



The Feast of Christmas

Joseph F. Kelly

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Many Christians struggle to balance the religious and secular elements of Christmas, but the history of the feast shows that this is nothing new. The religious Christmas has changed over the centuries and, contrary to many critics, is thriving today. This brief, accessible account will explain that:

The first Christians did not celebrate Christmas at all. The earliest mention of the feast occurs in the fourth century. In the Middle Ages Christmas moved into northern Europe where it became a major winter festival, competing with the pagan Yule. During the sixteenth century some Christians objected to Christmas because they claimed it had no biblical foundation. In England and New England the Puritans made it a crime to celebrate it! The modern secular Christmas arose in the nineteenth century, but the religious Christmas continued to grow in popularity and meshed well with the developing emphasis on Christmas as a day for family and friends. In today's world, rampant consumerism threatens the religious Christmas, but it continues not only to survive but to flourish, taking on new life and new forms. By tracing these and other aspects of the religious celebration of Christmas through the centuries, Joseph F. Kelly does much more than provide us with interesting facts. He reassures us that though the religious Christmas may not be in its traditional form, it is indeed alive and well, and has a bright and promising future. *Joseph F. Kelly, PhD, is professor of religious studies at John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. He is author of The Origins of Christmas, An Introduction to the New Testament for Catholics, The Collegeville Church History Timeline, The Birth of Jesus According to the Gospels, and The Ecumenical Councils of the Catholic Church, all published by Liturgical Press.*

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