

## Dean's Message for December 2012

### Christmas Celebrates a New Beginning

Christmas, the way we celebrate it, officially begins at the stroke of midnight on Dec. 25. Although we are bombarded for months with Christmas carols and advertising, the actual season of Christmas with only 12 days seems quite short in comparison. Technically, the creche's crib should stay empty until midnight on Dec. 25. In some Italian churches, a doll representing the baby Jesus is lowered from the ceiling to much cheering and applause.

But why Dec. 25? Many scholars believe that Jesus was actually born during springtime around the year 3 A.D. The answer probably has much to do with another important date: Dec. 22. This is the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year for those of us living in the northern hemisphere. The north pole is tilted its furthest -- 23.5 degrees away from the sun -- giving it the fewest hours of sunlight during the year. After the winter solstice, days begin to lengthen again until the summer solstice in June.

Every winter solstice, crowds gather in Druid costume at Stonehenge, the prehistoric monument in Wiltshire, England. It is laid out on a sight-line that points to the winter solstice sunset. The winter solstice was important to the ancients because it was when animals were slaughtered so they would not have to be fed during the winter. It was also when the majority of beer and wine had finally fermented.

To help spread Christianity, converts were allowed to keep many of their traditions that had been pagan in origin. Many of these pre-Christian traditions still survive intertwined with the ways we celebrate the Christmas season including carols, the Yule Log, candles, mistletoe, etc.

As we celebrate this season of Christmas, we truly walk in a new light as the earth and everything in it is reborn.