



C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

Reflections

December 2016 – XMAS & CHRISTMAS

In 1954, C.S. Lewis published an essay titled “Xmas and Christmas: A Lost Chapter from Herodotus.” It is about certain winter customs of the islanders of Niatirb (Britain spelled backwards). An excerpt follows:

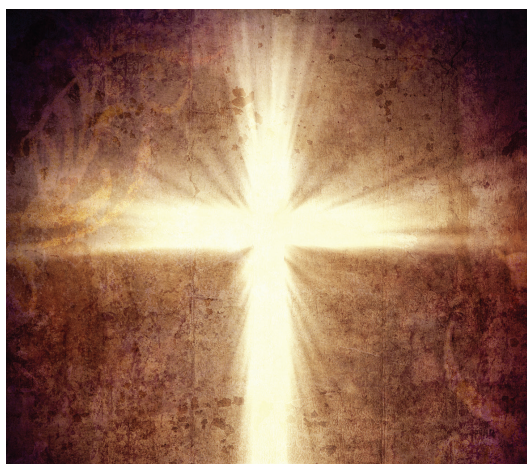
In the middle of winter when fogs and rains most abound they have a great festival which they call Exmas, and for fifty days they prepare for it in the fashion I shall describe. First of all, every citizen is obliged to send to each of his friends and relations a square piece of hard paper stamped with a picture, which in their speech is called an Exmas-card... And because all men must send these cards the market-place is filled with the crowd of those buying them, so that there is great labour and weariness...

They also send gifts to one another, suffering the same things about the gifts as about the cards, or even worse. For every citizen has to guess the value of the gift which every friend will send to him so that he may send one of equal value, whether he can afford it or not. And they buy as gifts for one another such things as no man ever bought for himself. For the sellers, understanding the custom, put forth all kinds of trumpery, and whatever, being useless and ridiculous, they have been unable to sell throughout the year they now sell as an Exmas gift...

This fifty days of preparation is called in their barbarian speech the Exmas Rush... But when the day of the festival comes, then most of the citizens, being exhausted with the Rush, lie in bed till noon. But in the evening they eat five times as much supper as on other days and, crowning themselves with crowns of paper, they become intoxicated. And on the day after Exmas they are very grave, being internally disordered by the supper and the drinking and reckoning how much they have spent on gifts and on the wine...

But the few among the Niatirbians have also a festival, separate and to themselves, called Crissmas, which is on the same day as Exmas. And those who keep Crissmas, doing the opposite to the majority of the Niatirbians, rise early on that day with shining faces and go before sunrise to certain temples where they partake of a sacred feast. And in most of the temples they set out images of a fair woman with a new-born Child on her knees and certain animals and shepherds adoring the Child...

But what Hecataeus says, that Exmas and Crissmas are the same, is not credible... [!]It is not likely that men, even being barbarians, should suffer so many and great things in honour of a god they do not believe in...¹



As we prepare for Christmas, let us avoid being distracted by the “commercial” or “cultural” Christmas around us and focus on the one thing Christmas is really about—the Incarnation of the Son of God.

“For I have come down from heaven... to do... the will of him who sent me... this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

JOHN 6:38, 40 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, “Xmas and Christmas: A Lost Chapter from Herodotus,” *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), pp. 301-303.