WINTER SOLSTICE

Mithras & Yuletide

Even on the darkest days of winter we have no doubt that the sun will soom be getting stronger again and the days longer. Our ancestors in Europe were not sure. They had to find ways of encouraging the sun to restore its energies, by lighting huge bonfires on the winter solstice.

In the Roman empire people celbrates two main midwinter festivals. Saturnalia, which began on around December, the 17th, was named after Saturnus, a gos whose name meant "plenty" or "bounty". Saturnalia was a period of feasting and present giving, and the world was turned upside down, with slaves becoming the masters. But there were also a secret and exclusive Mithrais religion, which was highly influential, as many of its members were in the army or were Roman businessmen. They celebrated the birthday el the Uncoquered Sun (Sol Invictus) on around December, the 25th.

In Anglo-Saxon England, December the 25th was the beginning on the year and, like most people of Nothern Europe, the English celebrated Yuletide. This was a pagan feast which provided many elements of our modern Christmas. Like Romans, they decorated theis houses with evergreens as symbols of the continuity of life while other plants and trees seemed dead. Ths Scandinavian would bring a huge log into the house (Yule log)- it was a symbol of good luck if it couls be kept alight for 12 hours (or 12 days according to some). And, like Romans, they had massive feast and drank in vast quantities. The Christians the converted such habits to their own use, so that, for example, the evergreen holly became the symbol of Christ's crown of horns.

Questions

1.- Which two festivals were celebrated in the Roman Empire?

2.- How the Anglo-Saxon English decorated their houses?

3.- How many hours (or days) must the log be alight?

4.- Do you know what a solstice is?

5.-In your country, how many hours of daylight do you have on this season of the year?