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## Gregory of Nazianzus on Christmas

In the first centuries of the Church, Jesus' birth and baptism were celebrated on the same day, January 6. In the mid-4th century, the two events began to be celebrated separately, with Jesus' birth assigned to December 25 and his baptism continuing to be celebrated on Epiphany, January 6.

One of the early promoters of celebrating Jesus' birth on December 25 was Gregory of Nazianzus, who began the festival at Constantinople around 379 or 380 A.D.<sup>1</sup>

The following quote is from one of Gregory's sermons on Jesus' birth and may well have been delivered on one of the first December 25 Christmas celebrations in Constantinople:

This is our present Festival; it is this which we are celebrating today: the coming of God to humanity, that we might go forth, or rather (for this is the more proper expression) that we might go back to God—that putting off the old man, we might put on the new; and that as we died in Adam, so we might live in Christ, being born with Christ and crucified with Him and buried with Him and rising with Him. . . For where sin abounded Grace did much more abound and if a taste condemned us, how much more doth the Passion of Christ justify us? Therefore let us keep the Feast, not after the manner of a heathen festival, but after a godly sort. ~ *Oration 38 On the Theophany, or Birthday of Christ*, paragraph 4.

<sup>1</sup>Martindale, Cyril Charles. "Christmas." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 3. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908. 1 Dec. 2009 <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03724b.htm>.