

SMITH RODGERS & STRICKLAND
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MERRY CHRISTMAS!
FROM KEVIN, GREG, RALPH, ALAN
AND BRIAN SAYS, ME, TOO!



Of the world's three major religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (founded in that chronological order), two have major celebrations in the month of December every year.

On occasion all three have a major celebration in December but Ramadan, the Islamic holy month, moves about the calendar and occurred this year from August 21st through September 19thth. Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic year.

So, Kevin, you may ask (and you may), why does Ramadan move around the calendar so much? Simply because the Islamic calendar is a lunar calendar (based on the cycles of the moon), and months begin when the first crescent of a new moon is sighted. Since the Islamic lunar calendar year is 11 to 12 days shorter than the solar year (our year, using the Gregorian calendar is based on our planet's trip around the sun), Ramadan migrates throughout the seasons. The Islamic day starts after sunset, actually.

Here's a thought from Ralph– the Gregorian calendar, now in use, is a reformed Julian calendar according to which the ordinary year consists of 365 days, and a leap year of 366 days occurs in every year whose number is exactly divisible by 4 except centenary years whose numbers are not exactly divisible by 400, as 1700, 1800, and 1900. Got that? Good – there is a test on January 2. Or maybe the 3rd – who can be certain?

The solar calendar now in use throughout most of the world was sponsored by Pope Gregory XIII (13th) in 1582

as a corrected version of the Julian calendar. How did he fully correct the Julian calendar? Among other more complex actions, Pope Gregory XIII simply decreed that the day after October 4, 1582 would be October 15, 1582. BAM! And if I, Ralph, may borrow a phrase from the Egyptian pharaohs, (and I may), “So let it be decreed; so let it be done.” And it was.

Now, our Jewish friends celebrate Hanukkah in December, an eight day celebration that began this year at sunset on December 11th. Hanukkah is The Festival of Lights and celebrates the victory of a courageous group of Jews, led by the Macabees, over the Greeks in 165 BC.

[An aside – in the Catholic Bible there are two books in the Old Testament, First and Second Macabees that tell this story. If you wish to read those two books, and you are not Catholic, please go to www.usccb.org where you will find The New American Bible online with a Table of Contents of the books of the New and the Old Testaments listed in alphabetical order, including both books of the Macabees.]

The Macabees entered Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem which had been defiled by the Greeks and purified and rededicated it. Only a one day’s supply of consecrated olive oil could be found but it miraculously lit the Menorah (a candelabrum) for eight days in the Temple, giving the Jews a week to press and consecrate virgin olive oil. So now that miracle is celebrated by Jews in December each year as an eight day celebration and

among other observances gifts are given. They also light a Menorah at home after sunset each day.

We suspect everybody pretty much knows why Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25th. The name Christmas comes from the Catholic Church's celebration of Christ's Mass on December 25th. And Christ's Mass became Christmas - Greg supposes because it was easier to say. Remember: The Shire's Reeve became Sheriff in medieval England.

Note that both Islam and Judaism begin the day at sunset and not sunrise, according to Alan. As a matter of fact, the Catholic Church, incorporating so much of the ancient Roman way of governmental life, begins its religious observations by a celebration (a Vigil Mass) on the evening before the day of the feast. That is why there is so much traditional religious importance for Christmas Eve. Christmas day is a Holy Day of Obligation for Catholics, meaning that they are obligated to celebrate Mass that day. And the word "holiday" is really a "holy day" secularized, if we may believe Brian's research. And so we can.

And you know, we aren't even certain of the day of Jesus' birth but traditionally it has been celebrated December 25th. If you see Christmas referred to as Xmas your feelings might be hurt if you are Christian. But it is merely a very legitimate abbreviation. Here is why according to Ralph.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek and not Hebrew or Latin. If you look at the Greek alphabet

you will note that the English letter C is represented by the letter X and is pronounced as Chi or “Key.” The English letter R is represented by the letter P and is pronounced as Rho. Therefore, Christ in Greek begins with an XP or Chi Rho (“Key Row”) and XP is Christ’s monogram, an anagram, in Greek. And X alone soon came to mean Christ and Xmas was Christ’s Mass and so there is no dishonor there.



To the left is a picture of the Chi Rho symbol for Christ. Often you see the Greek letter Alpha for A on the left side of the X and the Greek letter Omega (looking like a horseshoe with feet) on the right side. Alpha is the first letter of the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last. Therefore, the letters represent “from the beginning to the end.” Hey – the first letter of the Greek alphabet is Alpha and the second letter is Beta. So? Put ‘em together and you have “alpha beta” or the English word alphabet. Neat, huh? Yes, Kevin, it is neat.

“Jesus Christ” in Greek is written as: “IHCOPYC XPICTOC” in case you were wondering. Thank you for that thought, Alan.

Interestingly enough, neither Hanukah nor Christmas are the holiest days of either religion. For Jews, that is Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It is a day set aside to atone for one’s sins against G-d during the past year (atoning for sins against another person is more difficult but can be accomplished on Yom Kippur.)

In 2010 the celebration of Yom Kippur will begin on the 17th of October. Greg knows this things, folks, and you may trust him.

For Christians the holiest day of the year is Easter Sunday. If you think Ramadan moves around the calendar, think again about Easter Sunday. The Council of Nicaea in 325AD placed Easter as a movable feast on the first Sunday following the first full moon after March 20 (which is the vernal equinox, when the sun is directly above the earth's equator.) That should make your head hurt; it does Ralph's. If he had been good with numbers he'd have been a CPA. And we still to this very day use that formula to determine Easter Sunday. Easter Sunday can thus begin as early as March 22 or as late as April 25. This year it was April 12 and in 2010 it will be April 4th. Now that you know you will have no excuse to miss an Easter service.

This date allowed pilgrims to have moonlight for traveling to the great Easter festivals of that day. In 325AD there were no streetlights; there weren't any real streets – just foot paths (except for the Roman roads from major city to major city.) Moonlight would be very important to pilgrims and prevent aimless wandering in the woods and much heartbreak.

We hope our little monograph on religious festivals will cause you to stop and think about the deep meanings these days have for a vast majority of the earth's six and a half billion individuals. We should try to both celebrate our personal beliefs and understand how meaningful festivals and celebrations of other religions

are to their believers. And that is true no matter how strange or odd or different their celebrations are or appear to be from ours.

As we go through the last few days of 2009 let us pause to be thankful for our privileges and gifts and blessings – in the United States we are so fortunate. Nobody is trying to sneak secretly (or openly, for that matter) into the former USSR and there are a plethora (a bunch) of reasons for that.

If you did not live here, in the United States, would you want to?

If you live here, in the United States, where else would you rather live?

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, we rest my case.

May God bless you and your family now and in the coming year. And may God give us all the grace to be even better stewards of the cases of victims of criminal acts in our jurisdictions than we were this year.

We are all civil servants. Be civil; serve. There you are.

Do something now to build good memories for when you are older. Do not wait for others to love you; love them first.

Pray the prayer on the next page daily throughout the Christmas season and on into next year.

The Prayer of Saint Francis

More than 100 different English versions of the text exist. The following one is Ralph's favorite.

There is no proof that the saint wrote this prayer; it is only attributed to him because it is certainly the kind of prayer a man with his sentiment and personality could write. Note that we individually are called upon to stand up to hatred by returning love, and find pardon for injury and so on.

**Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, let me grant pardon;
where there is doubt, let me increase faith;
where there is despair, let me bring hope;
where there is darkness, let me be light;
and where there is sadness, let me make joy.**

**O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;
grant that I may not so much seek to be understood,
as to understand;
grant that I may not so much seek to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.**