

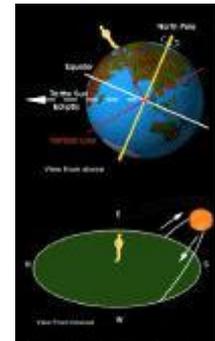
# CHRISTMAS IS AN OLD TRADITION FROM PERSIA

## Birth of Mehr/Mithra/Jesus Christ

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Here are few factual and historical aspects of the Persian Civilization that have flourished our entire world. Here the history of Christmas as a world wide celebration and tradition will be reviewed in the light of the Persian Culture and its impacts.

Those of you who are well familiar with the religions and history know that what today we call as Christmas is originally an Iranian celebration called *Yalda* (یلدا) celebrated on the Northern Hemisphere's longest night of the year, that is, on the eve of the Winter Solstice. Original celebration of Christmas has been due to birthday of Mithra/Mehr (21st Dec) celebrated in Persia and other parts of Europe by Mithraists. Also its coincidence with Jewish Hanukkah (Festival of Lights) is not just an accident. Already before the appearance of Christianity, the Romans celebrated birthday of Persian Mehr (called in English: Mithra) as Mithrakana Celebration on December 25th in honor of the birth of Mehr/Mithra.



The Winter Solstice



Persian Prophet, Zarathustra

Mithra had been worshipped by the Iranians for centuries when [Zarathustra](#) (Zoroaster in the Greek version of his name) founded the first revealed religion. Zarathustra is the most important person in the recorded history of religion, bar none. He is the first man to promulgate a divinely revealed religion. He influenced the religions of Judaism, Christianity, Mithraism, Islam, Northern (Mahayana) Buddhism, Manicheism, and the pagan Norse myths. Over half the world has accepted a significant portion of his precepts under the guise of one or another of these faiths. Holy Immortals in Zarathustrian includes Mithra/Mehr. The Mithra was known as the child of God. This identically correspondences to the concept of God and Jesus in Christianity.

In ancient Iranian beliefs, Mehr/Mithra was born of His Virgin Mother Anahita. In a temple, from 200 BCE in Iran, Anahita was referred to as "The Immaculate Virgin Mother of Lord Mithra". Mithra was known as king and the Son of God (Note: same story as Mary and Jesus). When Mithra dies, he is buried in a cave and then resurrected (رستاخیز) (compare to the Eastern tradition in Christianity). The cult of Mithraism survived the longest in Armenia, which also became the first country to embrace Christianity as state religion.

Those who have studied Iranian religions are well familiar with the story of virgins bathing in Lake Hamun (دریاچه هامون) where it was supposed that the seed of Zarathustra (زرتشت) is preserved for making the chosen virgin pregnant, who is to give birth to the Saviour, Messiah (ناجی), on the model of which the story of the virgin birth of Jesus from seed of David was constructed. Although no seed of David is in substance present at the appearance of the angel in the Annunciation scene, the Koranic commentators repeat the story that the angel blew into the sleeves of Mary's dress when she came out of the "water".



Lake of Hamoun, in south of Iran

The new testament of Bible provides no specific date for the birth of Jesus. If it occurred as the Gospel of Luke presents, as shepherds were watching over their fields by night, it probably wouldn't have taken place in December. So why do most Christians observe December 25 as Jesus' birthday? The studies on this subject have proved that in ancient Rome, as Christianity was emerging as a new faith, its calendar was influenced by Persian belief Mehr/Mithraism as a traditional Roman religion as "mystery religion".



Mithra/Mehr, Messiah from the Persian Mithraism now also standing as the Lady Liberty in New York

مهر (میترا)، مسیحای ایرانی که امروزه سمبل آزادی امریکا است.

