

ELCG Cultural Evening - Europe

Why Christmas Trees are Green
and
Santa Claus is Dutch

Christmas - frequently asked questions

1. What are the names of Santa's reindeer? (888)
2. What were the names of the three Magi that visited baby Jesus in the Biblical account? (299)
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10. Where and when did the tradition of exchanging Christmas gifts start? (166)
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49. Who invented Santa?

Early Mission/Pagan Conversion

- Lot's of the Christmas tradition goes back to early Christianity during the first centuries A.D.
- Early mission often chose methods
 - of counter-movements
 - or adaption/assimilation of local tradition and habitsto facilitate spreading of the Word and converting pagans
- Numerous examples available e.g. in St. Paul's letters



Where does the name Christmas originates?

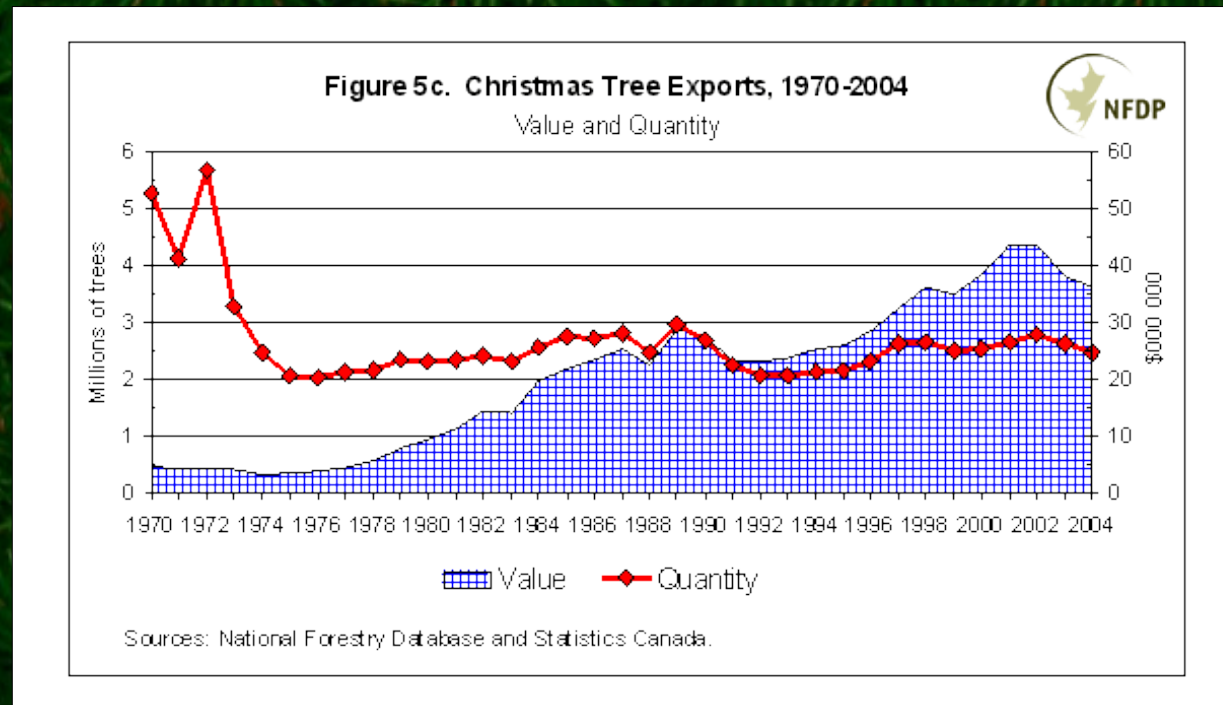
- Christmas, 'Cristes mæsse', Christ-maette, Kerst-misse = 'mass of christ'
- latin: "missa" as part of eucharist's end → "Ite, missa est" ≈ "Go, the dismissal is made" or "Go, it is done..."
- Other names:
 - 'Weihnachten' = sacred virgil,
 - 'dies natalis', Noël, Il natale, ...

Why is Christmas on the 24th/25th?

- Roman catholic competition with pagan winter solstice celebration ('Yule' / 'Saturnalia' longest night, ~21rd)

Why do people put up Christmas tree I/II

- First official mention in 16th century (Elsaß):
Law for protecting public trees against tree poachers....
- Today even with significant economical implications:



- However: Origins are much much older....

Christmas trees II/II

- Again: Christian 'pagan integration':
 - Trees as symbol of strength and life
 - 'Maien' → month 'May'
(a tradition still pursued in my village)
 - considered as auspicious during cold winter months
- became even absorbed in the Christmas pageant
 - Adam/Eve used to be played before the Bethlehem story
 - lots of other available “new” interpretations...



Who invented Santa Claus?

- Probably the Dutch
- Saint Nicholas aka. “Saint Nicholas of Myra”
4th century, Lycia (Demre, south-west Turkey)
- often depicted with long white beard and riding a white horse → Odin
- Known for his generosity towards children
 - later used to justify/explain “gifts” (beside 'magi story')
 - originally celebrated on 6th of December (Europe)
- Why Nicholas and not another Saint?
 - Patron of: **sailors, merchants**, archers, children, and students
 - Early Dutch going abroad were sailors or merchants.

