

# THE PAGAN ORIGINS OF CHRISTMAS

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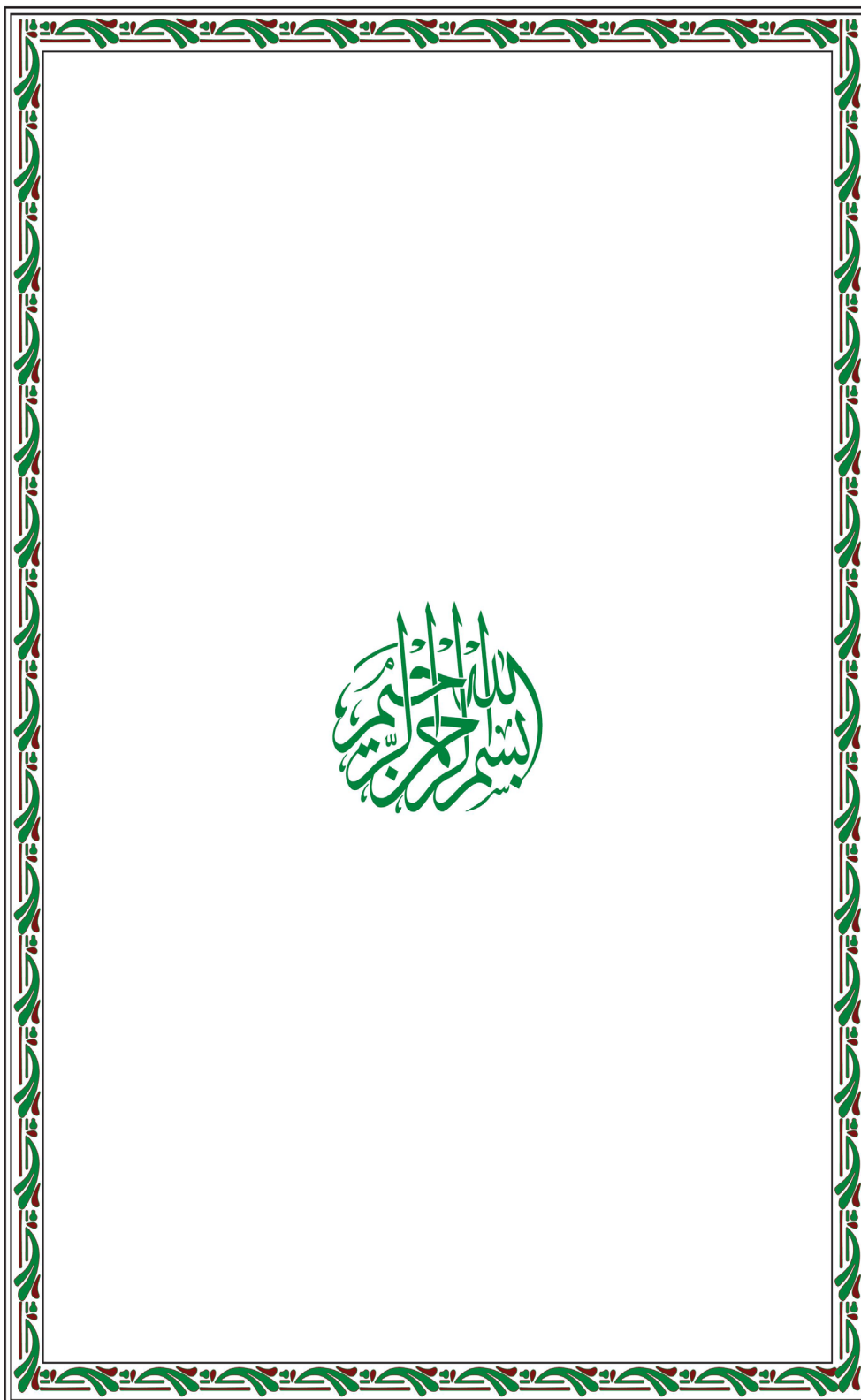
THE ISLAMIC RULING ON CELEBRATING  
**CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR**

﴿وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ  
وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا﴾



Prepared by:

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## Introduction

All praise is due to Allah, Lord of all creation. May Allah extol the Prophet in the highest company of Angels and may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, family, companions and all those who truly follow him, until the day of Judgment.

