



January is one of the newest months of the calendar, having only been added in 713 B.C. When the Romans adopted the Greek Calendar and shifted from a lunar to a solar year there were only 10 months. The names of the last months of the year still reflect their place in the 10 month cycle. Septem means seven, Octo is eight, Novem means nine, and Decem is 10. The year consisted of 304 days with winter being considered a time without months. I wish this was still the case with cell phone bills but

alas, no. January (Ianuarius) and February (Februarius) were added by King Numa Pompilius expanding the year to 354 days.

January's original Roman name, Ianuarius is a Saxon term meaning Wolf Month and also the Latin word for door, ianua. These months were added to the end of the original year with the New Year still being celebrated on March 1. In 44 B.C. Julius Caesar, not known for his modesty, changed his birth month, Quintilis, to July, named for himself. He also changed Sextilis to August to honor Augustus. Then, to honor one of the most revered gods of the time, he changed Ianuarius to January, paying tribute to the god Janus. He also added extra days to some months and started the leap year every 4 years so that his calendar could keep pace with the proper solar year which created the 365 day year we have now.

Janus is the god of beginnings and transitions so Caesar thought it only fitting to make January 1<sup>st</sup> the beginning of the year. Janus is often depicted as having two faces looking both forward and backward, an appropriate symbol for New Year's Day. Often the face looking behind is old and wizened while the face looking to what is ahead, is youthful and expectant. We can see this idea today with the popular Father Time and Baby New Year archetypes. The old man with the scythe and hourglass is thought to be based on the god Cronos, from whom we



get the word “chronograph”, or time measurement but paring the old and youthful characters together likely came from the Janus figure.

Prior to this, most civilizations celebrated the New Year as associated with an equinox or agricultural occurrence. The Egyptians celebrated the New Year around the fall equinox when Sirius reappeared in the sky heralding the annual flooding of the Nile. The earliest recorded New Year celebrations occurred in Mesopotamia at the time of vernal equinox in mid-March. The Greeks celebrated at the Winter Solstice. As the Roman Empire spread, they forced all to adopt the so-called Julian calendar, not only for standard business practices, but to show their dominion over conquered lands. January 1<sup>st</sup> was now the official New Year throughout the Roman Empire.

Turnabout being fair play, when the empire fell, Christians insisted the New Year be celebrated on March 25<sup>th</sup>. The drunken, January 1<sup>st</sup> Roman New Year Orgy was replaced by celebrating the day that Mary found out she was pregnant with Jesus. I’m guessing this was a tough sell amongst the Pagan masses. However March 25<sup>th</sup> was the official New Year for a long time after. In 1582 the Gregorian Calendar, instituted by Pope Gregory, reinstated January 1<sup>st</sup> as the first day of the year but Protestant nations were slow to make this transition. In fact England and her newly formed American Colonies celebrated March 25<sup>th</sup> as New Year’s Day until 1752.



We have discussed in previous posts that some Christian symbolism was adopted from older civilizations as people of those societies were converted. It is thought that St. Peter is closely related to Janus. When invoking gods, Romans would often say the word “Pater”, which is Latin for father. Pater Janus was known as the gate keeper and was often depicted holding keys.

Because he had two faces he could keep watch on both sides of the gate. St. Peter, as the keeper of heaven’s gate, is often depicted holding keys as well. Peter’s role as a fisherman is also thought to allude to Janus who was said to be a ferryman traversing the interval flood between the storms of winter. Janus’ staff can also be seen as the shepherd’s staff with which Peter is said to tend the flock of Christianity. And, as Janus

leads the 12 months of the year, and twelve signs of the zodiac, Peter leads the 12 apostles.

As 2015 begins I hope the part of you that is looking back on 2014 is wiser and stronger for all that has happened and hopefully you've got a little grin on your face too as you remember the good times. I hope the part of you that is looking at the year to come is hopeful and eager and ready to move ahead with youthful optimism. If you got invited to a Roman themed New Year's party....well what happened in 2014, stays in 2014.

Until next time,

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