

CHRISTMAS OBSERVANCE

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During the holidays, we of the *Tundra Times* wish to extend sincere good wishes to all the people in Alaska and many, many new friends we have acquired all over the United States since we first published on October 1, 1962.

The observance of Christmas was adopted by the Natives of Alaska with deep reverence. They have found in it a great boon to spiritual uplifting. Above everything else civilization has had to offer, the Natives have embraced Christmas with all the Christian feeling it deserves. In some Native communities it has replaced a custom that was observed annually around the same time of the year.

In the ancient times, people of the Arctic held festivities that roughly corresponded with that of Christmas, the festival of the *Return of the Sun*.

As they do now for the observance of Christmas, the people of ancient times made elaborate preparations for the return of the sun. Women fashioned garments of exquisite beauty for their family's wear; men made additional efforts in pursuit of game, such as caribou, to fill the larder for the feast.

In winter in the Arctic, the earth tilts northward away from the sun. As winter progresses the sun rises later and sets earlier each day until the time comes when it no longer appears over the horizon. The sunless days last for weeks at a time depending on one's geographical location in the Arctic. In Barrow this condition lasts for 54 days.

Then one day the sun returns with just a sliver of light over the horizon, the signal for the ancient people to put on the festival for the return of the sun.

On this day people long ago donned their fineries. They gathered in the kalagees and held special dances that had been handed down from generation to generation.

They held contests of skill and endurance. Strong men pitted their strength against one another in wrestling matches. Sages of the villages told their legends to rapt audiences. The best kinds of Native foods were brought to the kalagee for great feasts.

Young men, who had been training their dogs for dogteam races, hitched them and raced.

When the Natives acquired the custom of celebrating Christmas, they embraced the inspirational and spiritual value it offered. In the ensuing festivities, ancient customs were fused with the Western custom.

Therefore, in many Native communities today, what has been described in observance of the return of the sun has largely been carried over to the observance of Christmas Day. It is the Natives' way of showing their reverence to the Birth of Christ, in a manner which to them means the most.

In this manner they express best the feeling of rejoicing in homage to the **One Who Came** for their salvation. It is the epitome of their demonstration of faith in God which they have embraced with all the profound meaning in the heart of man.