Indeed, Allah has chosen for us Islam as our religion, a religion beside which no other religion is accepted. Allah says:

{ وَمَنْ يَبْتَغِ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ دِينًا فَلَنْ يُقْبَلَ مِنْهُ وَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ }

**{And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers}¹**

The Prophet told us that some of the Muslims will indeed follow and imitate the disbelievers in their affairs as it is evident from the hadith of Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri in which he said:

**“You will certainly follow the ways of those who came before you, span by span, cubit by cubit, until even if they were to enter a lizard’s hole, you would follow them.” We said, “O Messenger of Allah, (do you mean) the Jews and Christians?” He said, “Who else?!”²**

From the affairs of the Disbelievers are celebrations like Christmas, Valentine’s day, New year and the like. These festivals are celebrated in many places worldwide so much such that even some of the Muslim communities are engaged in it in one way or the other. The matter has been made even worse by the opening up of mass communications between peoples, whereby these celebrations are now transmitted with the glamorous adornment of sound and image into the Muslim countries, via satellite TV and the World Wide Web (Internet). With their glamour, many Muslims deceived.

With this in mind, I saw it befitting to write on some of these festivals called Christmas and New year with the aim of making the Muslims aware of its pagan origins and likewise the danger of taking part in it. I acknowledge the fact that many works on this topic has already been written, however this work focuses only on the origin of Christmas and the Islamic ruling regarding it and New year in the light of the Qur’an and Sunnah and statements of our Islamic scholars.

I ask Allah to accept it and make it beneficial to the Muslims perhaps they may be steadfast upon their religion. Aameen.

**Abu Aneesa Abdul Kabir  
Friday, 24<sup>th</sup> of December 2021**

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¹ Qur’an 3:85

² Related by Bukhari and Muslim

## **The pagan origins of Christmas**

The word 'Christmas' means "the mass of Christ" which later became shortened to Christmas. According to the Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary, *Christmas is the 25<sup>th</sup> of December, the day when Christians celebrate the birth of Christ*. Christmas is a widely celebrated festival and it is commonly believed by many Christians as the day Jesus was born. However, looking back into history, we find that the birth of Jesus has nothing to do with the 25<sup>th</sup> of December. The reality is that the actual day in which Jesus was born is unknown as it is not stated in the Bible. The Catholic Encyclopedia<sup>3</sup> states: "*The actual date of the Lord's birth is unknown...*". In fact, in the Early years of Christianity there was no such thing like Christmas. Jesus never celebrated his birthday and neither did his disciples nor did the early churches celebrated it. The 11 edition of the Catholic Encyclopedia under the heading 'Christmas' states: "*Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Church...*". In the same Catholic Encyclopedia under the heading 'Natal day' the early Catholic father Origen stated: "*In the scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a banquet on his birthday. It was only sinners who made great rejoicings over the day in which there were born into this world*". In the 1946 edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, it states: "*Christmas (or the mass of Christ) was not from the earliest festivals of the Church*".

If this is the case, how then did the 25<sup>th</sup> of December became a day on which the birthday of Jesus will be celebrated?

In ancient times even before Jesus was born the pagans use to celebrate the day in which their gods were born. One of these days was the 25<sup>th</sup> of December in which their god called Mithras (the sun god) was born. The pagans used to celebrate this day in honor of this god. This celebration among many others was prevalent in Rome where some of the Christians existed. Though the Christians at that time were the minority, they however were relentless in their efforts in spreading Christianity in Rome. In 313CE the Emperor of Rome (Emperor Constantine) became a Christian. With the conversion of the emperor to Christianity, most of the teachings of the Church were adopted alongside the pagan practices. As a way of calling

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<sup>3</sup> The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume 2, page 607

the pagans to Christianity, the Christians followed them in most their practices such as festivals, days of worship and so on. Sunday, the day on which the pagans would worship one of their gods (sun god) was adopted by the church also as their day of worship. The 25<sup>th</sup> of December, the day on which the pagans would celebrate the birthday of their god (Mithras), was also adopted by the Christians as the day they would celebrate the birthday of their own god (Jesus). That is how celebrating the birthday of Jesus on the 25<sup>th</sup> of December came about. Later on, in 350CE Pope Julius 1 declared the 25<sup>th</sup> of December as the official birthday of Jesus. From this time till present many Christians celebrates this day as the birthday of Jesus.