The conception of God in Persian religions, have strongly influenced other religions. In Mithraism we notice the same and identical story of birth of Jesus, i.e. Mithra (Messiah) born from his virgin mother Anahita. Mithra became the King and child of God. This story has been identically appeared also in Christianity. The Romans were very familiar with myths about virgin births, births marked by celestial signs, gods born in humble circumstances, newborn gods barely escaping death. The Mithras cult, arriving from Persia in the first century BC and popular among the Roman soldiers, was accepted nonchalantly in that society.

In Iran the temples of Mehr/Mithra (مهر), in Parthian Mithraism, were first turned into Zarathustrian temples (Dare-e-Mehr دار مهر) during Sasanian Empire. After introduction of Islam and Christianity we notice the influence of Iranian Mehr/Mithraism by presenting many affects in church (such as baptism, christening) and in the Islamic temples (mosques) as Mehrab (*Mehr + ab*) where "ab" means "water" and Mehrab refers to the place for the Mithraism baptism! Also the name of Islamic temples namely *Mosque* comes from the Persian word of Mithraism which is Myazda-kada -> Mazget (مزگت) -> masjed (House of Communion) -> Mosques (in



Faravahar symbolising Ahuramazda and standing for: Good Thoughts, Good Words, Good Deeds  
 نندپس فروهر نمابه: پندار نیک، گفتار نیک، کردار نیک

Arabic *sajada*). Myazda-kada means the House of Mayazda=(Ahura)mazda مزدا اهورا i.e. God. Also the word "mas" in "Christmas" is rooting from the old Persian word *Miz* and *Mayazda*.

As you may know, Pope Leo in the fourth century after almost destroying the temple of Mithra (A.D. 376), in his campaign against Mithraism in Europe, proclaimed the 25th of December as Christ's birthday instead of January 6th, a date that is still celebrated by the Eastern Orthodox Church, as well as the Armenians, as the real birthday of the Jesus the Christ. Well, that is also a part of history, but does it change the facts we have in common?

Now coming to the Persian word "Yalda" in respect to "Christmas". The word *Yalda* has been by some people understood being a Syriac word. However, this is not true. The affix "da" in *Yalda* is from Persian, and is an Indo-European word meaning "day" which can not be found among Syriac words. Therefore, as a whole the word "Yalda" does not mean "birth" but it is only the prefix "Yal" which means "birth". The word "Yalda" means the *birth* of "day, light" (see more details below).

As you may know the word "Christmas" is almost in all non-English speaking countries called *Yule*, for example in most of European countries. For instance, in Finnish Christmas is called *Joulu* (pronounced *Yowlou* i.e. *Yule*), in Swedish the Christmas day is called *Juldag* pronounced *Youldag* (*Jul+dag*, where *dag* = *day*). These all have its roots in Persian tradition *Yalda* (*Yal=Yule*, *da* = *day*), which has been celebrated for several thousands of years in Iran since the birth of *Mitra/Mehr*. "Day" symbolizes light and it is the sign of God and good power against the darkness, night, that symbolizes evil. In Iran the 21<sup>st</sup> of December occurs on the first day of 10<sup>th</sup> month of Persian calendar called "DAY" (ماه دی) which is the start of *Yalda* season. This simply shows us how the Swedish world *Juldag* (=Jul, *Yule* + *Day*) and in Persian *Yalda* (=Yal+Day) are formed. In both the affix "day" comes from the name of the Persian month "DAY" (دی ماه) which in English corresponds to the word "day". Therefore literally *Yule*, *Joulu*, *Juldag* and *Yalda* means the Birth of the Day and light (Note: the name of month *DAY* دی ماه) because the longest night of the year is over on the night of 20<sup>th</sup> of December i.e. the Winter Solstice that Iranians have celebrated for several thousands years. From the first day of the Persian month "DAY" (دی ماه), the days become longer and longer and that's why it is celebrated as the birthday of light (which in old Persian is represented by *Mehr*, *Mithra/Messiah*).



