who worship Thor. And that's where you get the word Thor's Day or Thursday. And the Quakers wouldn't say Thursday because Thor was a pagan god. So, they called it fifth day.

But anyway, the pagans worshiped Thor who lived in an oak tree. And St. Boniface pulls out an axe and he chops down Thor's tree. Somebody says stop him. Somebody else says, well if Thor's really a god, he can protect his own tree. And anyway, then St. Boniface points to a little evergreen tree and says let this be the tree of the Christ Child. Let it shelter no deeds of blood. See how it points toward heaven and its leaves are evergreen. And the triangular shape of the tree he used to teach the Trinity, similar to Patrick using a three-leaf clover to teach the Trinity.

And so, in Fritzlar, Germany, there is a St. Boniface Church. And there's St. Boniface standing on the stump of an oak tree with a big axe and holding a church in his other hand because he brought the Christian faith to the Germans. So, the evergreen tree is symbolic of Germans becoming Christians. And the lights on the tree, that could have come from Hanukkah. Because by this time, there's like 17 centuries of the Hebrews, the Israelites putting menorahs in their windows to celebrate driving out the Assyrians there.

And so, the story is that Martin Luther or put the candles in the evergreen tree in his home and told his children, this is like the sky above Bethlehem on the night of Christ's birth. And then, so we have St. Francis, we have Martin Luther, and then we have England. And Henry VIII is Catholic. And then he wants to have another wife. And the Pope won't recognize his divorce. And so, he decides to make himself his own pope. He goes on to have six wives. He brings the Reformation there, not because of a spiritual experience like Martin Luther. He just wanted another wife. And rather than refocusing back on the Christ Child, Henry VIII brings back an old Roman holiday, Saturnalia.

You have to remember, Britain used to be a Roman colony from 55 BC. And the Romans had the god of Saturn, who was their god of feasting, and plenty, and merriment, and the party. If you ever saw 'The Christmas Carol' with Charles Dickens, there's the spirit of Christmas present. And he's this big guy with robes, a wreath in his hair, a goblet of wine, the happy party guy. And you're looking at him, asking yourself, who is this guy? He sort of looks like Santa Claus. But he also sort of looks like some Roman god. Well, that was Saturn. But they Christianized him and called him Father Christmas. They couldn't call him St. Nicholas, because saints were outlawed because of the Reformation.

Christmas in England during Henry VIII became a party time, with drinking, and carousing, and gaming, and lewd parties, and drunken. And so, the Puritans. People forget Mardi Gras used to

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
.ORG**



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

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

be a religious day. It was the day before Lent when you would fast 40 days before Easter and celebrate the Resurrection. Now it's a lewd party in New Orleans. That's sort of what happened with Christmas in England under Henry VIII. And so, when the Puritans began to take over, they outlawed Christmas. Cotton Mathur, a Puritan leader said on December 25, 1712, can you and your conscience think that our Holy Savior is honored by mad mirth, long eating, hard drinking, lewd gaming, rude reveling, a mask fit for none other than a Saturn, or a Bacchus, or a night of Mohammed in Ramadan? You cannot possibly think so. That is the birth of our Savior, for which we owe our high praises. We take time to please the hellish legions to do actions that have much more of Hell than of Heaven in them.

And so, the Puritans were so strict, they tore down Shakespeare's Globe Theatre. They thought he was taking God's name in vain in his plays, and it was dens of iniquity in these theaters. And so, the Pilgrims branched off of the Puritans, and they settled Massachusetts. And the captain of the Mayflower writes in his ship's log December 25, 1620, at Anchor Plymouth Harbor, Christmas Day, but not observed by these colonists, they being opposed to all saints days, etc. A large party went ashore to fell timber, began building the first building. And William Bradford, the governor of the Pilgrims writes in his Plymouth Plantation that a second boatload of pilgrims came over in 1621.

One more incident rather amusing on Christmas Day. The governor called the people out to work as usual, but most of the new company excused themselves and said it went against their consciences to work on that day. So, the governor told them that if they made it a matter of conscience, he would spare them until they became better informed. So, he went with the rest to work. And on returning at work at noon, he found them playing in the street with pitching the bar and stool ball and such like sports. So, the governor went, took away their games, and told them it went against his conscience, that they should play while others work. If they made keeping the day a matter of devotion, let them remain in their houses. But there shall be no gaming and reveling in the streets.