## The Islamic ruling on Christmas and New year

Under this section I will present some of the verdicts of the Scholars on Christmas and New year

### ▪ Is it allowed for a Muslim to part in the Festivals of the Kuffar?

Shaykh ibn Baz (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “It is not permissible for a Muslim male or female to join the Christians and the Jews or other than them from the Kuffaar (disbelievers) in their festivals. Rather it is obligatory to abstain from it because whoever imitates a people is of them. The Prophet warned us from imitating them and from adopting their ways”<sup>4</sup>

Allah (سبحانه تعالى) says:

{وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا}

{And (they are) those who do not witness falsehood and if they pass by ill speech or evil play, they pass by with dignity.}<sup>5</sup>

Concerning this verse, Abul Aaliyah, Taawoos, Ibn Sireen and others (may Allah have mercy on them) said what is meant by “**falsehood**” here is “**Festivals of the polytheist**”<sup>6</sup>.

Commenting on this verse Shaykhul Islam ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said<sup>7</sup>: “As regards the festivals of the polytheists, they combine confusion, physical desires and falsehood. There is nothing in them that is of any religious benefit, and the instant gratification involved in them only ends up in pain. **Thus they are falsehood, and witnessing them means attending them.** This verse itself praises and commends (those who do not witness falsehood), which has the meaning of urging people to avoid taking part in their festivals and other kinds of falsehood. We understand that it is bad to attend their festivals because they are called 'falsehood'. It indicates that it is Haram (prohibited) to do this for many reasons, because Allah (سبحانه تعالى) has called it 'falsehood'. Allah Almighty condemns the one who speaks falsehood even if no one else is harmed by it, as in the verse forbidding Dhihaar [a form of divorce in which the man says to his wife "You are to me like the back of my mother"], where He (سبحانه تعالى) Says: "... *And indeed, they are saying an objectionable statement and a falsehood...*"<sup>8</sup> Almighty also Says: "... *So avoid the uncleanness of idols and*

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<sup>4</sup> Majmoo fataawa 6/405

<sup>5</sup> Quran 25:72

<sup>6</sup> See Tafseer ibn Katheer

<sup>7</sup> Iqtidaa' al-siraat al-Mustaqeem mukhalifat Ashaab al-Jaheem by Shaykul Islam ibn Taymiyah, page 183

<sup>8</sup> Quran 58:2

*avoid false statement...*"<sup>9</sup> So the one who says or practices falsehood is condemned in this fashion. Anas Ibn Maalik (may Allah be pleased with him) said: "The Messenger of Allah, came (to Madeenah) and they (inhabitants of Madeenah) had two days in which they would (relax and) play. He said: "What are these two days?" They said, "We used to play (on these two days) during the Jaahiliyyah (pre-Islamic period)." The Messenger of Allah, said: "Allah has given you something better instead of them: Yawmul Adh-ha ('Eidul -Adh-ha) and Yawmul Fitr ('Eidul Fitr)."<sup>10</sup> This indicates clearly that the Prophet, definitely forbade his Ummah (Muslim Nation) to celebrate the festivals of the disbelievers and he strove to wipe them (non-Islamic festivals) out by all possible means. Indeed, the Prophet (ﷺ) went to great lengths to command his Ummah to be different from the disbelievers in many issues that are permitted and in many ways of worship, lest that lead Muslims to be like them in other matters too. **This being different was to be a barrier in all aspects, because the more different you are from the people of Hell, the less likely you are to do their acts.** The Hadeeth: "Every people has its festival, and this is our festival"<sup>11</sup> implies exclusivity that every people has its own festival, as Allah Almighty says: "For every nation there is a direction to which they face (in their prayers)..."<sup>12</sup> and "... To each among you We have prescribed a law and a clear way..."<sup>13</sup>. This implies that each nation has its own ways. The letter "to" in "to each" implies exclusivity. So if the Jews have a festival and the Christians have a festival, it is just for them, and we should not have any part in it, just as we do not share their Qiblah (direction of prayer) or their laws. One of the conditions set out by 'Umar Ibn Al-Khattaab (may Allah be pleased with him) and agreed upon by the Prophet's Companions (may Allah be pleased with them) and by all the Muslim Jurists after them is that those of the People of the Book who have agreed to live under Islamic rule (Ahlul Dhimmah) should not celebrate their festivals openly in Daarul Islam (lands under Islamic rule). **If the Muslims have agreed to prevent them from celebrating openly, how could it be right for the Muslims to celebrate them?** If a Muslim celebrates them, is that not worse than if a non-Muslim does so openly? The only reason that we forbade them to celebrate their festivals openly is because of the corruption involved in them, because of the sin or symbols of sin. In either case, the Muslim is forbidden from sin or the symbols of sin. Even if there was no evil involved apart from the non-Muslim feeling encouraged to celebrate openly because of the Muslim's actions, how can a Muslim

