



QUOTES OF THE WEEK

“He who knows does not speak; he who speaks does not know.”
—Lao Tzu

“Remember not only to say the right thing in the right place, but far more difficult still, to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.”
—B. Franklin

3 WORDS

Memorize these by week’s end and you shall quickly develop an enviable lexicon.

apropos (a-pre-PO) *adverb*

1. at an opportune time; seasonably

(Your arrival was apropos)

as an *adjective*

1. being to the point
(I appreciate the clarity of an apropos speech)

sangfroid (san-FRWA) *noun*

1. self-possession; an imperturbable state, esp. under strain

(The man’s sangfroid was admirable, though perhaps not surprising given his military training)

demimonde (DEM-i-mond) *n.*

1. a distinctive class or group that is often an isolated part of a larger class or group, esp. one having little reputation or prestige

(He was but one member of the great literary demimonde of trashy romance novels and throw-away teen ghost stories)

2. a class of women on the fringes of respectable society supported by wealthy lovers

(If you ever find yourself in a position to use this word in this way, notify me immediately)

THIS WEEK IN HISTORY



DEC. 22, 1900: The first Mercedes automobile is produced for a man named Emil Jellinek. Emil was a wealthy businessman who acquired so much money he was able to buy cars (then quite new and expensive) as a hobby. He moved to Nice, where he began placing orders with Daimler-Motoren-Gesellschaft (DMG) for newer and faster models, which he entered in races—first and foremost of which was Nice week. Emil soon became well

connected with the top echelons of society and began promoting and selling Daimler cars to aristocrats and other successful businessmen.

In 1889, Emil had a daughter, whom he named Mercedes (a Spanish girls’ name meaning “grace”). He entered Nice week under a pseudonym, using his daughter’s name; in this way, he soon came to be known as “Monsieur Mercédès.” By mid 1900, Emil had concluded a deal with Daimler in which Mercedes was to be used as a product name on a new, 35 horsepower engine. The first car to be outfitted with this new Mercedes engine was delivered to Emil on December 22, 1900.

The new Mercedes cars attracted enormous attention at Nice week in 1901, since they beat the competition at nearly everything; this resulted in a flood of orders that stretched the Daimler production plant to full capacity.

Mercedes was legally registered as the car’s name on September 26, 1902. The following year, Emil started calling himself Emil Jellinek-Mercedes, and commented: “This is probably the first time that a father has taken his daughter’s name.” Emil remained interested in automotive engineering developments until his death on January 21, 1918.

Source: www.daimlerchrysler.com.



ETYMOLOGY 101

In the spirit of Christmas, I have decided to look into the origin of two words widely used around this time.

Messiah is derived from the Latin and Greek *Messias*, which in turn comes from the Aramaic *meshiha* and the Hebrew *mashiah*, the latter of which means “anointed” (of the Lord).

Christ comes from the Old English *crīst*, which in turn comes from the Latin *Christus*, which is derived from the Greek *khristos*, the latter of which means “the anointed.” This in turn comes from the Greek verb *khriein*, which means “to rub or anoint.” Christ and Messiah are linked by their basis in Hebrew; the Greek *khristos* is actually a translation of the Hebrew *mashiah* (see above).

Interestingly, Christ was a proper title in Old English but was not capitalized until the 17th century. Furthermore, it was originally pronounced with a short “i,” as in Christmas, until the 8th century.

Source: www.etymonline.com.

ETYMOLOGY 201

Speaking of Jesus, why on earth do we make a distinction between A.D. and B.C. when we speak of dates, and from whence does this distinction come? There is an overwhelming amount of reference material on this singular subject, but you only need to remember a few important things:

A.D. is an abbreviation for the Latin *Anno Domini*, which means “in the Year of the Lord” (or more completely, *Anno Domini Nostri Jesu Christi*, which means “in the Year of our Lord Jesus Christ”). A.D. is used to designate years following the alleged year of the birth of Christ—1 A.D.—and is referred to as the Christian Era. Academic circles, in an attempt to be more...religiously neutral...have chosen to name the Christian Era the Common Era, and thus abbreviate years after the birth of Christ as C.E. (for Common Era); those before the birth of Christ as B.C.E. (Before Common Era).

B.C. is a much more recent English abbreviation, standing simply for “Before Christ.” The old Latin abbreviation was A.C.N., for *Ante Christum Natum*, or “Before the birth of Christ.”

It is common to write both A.D. and B.C. subsequent to a given year: i.e., 2001 A.D. or 500 B.C. This is incorrect, however; formal English usage places the A.D. before the year; i.e., A.D. 1998 (though the B.C. is still placed after the year). This is because it makes no sense to say “1998 in the Year of the Lord.”

One of these days I’ll likely do an extended article on the history of the A.D. dating system; for now, however, suffice it to say that people didn’t always agree on what year it was, and in fact numerous systems for calculating the year existed for hundreds of years *after* the alleged birth of Christ. The decision to start the current Christian Era at 1 B.C. was purely arbitrary, and involved skipping over a Year 0. **It is because of a disagreement over whether or not there was a year 0 that we celebrated the new millennium twice: once in 2000 and again in 2001.**

Source: www.wikipedia.org.



THE “X” IN XMAS

This commonly used abbreviation for Christmas is not as modern as most people think, but dates back to, well, a long time ago.

The entire New Testament was translated in Greek, and hence had to be transliterated, or “mapped” from the Greek 24-letter alphabet to the Roman one, which has 26 letters. In the process, the Greek ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ was transliterated as *khristos*, or Christ. The first letter, chi (pronounced with a hard “ch” and represented by the Roman letter “X”), is the first letter of Christ’s name in Greek.

