

## The History of Christmas – Pt. I



From very ancient times the Nordic races and especially the Druids celebrated the pagan festival of the winter solstice on December 22. Celebrating the rebirth of the sun and the lengthening days to come.

This festival was called Yule or “Jol”, a Nordic word meaning “festival of 12 days”. Celebrations centred around the fir tree which symbolically represented an ever-continuing cycle of life. The northern pagan tribes viewed the fir tree with great reverence. It had the ability to survive and stay green throughout the severest of winter conditions while giving shelter, timber and many essences used for healing. Fir logs burned brightly and gave off great warmth.



It was believed that fire kept the devil away and it symbolizing warmth and light. Giant Yule logs of fir or oak were carried to the home amid great singing, dancing and revelry. The log was lit with a brand from the previous year’s log and was dedicated to the honour of Thor. The log was kept burning for the entire 12 day festival. If it were to go out this would have been very bad luck.

Decorations made of straw and corn to adorn the house and were placed on the front door. They were meant to please the corn and wheat spirits to insure a good harvest later in the year. Sacred fir boughs decorated the house in sprigs, garlands and wreaths as a symbol of survival and renewed life.

Holly, Ivy, yew, cherry laurel and mistletoe all carried immense spiritual significance so were incorporated with the fir boughs in the decorating scheme. A wreath always adorned the front door as a sign of welcome and good luck for the coming growing season.



The circular wreath represented the continuing, eternal circle of life. Usually made of willow, symbolizing grace and flexibility, it was adorned with all the other symbols of life: fir, holly, pine cones, mistletoe, etc.

The tree itself was decorated with similar symbols. Small willow wreaths adorned with berries, pine cones, apples, nuts and other fruits, small cakes and shapes cut out of bread, bird feathers, sprigs of holly, wintergreen, and mistletoe. The Yule festival spread with the advance of the Norms through much of Europe but remain unchanged for many centuries.

Further south the Romans also celebrated a winter solstice festival. This was the festival of Saturnalia. Saturn was the god of agriculture. The rebirth of the sun was extremely important and represented the beginning of the new growing season. Saturnalia began Dec 17th with religious rites lasting 7 days.