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<sup>9</sup> Quran 22: 30

<sup>10</sup> Sahih Abu Daawood

<sup>11</sup> Bukhari and Muslim

<sup>12</sup> Quran 2: 148

<sup>13</sup> Quran 5: 48

do that? The evil involved (in their festivals) will be explained below, Allah willing. In the chapter entitled "*on the abhorrence of entering the churches of Ahlul Dhimmah on the occasion of their New Year and other celebrations*". Al-Bayhaqi (may Allah have mercy on him) reported the following Hadeeth: Umar, may Allah be pleased with him, said: **“Do not enter upon the polytheists in their churches on their feast-days, for the Wrath (of Allah) is descending upon them.”** He, may Allah be pleased with him, also said: **"Avoid the enemies of Allah on their festivals."** It was also reported that 'Abdullah Ibn 'Amr, may Allah be pleased with him, said: **“Whoever lives in the land of the non-Arabs (non-Muslims) and celebrates their New Year and their festivals, and imitates them until he dies in that state, will be gathered with them on the Day of Resurrection.”** He, may Allah be pleased with him, mentioned - and Allah knows best - the one who lives in their land, because at the time of 'Abdullah Ibn 'Amr, may Allah be pleased with him, and the other Companions, they used to forbid open celebration of non-Islamic festivals in the Muslim lands, and none of the Muslims imitated them in their festivals; that was possible only when living in the lands of the non-Muslims. Ali Ibn Abu Taalib (may Allah be pleased with him) refused to even acknowledge the name of their festivals which were exclusively theirs, so how about actually celebrating them? Ibn Al-Baghdadi said: **“It is not permitted to attend the festivals of the Christians and Jews”**. Ahmad also stated this, and his evidence for that is the verse: **"And those who do not witness falsehood..."**<sup>14</sup> [end of quote].

- **Is it allowed for a Muslim to congratulate the Christians on their Christmas celebration?**

Ibn Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Congratulating the kuffaar (disbelievers) on the rituals that belong only to them is haram by consensus like saying ‘*A happy festival to you*’ or ‘*May you enjoy your festival*’ and so on. If the one who says this has been saved from kufr (disbelieve), it is still forbidden. It is like congratulating someone for prostrating to the cross, or even worse than that. It is as great a sin as congratulating someone for drinking wine, or murdering someone, or having unlawful sexual relations, and so on. Many of those who have weak faith fall into this error without realizing the offensiveness of their actions. Whoever congratulates a person for his disobedience or bid’ah or kufr exposes himself to the wrath and anger of Allah”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Quran 25: 72

<sup>15</sup> Ahkaam Ahl al-Dhimmah, vol. 1, page 441



- **Is it allowed for a Muslim to eat from the Food prepared specifically for Christmas celebration?**

The permanent committee for scholarly research and verdicts in Saudi Arabia said: “It is not permissible for a Muslim to eat the food of Jews, Christians, and the Mushrikoon (polytheist) prepared on their feasts. It is also not permissible for Muslims to accept their gifts on their feasts, for this includes honoring them and cooperating with them in observing their rituals, promoting their Bid`ahs (innovations in religion), and sharing their happiness on the occasion of their feasts. This may lead to adopting their feasts or at least to exchanging invitations for food and exchanging presents during each other’s feasts. This could lead to Fitnah (trials) and innovations. It was authentically reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said “Whoever introduces anything into this matter of ours that is not part of it, will have it rejected.”<sup>16</sup> It is also not permissible to give them presents on their feasts<sup>17</sup>.

