

Christmas Assembly





Jesus of Nazareth – d.o.b (unknown)

- There is not a single month of the year in which Jesus birth has not been celebrated by one group of Christians at some time!
- By 400 AD the Christian Church (East and West) celebrated it on 25th December



Dies Natalis Invicti - Birthday of the Unconquered Sun.



- In the northern latitudes, midwinter's day has been an important time for celebration throughout the ages.





Dies Natalis Invicti - Birthday of the Unconquered Sun.

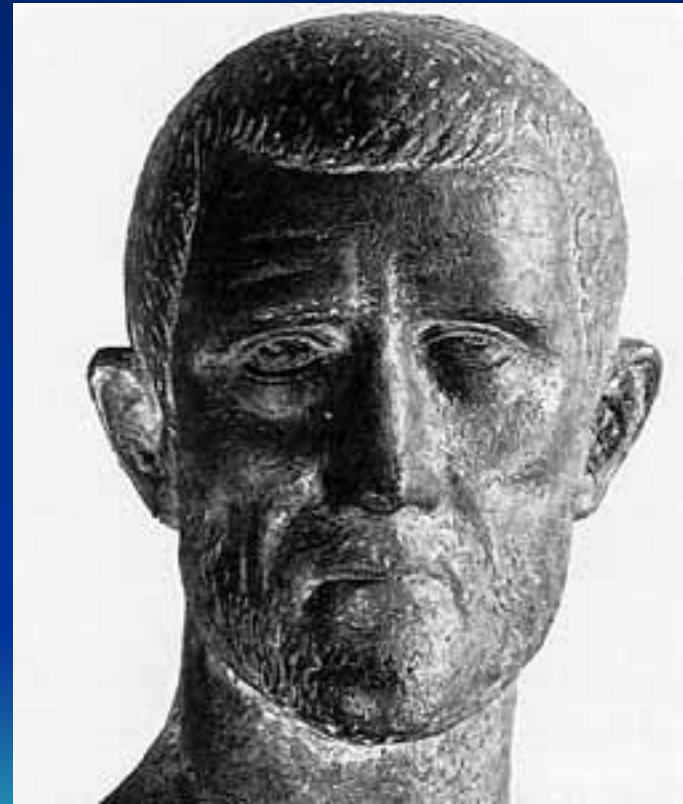
- On this shortest day of the year, the sun is at its lowest and weakest, a pivot point from which the light will grow stronger and brighter.
- This is the turning point of the year.





Dies Natalis Invicti - Birthday of the Unconquered Sun.

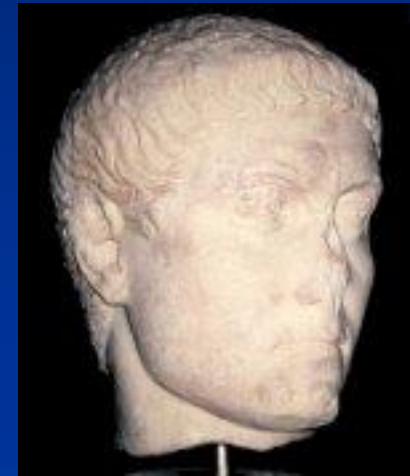
- Calendar shift have meant that December 25th no longer coincides with this shortest day
- But by order of the Emperor Aurelian (270-5), an ardent worshipper of the Syrian sun-god Baal the day was made a festival of the Roman Empire.





Dies Natalis Invicti - Birthday of the Unconquered Sun.

- Constantius II moved the Feast of Jesus' birth to coincide with it.
- The feast day came within the celebrations of Saturnalia with its feasting and exchange of presents.





Saturnalia

- Saturnalia was both a gigantic fair and a festival of the home.





Saturnalia

- Riotous merry-making took place, and the halls of houses were decked with boughs of laurel and evergreen trees.





Saturnalia

- Lamps were kept burning to ward off the spirits of darkness.





Saturnalia

- Schools were closed, the army rested, and no criminals were executed.
- Friends visited one another, bringing good-luck gifts of fruit, cakes, candles, dolls, jewellery, and incense.
- Temples were decorated with evergreens symbolizing life's continuity, and processions of people with masked or blackened faces and fantastic hats danced through the streets.





Celebration

- Before 300AD Christmas – if celebrated at all – was a very low status festival.
- By 1100 Christmas was the peak celebration of the year for all of Europe.
- During the 16th century, under the influence of the Reformation, many of the old customs were suppressed and the Church forbade processions, colourful ceremonies, and plays.





Celebration

- In 1644 in England, Parliament passed a law abolishing Christmas altogether!
- The day was to be a fast and a market day; shops were compelled to be open; plum puddings and mince pies condemned as heathen!





Celebration

- When Charles II came to the throne, many of the customs were revived, but the feasting and merrymaking were then more worldly than religious.





