



Name _____

The History of Christmas

Christmas is a holiday celebrated each year on December 25th. Although it is a Christian holiday celebrating the birth of Jesus, its origins date back thousands of years ago to Scandinavia when the Norse celebrated Yule, the winter solstice, from December 21 through January. The winter solstice celebrated that the worst of winter was over and there were longer days and more sunlight. Men would bring home large logs, which they would set on fire and would decorate their homes with branches of fir trees.

In Rome Saturnalia was a holiday in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture. The week leading up to the winter solstice and continuing for a month people would eat and drink and celebrate.

In the early years of Christianity, the birth of Jesus was not celebrated and the Bible does not mention a date for his birth. Pope Julius I chose December 25. It is believed he chose this date in an effort to convert the traditions of those who celebrated Saturnalia.

The pilgrims that came to America in 1620 were very orthodox in their beliefs and as a result Christmas was not celebrated in early America and wasn't declared a federal holiday until 1870.

1. The holiday was dated back to _____ .
2. The Norse celebrated the _____ .
3. People celebrated Saturnalia by _____ .
4. Christmas wasn't declared a federal holiday until _____ .