

Devotion, Week of November 30 , 2025

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

It's Advent! Black Friday came and went, and the news reports that there was unprecedented spending. I too had unprecedented spending, but it was on car maintenance. Nothing like a low tire pressure warning light when you're on I-285 to put the fear of God into you. It's been a week of clouds, drizzle, and cold, so it certainly seems that winter has come. The days are shorter. I often look out in amazement about 5:30, realizing that it is getting dark and I better go get the mail.

We know that Jesus was probably born in the spring, because the shepherds were in the fields watching their flocks by night. That meant the ewes were lambing. Why did his birthday get moved to winter? In the early days of Christianity, birthdays were not celebrated, because they were considered pagan. There was a pagan winter solstice festival, the Roman *dies natalis solis invicti* (the birthday of Mithras, the unconquered sun), celebrated on December 25. December 25 every year was considered the day with the longest night, and in Rome people celebrated the return of Mithras as the days began getting longer, symbolized by a newborn baby.

By 312, Roman Emperor Constantine I had abandoned polytheism and adopted Christianity. He canceled the holiday celebrating the "Sun God" and instead celebrated the birthday of Jesus. In 354, Pope Liberius announced December 25 as the official date to celebrate the Nativity of Jesus. And it is kept to this day.

So as we look toward the shortest day of the year, when the night is longest, we can celebrate the fact that Jesus came to us as a newborn child to bring light out of darkness. In the midst of the cold winter, there is a miracle birth to bring us hope and peace and joy and love.

Jeanne