So what does it mean?

- Why bother celebrating Jesus birth if we don't know the correct day to do it on?
- Why celebrate it on the 25th December ?





Dies Natalis Invicti – Birthday of the Unconquered Sun.

- The Old Testament closes with a prophecy of the coming of a new day, a great Age in which righteousness will flourish. Malachi 4:2 says,
- **But for you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in its wings (or, “sun rays”).**
- The watchers of the night see the Morning Star first, followed by the first rays of the sun as dawn breaks.
- Malachi compares the coming of Christ to the dawning of a new day, which was known to the Hebrews as the Messianic, or Kingdom Age.





Jesus is the
'Sun of
Righteousness'.

- Not a light in the sky that gives warmth to the cold earth and brings forth life from it, but a *spiritual light* that gives the *warmth of love to cold hearts* and brings forth *eternal life*.





Celebrations!

- Greenery and berries – a reminder that spring is coming – a time of re-birth – a spiritual rebirth!
- John 3 v 3: In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.





Celebrations

- Gifts – we give gifts to those we love
- 1 John 4 v 9: God showed how much he loved us by sending his only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him.
- God's gift to us was Jesus





Celebrations

- In Saturnalia lamps were lit - now we have Christmas lights to remember the 'Light of the World' has come!
- Gospel of John v v 1-5:
In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.





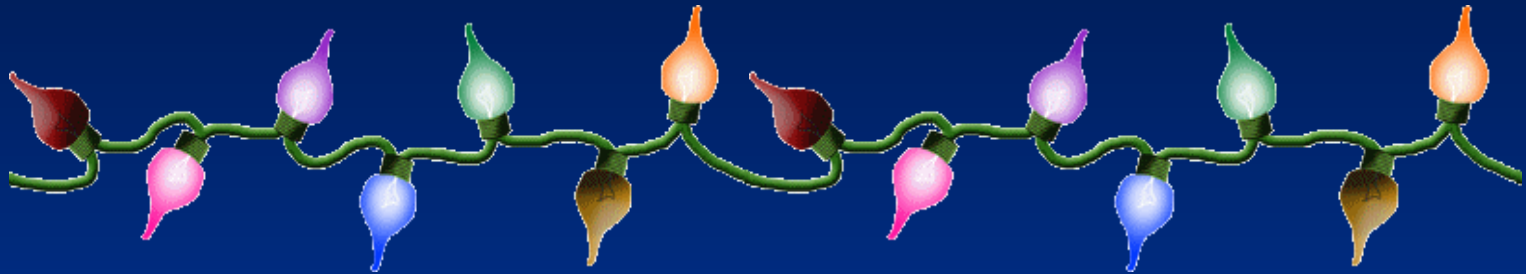
Prayer

- Lord, this Christmastime help us to look at the meaning behind the Christmas fun and festivities.

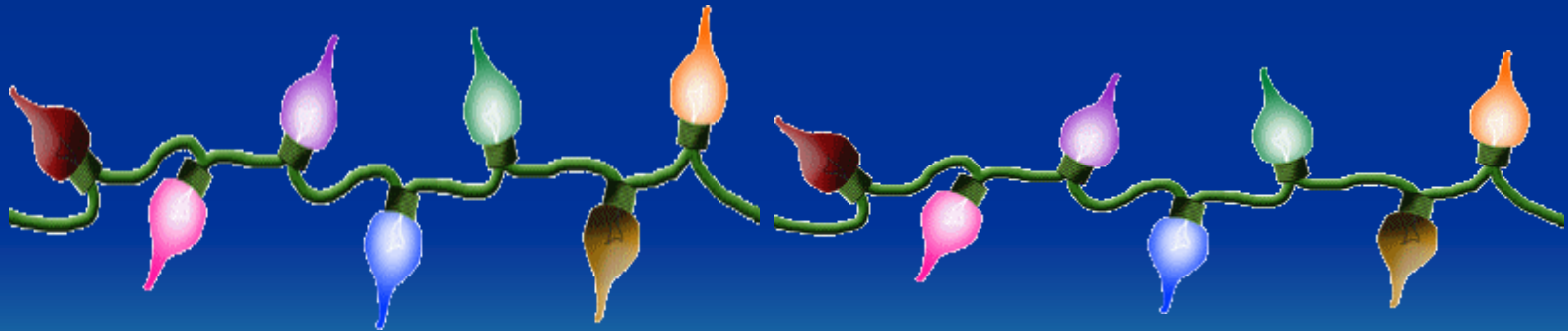




Prayer



- When we see lights may we thank you for sending your Son into the world to be a Light for us.





Prayer

- When we see greenery and berries remind us of the promise of spiritual rebirth



Prayer



- When we open our gifts may we think of your gift to us and be thankful at Christmas-time.