Yalda table including fruits and foods espeical to Yalda season celebrated in Iran over thousands of years.  
 میز یلدا (که در در گذشته کرسی به جای آن بود)

Also the word *Sunday* in English comes from this Persian tradition (the birthday of light/Sun = Sun+DAY دی) which means the day of light, the day of sun. When we look at the traditions in Christianity, we notice that all of them, from Christmas to Eastern have their sole roots in Iranian traditions beginning from *Yalda* (*Yule-Christmas*) to *Nowruz* (*Eastern*). The birthday of *Mehr/Mithra/Messiah* on December 25th has been celebrated by Iranians as early as 5000 B.C. In Iran, *Zarathusrians* after refining and discarding some of the mythical and "heretical" aspects of *Mithraism*, retained *Jashn-e-Mehregan* and *Yalda* or "The Birth of Light/*Mehr/Mithra/Messiah* which is now also celebrated as the birthday of *Jesus* (*Christmas*) among Christians of Iran, an as *Yalda* the birthday of light (*Mehr/Mithra*) among all Iranians, no matter what religion they have.

### What About The Symbolic Aspects of Christmas/Ylue/Yalda?

Also the Christmas tree has its roots in Persian *Yalda*. What does a pine tree have to do with the birth of *Jesus*? Nothing, but it has a lot to do with Persian *Mehr/Mitra* in *Yalda/Yule*, that in a temple in *Rome* each *March 22* a pine tree would be carried and decorated with flowers and carvings.

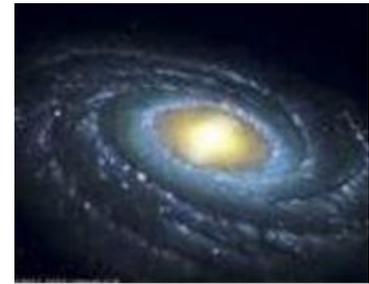


Yalda tree سرو یلدا (today's Christmas tree) in Persian capital Perspolis about 3000 years ago.  
 سرو یلدا یک پدیده ایرانیت که در سه هزار سال پیش در تخت جمشید (پارسه) زینت مباحث و اراج نهاده میشد

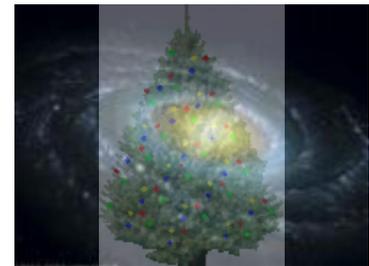
Today, even though people celebrate the Christmas every year but unfortunately nobody know why they put the Christmas tree and decorated it, and what these decorations actually mean! The Christmas tree is actually one of the holy trees held in old Persians celebrations, namely *Yalda*. Iranians celebrated *Yalda*

(Yule) and decorated an evergreen tree, the "Sarve" درخت سرو (Rocket Juniper - also known as the cypress tree). The astronomy is one of the oldest sciences in Persia.

In one aspect Persians decorated the Yalda (Yule, Christmas) tree so that it represents our solar system. On the top of the tree was the Sun (i.e. the symbol of Mehr, Mithra) and under it, around the tree, there were other decorations presenting the planets and stars (as today may in some Christmas tree decorations be seen). Persians put also two silver/golden ribbons on the tree indicating the Milky Way i.e. a galactic dust (in Persian راه شیری, in Finnish Linnunrata) that we can also somehow see as decorations in today's Christmas trees. The younger girls had their "wishes" symbolically wrapped in colorful silk cloth and hung them on the tree with lots of presents for Mitra, to answer their prayers.



راه شیری Milky Way



While the Yalda tree (Christmas tree) was a part of Yalda tradition in Iran, the practice of bringing such trees into the home in Europe only began in Germany during the reformation in the sixteenth century, with encouragement, according to legend from Martin Luther. As you may know, Luther, the famous German reformer, in the 18th century (about 1756), having learned of the Yalda "Sarve tree" (درخت سرو), introduced the Christmas tree to the Germans. As "Sarves" (سرو یلدا) were not much known in Germany, as indeed in most of Europe, the chosen tree became a genus of pine which was abundant in Europe. German Hessians brought the custom to America during the Revolution, but it did not become popular until the nineteenth century and even by 1900, only one in five U.S. families had one. The majority came to do so during the next two decades.



