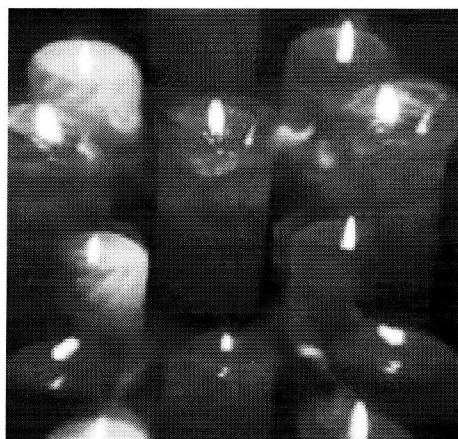


from them in tax. Those who had moved away from their family homes, like Joseph, had to return to have their names entered in the Roman records.

Joseph and Mary set off on the long, arduous 90-mile journey from Nazareth along the valley of the River Jordan, past Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Mary travelled on a donkey to conserve her energy for the birth.

But when they arrived in Bethlehem the local inn was already full with people returning for the census. The innkeeper let them stay in the rock cave below his house which was used as a stable for his animals. It was here, next to the noise and filth of the animals, that Mary gave birth to her son and laid him in a manger.

The first Christmas



Candles and fires have been lit at mid-winter celebrations for thousands of years ©

The Gospels do not mention the date of Jesus' birth. It was not until the 4th century AD that Pope Julius I set 25th December as the date for Christmas. This was an attempt to Christianise the Pagan celebrations that already took place at this time of year. By 529, 25th December had become a civil holiday and by 567 the twelve days from 25th December to the Epiphany were public holidays.

Christmas is not only a Christian festival. The celebration has roots in the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, the festivals of the ancient Greeks, the beliefs of the Druids and the folk customs of Europe.

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Where does word Christmas come from?

The word Christmas comes from the combination of the words 'Christ' and 'mass.'

But where did the X in Xmas come from, and what does it mean? In the Greek alphabet, X is the symbol for the letter 'chi.' Chi (or X) is the first letter in the Greek word for Christ.