

Why We Do What We Do

A number of Catholic traditions were borrowed and "baptized" from existing societal customs or celebrations, from the Roman courts, and from other sources. As mentioned in a previous article, the date of Christmas was more than likely taken from a Roman festival that occurred around the northern hemisphere's winter solstice (Dec. 21 today but at one time thought to occur on Dec. 25).

The celebration of Christmas is not mentioned in the lists of feasts of St. Irenaeus (Early 1st century-c. 202) nor Tertullian (ca. 160- ca. 220) There are references in the 300s and 400s. Many early Christian documents suggest the conception and death of Christ occurred on or around March 25 and that the Creation of the World occurred in the spring around the spring solstice as well. The establishing of the Annunciation (conception of Christ) as March 25 may have influenced the fixing of the Birth of Christ as nine months later on Dec. 25.

The stoles priests and deacons wear are something borrowed from the Roman courts. The judges and other court officials wore "stoles" (ceremonial scarves) and other distinctive ceremonial clothing to distinguish themselves and in keeping with their responsibilities. Jewish priests also had worn ceremonial vestments going back to the time of Moses (Num 15:38-39).

"The original intent then was to designate a person as belonging to a particular organization and to denote their rank within their group, a function which the stole continues to perform today. Thus, unlike other liturgical garments which were originally worn by every cleric or layman, the stole was a garment which was specifically restricted to particular classes of people based on occupation." (*Wikipedia*)

"A bishop or other priest wears the stole around his neck with the ends hanging down in front, while the deacon places it over his left shoulder and ties it cross-wise at his right side, similar to a sash." (*Wikipedia*)