

Food For Thought

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WHY CHRISTMAS COMES IN WINTER

DATE LOST IN DIM PAST

Time of Birth of Christ Various Observed by Early Church; Solstice Is Present Basis

Prof. Edmund D. Soper of the history of religion department of Northwestern university last week answered the moot question "Why Does Christmas Come in Winter?" Addressing a vast invisible audience over the Chicago Daily News, radio, WMAQ, Soper referred to the haze enveloping the historical date of the birth of Jesus, the complexities of the various systems of calendar computation and then gave his reasons for approving of December 25th as Christmas day.

Information Indefinite
"The gospels do not give us enough information to fix the date with certainty," said the educator. "As a result, a number of dates were chosen in the early church as the anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ. Among them were March 25 or 28, April 19 or 20, November 18, December 26 and January 6. The last two were the chief rivals, January 6 being retained to this day as Christmas day in the Armenian church. If, then, the date was not definitely known, what reasons were given for the choice of Dec. 25? One method was based on a so-called plan of the ages which is as uninteresting as it is useless. One writer works it out on the theory that 'the first day of creation was at the vernal equinox when everything breaks into life,' and so on more elaborately but to no purpose.

Reasoning Followed
"If the gospels do not furnish sufficient evidence to fix the day of the nativity with any assurance and if, as we have seen, speculation has no firm foundation on which to build, what else is left? Only one avenue of approach seems to have been left and that the one which was consciously adopted which may be spoken of as the solar argument. This means that Christmas day should be placed at the time of the winter solstice, just at the period when the days are shortest and the nights longest, when the sun has travelled to its farthest limit south and stops, and begins to travel north again until it reaches its other limit at the summer solstice in June.

Difficult to Appreciate
"It is a little difficult for us to appreciate this in this day when we are able to turn the night into day by the use of electricity. All we have to do is to push a button in the wall and the whole room is flooded with light, but it was very different with our forefathers who did not even have kerosene, whose tallow dips and candles often did little more than punctuate the gloom. The coming of darkness was a solemn, serious affair. How difficult for them before the day of Copernicus and Galileo to know what to make of the shortening days of the autumn, the sun sinking down beyond the horizon earlier and earlier and ever further toward the south! Would it ever turn north again, and what if it should not?"

Season Appropriate
"Finally, it stopped and they could discover now that it began to climb the sky. They rejoiced, for they could feel assured that spring would come again, the summer and the flowers, and then, the harvest. Is it not fitting that Christmas day should be placed just at this time? The coming of Jesus Christ has meant a new day for the whole world. It was a new beginning. I, for one, am glad that Christmas does come in the winter because then it is cold and many people are needy whom we can help. The very spirit of Christmas is the spirit of giving and the winter days furnish us many opportunities for a display of unselfishness. We give to our loved ones and friends but there is also the opportunity to give to those whose Christmas would be cheerless were it not for the cheer we bring."

WHAT "STATION" IS IN PHONE PARLANCE

In telephone parlance every telephone instrument is a station, so that when the statement is made that there are now 15,600,000 telephone stations in the Bell system, it means that there are that many telephone instruments in actual use in the United States, Bell-owned or connected with the system.

Telephone subscribers, however, are sometimes confused by the terms station-to-station in placing long distance telephone calls. An amusing instance of this is cited recently from Des Moines. A party in that city called the rate clerk and requested the rate to Parker's Prairie, Minnesota. After being told that the station-to-station rate was \$2.15 for three minutes the subscriber said, "Thank you", and hung up. Five minutes later the same person called the rate clerk again and wanted to know how many stations there were between Des Moines and Parker's Prairie. He was trying to figure how much the call would cost him.

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What they say in the schools of the North Shore has greater effect in keeping your children away from danger than you perhaps realize.

Hundreds of these safety talks are given each year, under the management of the North Shore Line Safety Engineer. Last year every public and parochial school on the North Shore was visited. In addition to this work among the school children, the North Shore Line has established Safety Councils in various communities, and posted thousands of safety posters.

The enlightened spirit of public service of the North Shore Line has often been made the subject of comment. Spreading the gospel of safety to your children is one example.

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