And so, in 1659, the Puritans in New England had a five-shilling fine for anybody caught celebrating Christmas. Whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas, either by forbearing, labor, feasting, or any other way, shall pay for each offense a five-shilling fine. So, where the Pilgrims, Puritans, and most Presbyterians did not celebrate Christmas, others did. The German French but especially the Dutch. And so, let's take apart the Dutch. So, there's the Catholic saints and Peter's at the gates of heaven. Well, the Dutch do a take on the book Revelation, where Jesus will return to 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, so he will be one of those riding a white horse. But he's so special to the Dutch, he gets to come back once a year for a little mini judgment, a little checkup on the kids to see who's on the right track, see who's naughty and who's nice. And so, to this day in Holland, they have St. Nicholas, Sinterklaas, coming once a year dressed as a bishop riding a white horse to do his judgment checkup with the kids. And there's pictures of him holding the

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
ORG**



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

with Dr. Frank Turek      PODCAST

book and the little kids are looking pretty serious. But over the years, the Lamb's Book of Life and the Book of Works turns into the book of the naughty and the nice. And the angels turned into elves. And in Norway, they didn't have horses so he's riding a reindeer. And saints come from where? Heaven, the celestial city, the New Jerusalem. Well, that turned into the North Pole.

So, you can sort of see where things start to diverge from their scriptural beginning. And so, one interesting thing that the Dutch add on is Santa's helper. His name is Zwarte Piet. He's a Moor; he's a Muslim. And they tell the kids, if you're good, St. Nicholas will give you a present. If you're naughty, his little helper Zwarte Piet will put you in a gummy sack, take you back to Spain, and sell you into Muslim slavery. Well often little kids are crying when we told them that Santa Clause is coming.

**FRANK:**

We've got a lot more with Bill Federer. This is fascinating stuff, the origins of Christmas traditions. It's no wonder Jesus said, you nullify the Word of God on account of your traditions. Much more. You're listening to I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist. With me, Frank Turek. Back in two.

What are the origins of Christmas traditions? The great Bill Federer has been taking us through the entire story. We're up to about the 1700's. And we're going to take it to modern day here in just a minute. But before we do, I want to thank all of you who have supported CrossExamined this year and over the years. As you know, we're about 93% donor funded. Everything you see that we do, 93%, you are actually behind. So, thank you for partnering with us. And any money you give here at the end of the year, as you do throughout the year, is going 100% to ministry, 0% to buildings. We have no buildings. We all work out of our homes. We're very frugal. And we get a lot out of the money that you provide to us. So, thank you so much as you come up to the end of the year considering CrossExamined.org.

Also want to mention, we always have new courses, new online courses starting in January. Go to CrossExamined.org. Click on Online Courses. You will see those courses there. Start the year out right by learning more about Jesus, more about theology, more about apologetics, more about philosophy, so you can be a better ambassador for him. Now, back to Bill Federer. His book, 'There Really is a Santa Claus.' His website, AmericanMinute.com He's a great guest. I just give him one question and he takes off and tells a story. Alright, Bill, what happened from about 1700 to today? What are those Christmas traditions? Take it away, sir.

**BILL:**

Well, what we have in America is basically borrowed from the Dutch. And the Dutch pronounce St. Nicholas, St. Nick Claus. And I was sharing where they tell the kids if you're good, Santa Claus will give you a present. If you're naughty, his little helper Zwarte Piet will put you in a gunny sack, take you back to Spain, and sell you into Muslim slavery. People forget the Muslims controlled Spain for seven centuries and enslaved millions of Europeans. There were whole

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
ORG**



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

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

Catholic orders in Europe through the Middle Ages called the Trinitarians. And they would ransom back your friend from slavery. And so, I was doing a call-in, and somebody said yeah. I was raised in Holland. And in our neighborhood, the night before St. Nicholas visited, all the little boys would go to sleep 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. I'd love to have tormented my little brothers with that one.

But the largest cathedral in Amsterdam is the Basilica van de Heilige Nicolaas. The Basilica Holy Nicholas, St. Nicholas. So, in 1624, the Dutch settled New Amsterdam, which becomes New York, and they have a church they start in 1628. And it's called the St. Nicholas Dutch Reformed Church. It's the first church that the Dutch built. And it's in Battery Park, New York where it was. And it went on to become the biggest church in America. It's called the big Protestant cathedral. And it was the longest continuous church congregation in America. And it was so big, Teddy Roosevelt went there, the 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue in New York.