Yalda/Christmas tree  
سرو یلدا یک پدیده ایرانیست

Another subject in Christmas time that can be found far past in Persia is



سه اختر شناس ایرانی (مغ) در دیدار با عیسی مریم (نقاشی از استاد بهزاد)  
Three Persian Wise Men, Magis visiting Mary and Jesus baby

the *Santa Claus* which has an origin in Persia from *Yalda* and *Nowruz* celebrations.

In both *Yalda* and *Nowruz* traditions Iranians gathered together, eat together and gave gifts to each other especially to children. But how it became as a custom in Christmas in Europe and rest of the world? In respect of *Yalda/Christmas* if we go back to the birth of Jesus we can find some sign for such nice fellow (*Santa Claus*, or in Finnish *Joulupukki*) coming from Persia.

It is said that when Jesus was about to born, three Persian *Wise Men* (priests *Magi* مغ , موبد from the Zarathustrian religion which is the first religion believing in one God), predicted the born of Jesus, that according to the Persian beliefs would be the Messiah (the Mithra of the time) and will become the King of Jews and the Son of God. In Persia *Magis* (Wise Men, مغ) paid particular attention to the stars, and



Uncle Nowruz in the Persian New Year Festival بابا نوروز

gained an international reputation for astrology. These three Magis are said to have travelled from Persia to Jerusalem before Mary delivered Jesus. They told Jewish leaders that they have made observations from the stars and they believe that soon a baby will be born, the Messiah (the Mithra of the new age), that would become the king of Jews and the Son of God. On the contrary to the kindness and happiness of these noble Persians from the birth of this child, few of the Jewish Rabbis planned to kill Mary before she could deliver her baby! It is said that the just born Jesus, an infant started to talk in the hands of his mother to these Jews which made them shocked so that they left Mary and Jesus alive. However, when these three Magis came to Mary, they honored her by presenting their gifts on the honor of the birth of the Jesus (Note: Magis brought gifts for the child, Jesus – compare to Santa). This was the reason

