

Christmas should be, by tradition, on the longest night of the year, (December 21 or December 22 in some years). At least it should **not** be on December 25. According to the available information, Jesus was actually born in the spring. The census that was conducted (the tax census from Cesar Augustus, the first census made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria) that caused Mary & Joseph to go to Bethlehem was done in the spring. Accounts of shepherds watching flocks by night indicate that the sheep were having lambs. Otherwise the sheep would be put in pens & would not have to be watched. Any respectable sheep farmer can tell you that sheep have lambs in the spring. The best estimate of this census places it in the spring of the year in what we now call 7 BC. Years were not calculated as AD or BC as they are now, the dating of particular years didn't become important as part of history to people until about 700 AD.

Many astronomers believe that the "star" that appeared was actually the conjunction of two planets, Jupiter and Saturn. These two planets when next to each other are bright enough to be seen in daylight – "the star shown both night and day". The conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn first happened in May of 7 BC with two other conjunctions later that year. In addition, the conjunction happened in the constellation Taurus which would have been an important astrological sign to people of the east (the "wise men").

So why have Christmas on December 25 (or December 21)? In the early times of Christianity when it was illegal (punishable by death) to be a Christian, the Christians adopted the festival of lights, the return of the day, the day when people would make a sacrifice to the sun god to cause the length of the day to increase, as the day for Jesus' birth. In many countries the king would be converted to Christianity and would declare that Christianity would be the religion of the land. The common people would often continue to celebrate the festival of lights. The religious leaders had problems with this so they solved the problem by declaring this day to be that of the birth of Jesus. The date of Christmas on December 25 wasn't determined until about the 5th century. Even the Jewish people celebrate Hanukkah, the celebration of a military victory over the Syrians during this time of the year. Most of us know the shortest day of the year, December 21, the winter solstice, as the beginning of winter but it is also the day when the daylight hours begin to increase again. If you think we have gotten past the pagan tradition of the festival of lights I would invite you to take a drive around town one evening between Thanksgiving and Christmas and notice how we are celebrating light.

So why is Christmas on December 25 instead of on December 21? Because the Julian calendar (as in Julius Caesar) had an error of 11 minutes 10 seconds too much time in the year [now we find out what happened to our extra time :)]. The Gregorian calendar (after Pope Gregory XIII) was introduced in 1582 to correct this error with a difference that only century years that are evenly divisible by 400 (e.g. 1200, 1600, 2000) would be leap years and to keep those evenly divisible by 4,000 as normal (not leap) years. This will keep the Gregorian calendar accurate to within one day in 20,000 years. The calendar was changed so that the vernal (spring) equinox would be restored to March 21, the date it had at the time of the Council of Nicaea, AD 325 (The source of Nicene Creed).

The Gregorian calendar was adopted by the "Catholic" counties in 1582. The Gregorian calendar was adopted by England and the English colonies of America in 1752. By then the calendar had an excess of 11 days. Imagine, George Washington was really born on February 11, 1732 but because of the new calendar he "lost" 11 days when he was 20 and his birthday was changed to February 22.

Thanks to Pope Gregory, Christmas is still on December 25 and was not moved to December 21 to coincide with the beginning of winter. This gives you an extra four shopping days (or would we have moved Thanksgiving?) until Christmas.