And then as the city became more of a financial district, the church membership dwindled, and the church elders sold it to Sinclair Oil Company, who demolished it and built an oil building. And the remaining members of the congregation joined the Marble Collegiate Church, Dutch Reformed Church. And over the years ago, Vincent Peale, Norman Vincent Peale, became the pastor. And many famous people went there, including Donald Trump. But New York is where a lot of the changes happen from the St. Nicholas to the Santa Claus.

So, first you have Washington Irving. And he writes these fictitious history books, like 'Rip Van Winkle', 'Legend of Sleepy Hollow,' sort of like Paul Bunyan's 'Blue Box.' He can't tell history, but he'd mix in fanciful stories. He invented the name Gotham for New York City. And so, in 1809, he writes Diedrich Knickerbocker. By the way, Knickerbocker was a made up name. But it was so popular, you have the New York Knick's basketball team, the Knickerbocker. Diedrich Knickerbocker's, 'A History of New York from the Beginning of the New World to the end of the Dutch dynasty.

And in there, he describes St. Nicholas no longer dressed as a bishop, but dressed in a typical Dutch outfit of long trunk hose, leather boots, leather belt, stocking hat. But he describes him in the book, St. Nicholas rode over the housetops, drawing forth magnificent presents, dropping them down the chimneys of his favorites. Now, he visits but one night a year. He rattles down the chimneys, confining his presence to children. The stockings found mysteriously filled in the morning. And so, laying his finger beside his nose gave the significant look. Then mounting his wagon, he returned over the treetops and disappeared. And so, that's New York.

And then in New York, Clement Moore in 1823. He's a Hebrew professor at the Episcopal Seminary. As a matter of fact, his family donated the land for the Episcopal Seminary. And there is a park in New York at 10th Avenue and 22nd Street called the Clement Moore Park. And so, he writes a poem for his children in 1823 called 'A Visit from St. Nicholas', and we've all heard it. It goes, the night before Christmas and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, not

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
.ORG**





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

with Dr. Frank Turek

PODCAST

even a mouse. The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, in hopes that St. Nicholas would soon be there. And what to my wondering eye should appear, but a miniature sleigh, and a tiny reindeer, and a little old driver so lively and quick. I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

And so, he's still St. Nicholas. But he's dressed in fir from his head to his foot. Closed tarnish with ashes and soot. And he's not dressed as a bishop anymore. He has a stump of a pipe. He'll tighten his teeth. Smoking and circled his head like a wreath. It's like, when did he take up tobacco? [Laughter] And then it says, a chubby plump, right jolly old elf. I laughed when I saw him in spite of myself. So, now he's shrunk in size, and he's an elf. And then we fast forward to the Civil War. And you have Harper's Weekly magazine.

And an illustrator, Thomas Nast, you know him because he invented the Republican elephant and Democrat mule. And Thomas Nast does a cover of the magazine of St. Nicholas, Santa Claus, speaking to the Union troops. He's giving out toys, and there's kids there playing with the toys. And in the background is a North Pole sign. And this was actually a political jab at the south to say St. Nicholas belongs to the north. And then he does an illustrated version. This is the first time he's painted red.

And then you have Coca Cola. And they hire Haddon Sundblom, an artist famous for creating the Quaker Oats man and Aunt Jemima syrup. And Haddon Sundblom does a painting of St. Nicholas, Santa Claus, drinking Coke. Now, Coca-Cola pioneered mass marketing. It is the best known trademark named in the world. And for the next 33 years Haddon Sundblom is doing these paintings. It spread around the world, and so this is the image we have today. He's full-grown size again. He's a nice huggable grandfather, rosy cheeks.

But we have to remind ourselves that if you peel back everything that's been added on, underneath it all, was a real man who loved Jesus in the third century. And he went into the ministry became a bishop, and he was imprisoned under the government, under the Roman Empire. And he gets out, and he preaches against the sexual immorality of Diana worship. Today he'd be preaching against all this alternative sexual agenda stuff. He spoke out against exposure of unwanted infants. He would have been a pro-life speaker today. He confronts these corrupt politicians that are wanting to execute people, and he stood up for the doctrine of the Trinity at the Council of Nicaea.

