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Why December 25? Don't Believe What You've Heard

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Gene Edward Veith, *World Magazine's* indispensable culture editor, sets the record straight on December 25 in the magazine's [December 10 issue](#).

According to conventional wisdom, Christmas had its origin in a pagan winter solstice festival, which the church co-opted to promote the new religion. In doing so, many of the old pagan customs crept into the Christian celebration. But this view is apparently a historical myth—like the stories of a church council debating how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, or that medieval folks believed the earth is flat—often repeated, even in classrooms, but not true.

Veith bases much of his column on an article by William J. Tighe published in the [December 2003](#) issue of *Touchstone* magazine. In “[Calculating Christmas](#),” Tighe argued that “December 25th as the date of the Christ’s birth appears to owe nothing whatsoever to pagan influences upon the practice of the Church during or after Constantine’s time. It is wholly unlikely to have been the actual date of Christ’s birth, but it arose entirely from the efforts of early Latin Christians to determine the historical date of Christ’s death.”

Further: It is true that the first evidence of Christians celebrating December 25th as the date of the Lord’s nativity comes from Rome some years after Aurelian, in A.D. 336, but there is evidence from both the Greek East and the Latin West that Christians attempted to figure out the date of Christ’s birth long before they began to celebrate it liturgically, even in the second and third centuries. The evidence indicates, in fact, that the attribution of the date of December 25th was a by-product of attempts to determine when to celebrate his death and resurrection.

Tighe offers a very detailed argument from the historical data, and Veith adds his own insights. Keep these articles at hand in order to answer those who fall back on the argument that the date of Christmas is based on pagan mythology.

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