

Why are there two Christmases?

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By: Peter Drosdoweck

My family celebrates two Christmases, and my grandchildren are now of an age to be asking: Why are there two?

I typed out my answer, of which I will give each of them a copy tonight. This is what they will read.

The story begins in 45 BC with Julius Caesar, who authorized the use of a calendar which became known as the Julian Calendar.

Until 1582, all Christians celebrated Christmas on Dec. **25**.

During the 16th century, scientists and astronomers began telling the world that the calendar was 13 days "behind the sun."

In 1582, Pope Gregory, head of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, authorized the use of a new calendar that moved the days ahead by 13 days, thus "catching up with the sun."

As the years and centuries went by, more and more countries accepted the new calendar, but at first only those where people belonged to the Roman Catholic Church.

In later years, countries with Protestant majorities opted for the new calendar. Thus, the new calendar became the choice for most of the people in the western part of that part of the world.

However, the Christian people in the eastern part of that part of the world who belonged to the Orthodox Church in Constantinople continued to use the Julian calendar and only in later years (the 19th and 20th centuries) adopted the Gregorian calendar for daily use and for civic purposes -- but not for religious holidays.

Since 1582, Christmas has been (and is) celebrated in Ukraine and by many Ukrainians all over the world on Jan. 7, as it is in Belarus, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia and Serbia.

In addition, Christmas is celebrated on Jan. 7 in countries where there is a high percentage of Orthodox followers: Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Estonia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia and Lebanon.

It is the day when people of the Orthodox faith all over the world -- and some Ukrainian Catholics in North America -- celebrate Christmas.

Peter Drosdowech is a Winnipeg grandfather.