But most of all, we remember him because he was generous and wanted to give away his money to help the poor, but he did it anonymously so the credit would go to God and not to him. So, just a fascinating story. And it's again, a lot easier to redeem his story and say that he was a generous Christian person, than trying to tell the kids that Santa is Satan. See, you can change the letters around. Little kids are like, yeah, but look at my neighbors. They're getting presents.

**FRANK:**

Ladies and gentlemen, all this is in Bill's book called, 'There Really is a Santa Claus.' And you want to sign up for his email. It's called AmericanMinute.com. That's his website. You can go

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
.ORG**





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

with Dr. Frank Turek      PODCAST

there and sign up. If see his bio, he's spoken all over the world in so many different venues. And as you can see, he's just an amazing historian. Bill, before we go, I do want to ask your opinion. And this is just an opinion. You know, Christians have different views on this. What is your view of telling young kids that there is a Santa Claus who literally comes in a sleigh, and you know, leaves presents in the house? And then, of course, later on, you've got to say it's not really true. What do you think about that?

**BILL:**

I leave it up to each parent. We didn't. We told our kids the truth. And then my daughter, she's like, I feel cheated because I didn't get to have the fun when I was a little kid. And so, it's like, okay, okay. Just let every parent decide what they want to do. One more thing. I'd like to give the Gospel. Why did God make us in the first place? I mean, He made the entire universe, 93 billion light years and still expanding at the speed of light. But it's almost like God said, you know, been there, done that. I can make everything. I would really like someone in my image that can love me. And so, that's why He made us.

But God is a just God and He can't help it, which means He has to judge every sin. In mathematical equations, there's constants and variables. The constant in the equation of redemption is God is just, was, is, and forever will be just, which means He has to judge every sin. The variable is, who takes the judgment? You or a substitute. Jesus is our substitute. So, God is completely just. He judges every sin. But he's loving, that He provided His own Son to be the Lamb of God to take the judgment in our place. The Lamb is God's way to love you without having to judge you. So, Jesus, the Lamb of God, came.

He knew He was supposed to die on the cross and take the wrath of God. Isaiah 53 says it pleased the Lord to crush Him. And then, He rose from the dead to prove He was who He said He was. So, this way, you and I can approach this universe creating, omnipotent, all perfect, and all just God, and not have to worry about being judged. And so, that's why we celebrate Christmas, because God gave His own Son to be the Lamb. Abraham and Isaac were going to the top of Mount Moriah. And Isaac says, father, we have the wood for the sacrifice. We have the coals for the sacrifice. Where's the sacrifice? And Abraham says, son, God will provide Himself a sacrifice. And that's what happened.

Jesus, the second person in the Trinity, the only begotten Son of God, in the plan of redemption that was hidden from ages. It was a hidden plan. It says, if the princes this world had known, they never would have crucified the Lord of Glory. The Apostle Paul called it the mystery of the Gospel. In this hidden plan, Jesus, the Son of God, became man. And only as a man could God die on a cross to pay for our sins. Charles Wesley wrote the hymn, amazing love, how could it be, that thou my God should die for me? So, we can approach this perfect God, and not have to worry about being judged. And we can love Him and have Him love us back for the rest of eternity, because Jesus took the judgment that we deserve upon Himself. And then He rose from the dead to prove He was who He said He was.

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
ORG**



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

with Dr. Frank Turek    PODCAST

**FRANK:**

That's the real meaning of Christmas, Bill. I mean, you're so great at telling us about the history of how these traditions came about. But the real story of Christmas is what you just said. Ladies and gentlemen, there is hope out there. That's what Christmas is all about. God Himself came to earth to take our sin upon Himself. That's why He came. Bill, it's been wonderful having you on the show. Thank you so much.

**BILL:**

Thank you, Frank.

**FRANK:**

Bill Federer, ladies and gentlemen, AmericanMinute.com You need to check him out. Sign up for his email. Get the book, 'There Really is a Santa Claus.' And again, friends, we're at the end of the year. Thank you so much for all your support. Your donations go 100% toward ministry, 0% toward buildings. Go to [CrossExamined.org](http://CrossExamined.org). Click on Donate. Thank you so much. Lord willing, we'll see you here next week. God bless.

**CROSS  
EXAMINED  
ORG**

