

CHRISTMAS

The Church officially instituted the Feast of Christmas around the middle of the 4th century after the edict of Constantine.

St Luke in His gospel, however, places the event of Christ's birth at a **precise moment in history i.e** when Caesar Augustus was Roman emperor and (He reigned from 42BC to 14AD.) Quirinius was governor of Syria. We know Quirinius was in office between 8BC and 6BC. That would place the birth of Jesus about 6 or 7 BC

The first person to make a clear affirmation that Jesus was born on 25th December was Hippolytus of Rome in 204 AD. *In the fourth century it was assigned to this date officially by the Pope. It was on this day that ancient Rome celebrated a yearly event known as 'the festival of the Invincible Sun.' According to their calculations this was the time of the Winter Solstice - the Sun appeared at its weakest. This great source of Light and Heat seemed to be at the point of Death but then it began to revive and, as each day passed, gradually grew stronger. Hence the name, 'invincible sun'.*

As in other cases, the Catholic Church infused this Festival with a Christian significance - Christ is the **invincible Son of God** who by His coming into this world has eclipsed the Powers of Darkness.

Luke, in his Gospel, makes sure that we see the Universal significance of Christ's birth by placing it in the context of Imperial Rome and **world events** - hence the reference to 'a census of the whole world being taken'.

Caesar Augustus was the august emperor during the great *Pax Romana* but the real Prince of Peace, came into the world **practically unnoticed** and in very humble circumstances. His birth, however, would be of **cosmic** significance as

Saviour of the world. But it is ironic that the Saviour of the human race will be later disowned by the official Judaism of His day and indeed peoples in every generation. But of course to balance that there will be many who will embrace his message.

Mary and Joseph were turned away from the Inn. This was an **early indicator as** to later developments in the life of Jesus i.e. the refusal of his own people to accept his message and his ultimate rejection on the Cross. In this sense Jesus **can identify with those in our world who feel excluded**, unwanted or abandoned.

The Shepherds were barred from worship at the synagogue because they lived lives similar to vagrants. But, to their surprise they were the first to hear the Good News of Christmas from the angels. In God's Kingdom the last will be first.

*And perhaps that is a pertinent message to take away with us this evening. We put Christ back into Christmas when He is given pride of place in **our lives** and we are humble enough to accept his message and live by it. Then the light of the invincible Son of God will shine in us too.*

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