In ancient Christian art, both X and XR (chi-ro, the first *two* letters of Christ’s name) are used as abbreviations for Christ’s name. Around the same time, both *Xianity* and *Xian* were abbreviations for Christianity and Christian, though they are hardly used at all today.



THE HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

FROM WHENCE IT CAME, AND WHY IT FALLS ON DECEMBER 25

The actual date of Christ's birth has never been known with any degree of certainty. It was not until the 4th century that any effort was made by the Catholic church to assign a day to his birth, and this assignment was made with little investigation. So why do we celebrate the birth of Christ on a seemingly arbitrary date in the middle of winter? There are a few theories.

The most popular holds that the Catholic church, in an effort to Christianize the populace of Europe, placed the Christmas celebration in the midst of the pagan midwinter celebrations. These celebrations had been going on for hundreds of years, and were based on the belief that the sun was a god and winter came each year because the sun god had gotten sick and weak. The winter solstice marked a time when the sun god began to recover, and so it was also a time of great rejoicing, since it meant the dark, cold, and short days would soon be at an end.

It must be remembered that the traditions we celebrate today began at a time when life was much harder, and there was much greater cause to rejoice when the days grew longer. People had no centrally heated homes to return to, nor a sure supply of food. The turning of the solstice was a time of celebration because it meant people had made it halfway; surely if they had made it this far it was cause for celebration. The days were getting longer, the sun god was getting well, and soon the world would be green again.

At the solstice, the early Romans celebrated a feast called Saturnalia, in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture. This is because the Romans knew their farms and orchards would soon be green and plentiful; in celebration, they decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs (a tradition that lives on today). It should be noted that evergreens have always been considered a sign of life to all peoples in colder regions, since it gave them hope that not all life ended during the harsh winter months, and would yet return.

Over time, the Saturnalia feast extended to a week, from December 17 to December 23. It was a happy occasion, marked by peace and general tomfoolery: masters and slaves would switch places, and there was general merriment. The festival often degenerated into debauchery and involved lecherous behavior, and among Christians the word "saturnalia" became synonymous with excess and extravagance.

Other celebrations abounded this time of year, chiefly among the pagan populace of northern Europe and Scandinavia. These peoples practiced a polytheistic religion now known as Asatru (AH-sah-troo), which was the dominant religion in the area before the spread of Christianity. Pagan celebrations began on the Mother Night (December 20) and ended on the 12th Night (December 31); it is partially from this 12-day Yule celebration that we get the "12 Days of Christmas." Some believe that the 12 days of Yule are a microcosm of the 12 months of the year, and act as a time of reflection on the past and resolution for the future.

CHEER THIS CHRISTMAS EVE IN BROOKLYN

By Joe Quesada & Jimmy
Plamiotti

'Twas the night before Christmas,
Da whole house was mellow,
Not a creature was stirrin',
I had a gun unda my pillow.

When up on da roof
I heard somethin' pound,
I sprung to da window,
To scream, "Ay, keep it down!"

When what to my
Wanderin' eyes should appear,
But dat hairy elf Vinny,
And eight friggin' reindeer.

Wit a bad hackin' cough
And the stencha burped beer,
I knew in a moment,
Yo, da Kringle wuz here!

Wit' a slap to dere snouts
And a yank on dere manes,
He cursed and he shouted,
And called dem by name.

Yo Tony, Yo Frankie,
Yo Sally, Yo Vito,
Ay Joey, Ay Paulie,
Ay Pepe, Ay Guido!

As I drew out my gun
And hid by da bed,
Down came his friggin' boot
On da top a my head.

His eyes were all bloodshot,
His b.o. wuz scary,
His breath wuz like sewage,
He had a mole dat wuz hairy.

He spit in my eye,
And he twisted my head.
He soon let me know
I should consider myself dead.

Den pointin' a fat finga
Right unda my nose,
He let out some gas,
And up da chimney he rose.

He sprang to his sleigh,
Obscenities screamin',
And away dey all flew,
Before he troo dem a beatin'.

But I heard him exclaim,
Or better yet grump,
Merry Christmas to all, and
Bite me, ya hump!

Practically all of the traditions we celebrate now can be traced back to these ancient pagan celebrations: the Yule log, feasting, the giving of presents...yes, gift giving has its roots in the ancient Yule celebrations. Back when there were no supermarkets and no commercial farms churning out food every month of the year, people had to rely on the harvest and ration their food for the long winter months. Often times, some would have bountiful harvests while others would come up short. The practice of giving a share of food to those less fortunate thus developed, and as time went on, the practice expanded to include non-food items.

Part of our present gift-giving tradition can also be traced to the Roman practice of giving gifts during Saturnalia. Such gifts had to be of a certain quality or substance, or bad luck would plague the giver for the coming year.

The early Christians tried to suppress this pagan practice of gift-giving, but like so many other pagan traditions, it was not easily suppressed, and so the Christians made it their own.

Hence the church, rather than trying to eliminate a popular celebration with roots deep in time, created its own holiday in the midst of all the winter celebrations. Over time, the pagan roots were forgotten but the traditions remained.

So when you find yourself standing in line, waiting to ring up your purchases, just remember that you are carrying on a tradition that began many hundreds of years ago, one that has changed remarkably little in spirit despite the constant wear of time.

The Wise Men



LITERARY GENIUS

FROM THE HOLY BIBLE— THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW

New King James Version

Matthew 1:18-25. Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. "And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "*Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,*" which is translated, "God with us." Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son...

Matthew 2:1-9. Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet..."

Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also." When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was.