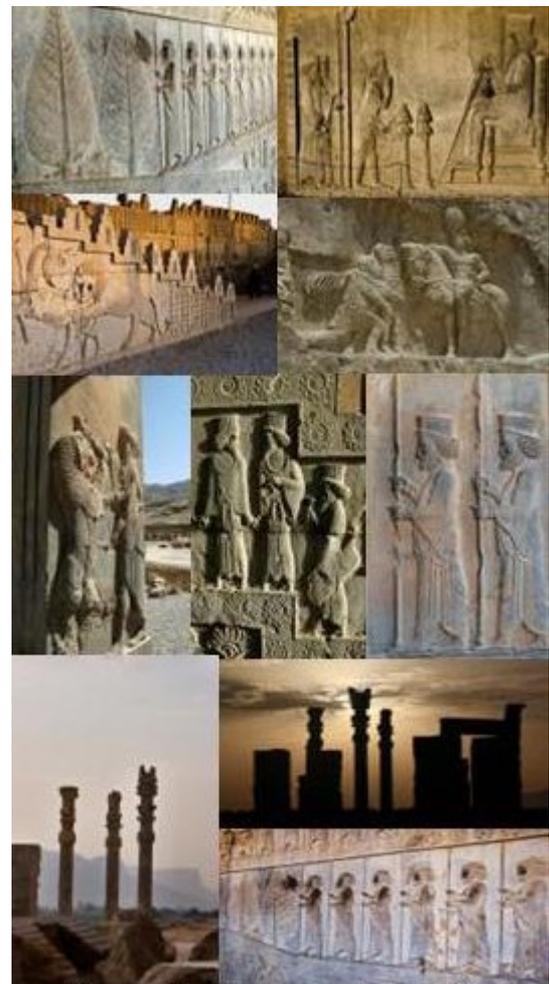


Santa Claus looking like Persian Magis

that the word "Magi" was also, later on, used in the Christian world as "Gift Bringer", a good old man who brings gifts for children in Christmas time. But in the west and after the birth of Jesus we don't see any Santa (Magi) bringing gifts for children until the recent years. But in Persia the Magi was a person who brought gifts and hope also in the beginning of Nowruz celebration. In Iran he is called "Father Nowruz, or Uncle Nowruz or Baba Nowruz" (بابا نوروز). Such a nice fellow was missing from Christmas for a long time, so that later on in Europe, Christians wanted to treat their children like Magis treated Jesus and therefore the *Baba Nowruz* or *Magi* concept was used under a new name "Santa Claus". Santa wears the same cape or robe as *Baba Nowruz* does. Now at every Christmas time a man wears on "Magi" cape and as a Yule/Yalda/Christmas father (the later *Santa Claus*, in Persian also *Baba Noel*) brings gifts for children i.e. the same Persian "gift bringer", *Magi* (مغ) or "Baba Nowruz". Note that Santa Claus wears on the same cape or robe as *Baba Nowruz* (بابا نوروز) has.

### What We Have in Common?

A lot. Even though the Mithraism as a single religion is not actively present in our today life, but almost all of its traditions and ideas are present, that are transferred via Zoroastrianism to most of the major religions and our traditions of today. It simply proves that most of our traditions have the same root and we all celebrate them. This shows us that we have a lot in common that can be seen at least in form of these common traditions no matter under the name of what religion or cult. We all, religious or not, celebrate Christmas as a celebration of light and birthday of Mehr/Mithra/Jesus since Christmas has been celebrated for thousands of years before the birthday of Jesus, having its roots in Iran, the Cradle of Civilization.



Perspolis, Iran تخت جمشید / پارسه

## The Significant Essence of the Light in Yalda/Christmas

All the above and many more of Christmas traditions are Mithraic, Zoroastrian, and originated from Iran. Professor Gary Leupp from Tufts University describes the Yalda/Christmas as follows:

"It is really wonderful from the first moments that the Sun rises on Yalda day. The Earth is really close to the Sun, as it is whizzing past the Sun at it fastest, and Yalda will be the first Longer day. And so Iranians call it the Birthday of Light, and the Three Wise Men knew, that Jesus is the personification of the birth of Light, when the planets' inclinations were such that it looked as one big bright Star over Bethlehem. Iranian Cosmologists, Astronomers, Astrologers, were responsible for creating observatories, and following the change in the amount of light every day. They created a calendar that connected the change in daylight to the seasons. Astrologically they created what is called the Horoscope. In present day Iran the calendar is an Astrological calendar. It has withstood the test of time, and the people of Iran have four celebrations to commemorate the interplay of Light and Darkness. The Yin Yang of time, to make it clear to the Chinese folk who buy all that oil from Iran, is called the [Ohrmazd-Ahriman](#) dialectic. These are the Twin Forces that show up in all realms of Life. [Cyrus the Great](#), King of Persia, followed and understood this form of reasoning, when he entered Babylon and released the Jews. The *Magis*, three [Wise Men](#) of Iran knew this reasoning, when they saw that the ancient prophecy in ancient Iranian oracles, about the coming of Jesus. [It was the Iranians that gave the honor and respect first to baby Jesus.](#)"

Lets now come to an end of this interesting subject with another wise sentence from Professor Parviz Varjavand, saying: If someone asks you "Do you know what is the reason for this season?" answer "The birth of Mehr/Mithra/Jesus and light". So Merry Yalda/Yule/Yuletide/Jul/Joulu/ Christmas and Happy every New Year.

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