- **What should we say if the Christians on Christmas day or New year greets us by saying something like; happy Xmas, happy new year etc?**

Shaykh Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said<sup>18</sup>:

“If they greet us on the occasion of their festivals, we should not respond, because these are not our festivals, and because they are not festivals which are acceptable to Allah. These festivals are innovations in their religions, and even those which may have been prescribed formerly have been abrogated by the religion of Islam, with which Allah sent Muhammad (ﷺ) to the whole of mankind. Allah says: “Whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers.”<sup>19</sup>

**NB:** If we fear that it may harm our relations we can respond by saying “good morning”, “good afternoon” or something of that sort.

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<sup>16</sup> Sahih Al-Bukhari, 2697

<sup>17</sup> Al-Lajnah al-Daa’imah, 22/398.

<sup>18</sup> Majmoo’ah Fataawa wa Rasaa’il al-Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen, 3/369

<sup>19</sup> Qur’an 3:85

- **Is it allowed for a Muslim to exchange gift with the Christians and other than them from the non-Muslims on the day of their festivals?**

Abu Hafs al-Nasafi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Whoever gives a polytheist a much as an egg on the day of his festival seeking to venerate that day has committed kufr (an act of disbelief)”<sup>20</sup>

Shaykh Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said: “Muslims are forbidden to imitate the kuffaar by having parties on such occasions, or exchanging gifts, or giving out sweets or food, or taking time off work, etc., because the Prophet (ﷺ) said: **“Whoever imitates a people is one of them.”**”  
 Shaykh al-Islaam Ibn Taymiyah said in his book Iqtidaa’ al-siraat al-mustaqeem mukhaalifat ashaab al-jaheem: *“Imitating them in some of their festivals implies that one is pleased with their false beliefs and practices, and gives them the hope that they may have the opportunity to humiliate and mislead the weak.”* **Whoever does anything of this sort is a sinner, whether he does it out of politeness or to be friendly, or because he is too shy to refuse, or for whatever other reason, because this is hypocrisy in Islam, and because it makes the kuffaar feel proud of their religion**<sup>21</sup>.

Summarily, we can say celebrating Christmas and Ney year is not allowed due to the following reasons:

- 1) They are from the innovated festivals which has no basis in Islam.
- 2) A Muslim is not allowed to celebrate any festival except that which is authorized by Allah and His Messenger (ﷺ).
- 3) It is allowed in Islam to celebrate the birthday of anyone irrespective of who he is, not even the birthday of our prophet (ﷺ) or our birthdays.
- 4) On Christmas there is veneration and exaggeration in praising Jesus (may the blessings of Allah be upon him) and likewise he is glorified and worshipped. And these are the things from which we are forbidden.
- 5) It was not from the practice of the best generations of the Islamic nation (the generation of the prophets’ companions, the tabi’oon and the atbaa’u taabi’een).
- 6) Celebrating birthdays is imitating the kuffaar on affairs which are specific to them and the Prophet (ﷺ) warned from imitating them.

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<sup>20</sup> Fath al-Baari, vol.2, page 442

<sup>21</sup> Majmoo’ah Fataawa wa Rasaa’il al-Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen, 3/369

- 7) Celebrating Christmas is actually in opposition to the guidance of the Prophet (ﷺ) for verily the Prophet (ﷺ) was stern on opposing the ways of the kuffaar.
- 8) It is on these days that many are involved in sins such as adultery, fornication, gambling, drinking, smoking and the likes. And these are from the things from which we are forbidden.
- 9) The Christians say on this day Jesus was born and they say Jesus is the son of Allah. So, it is the day Allah became a father. This is indeed a great insult and vilification to Allah. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil of their false utterance.
- 10) Some of the Christians holds that Jesus is Allah. So, celebrating the day he was born means celebrating the day Allah was born. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil of their false utterance.

We ask Allah to make the Muslims feel proud of their religion, to help them adhere steadfastly to it, and to make them victorious over their enemies, for He is the Strong and Omnipotent. may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, family, companions and all those who truly follow him, until the day of Judgment.