

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

In Cicero's time, the Saturnalia, an ancient Roman agricultural festival, lasted seven days.

Augustus, however, limited the celebrations to three days so the civil courts would not have to be closed for an extended time.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

The celebration of the *Saturnalia* was extended with the *Sigillaria*, so named for the small earthenware figurines which were sold and given as gifts. [Macrobius I.10.24]

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA [December 17-23]

After the Julian reform of the Calendar, the original first day of the *Saturnalia* was dedicated to *Ops* in the festival *Opalia*.

*Ops*, the consort of *Saturnus*, signified the abundance and fruits of the earth.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

In the Roman Calendar, the *Saturnalia* was designated a holy day, or holiday, on which religious rites were performed.

As an example, the woolen bonds, which fettered the feet of the ivory cult statue of *Saturnus*, were loosened to symbolize the liberation of the god.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

The origin of red & green  
Christmas decorations -

During the *Saturnalia*, the  
Romans decorated their homes  
with evergreen wreaths (*serta*)  
bearing red berries.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA [December 17-23]

The Roman god *Saturnus* was often identified with *Kronos* and was worshipped according to Greek ritual.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

The Temple of *Saturn*, the oldest temple recorded by the pontiffs, had been dedicated on the *Saturnalia*.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

After sacrifice in the Temple of Saturn,  
the celebrants would enjoy a public  
banquet, after which they would enter the  
streets shouting “IO SATURNALIA.”  
[Macrobius I.10.18]

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)



# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

The *Saturnalia* was the most popular holiday of the Roman year. In poem XIV, Catullus describes the festival as “the best of days.”

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

The *Saturnalia* was an occasion for celebration, visits to friends, and the presentation of gifts, particularly *cerei*, wax candles, and *sigillaria*, clay figurines.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

The exchange of wax candles called *cerei* is thought to have symbolized “*Sol Invictus*,” the unconquered sun, as part of the winter solstice tradition.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

During the *Saturnalia*, slaves were treated as equals by their masters, in memory of an early golden age thought to have been ushered in by the god *Saturnus*.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

The ancient Roman festival of *Saturnalia* recalled an age of general merriment and goodwill, ruled by *Saturnus*.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

By the second century A.D.,  
*Brumalia*, the winter solstice  
celebration, replaced the  
*Saturnalia*.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

By the middle of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D., many customs of the *Saturnalia* were adapted to the celebration of Christmas.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)

# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

During the *Saturnalia*, Roman men replaced the *toga* with a loose-fitting garment called the *synthesis*.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)



# CLASSICAL FAX\*: Festivals & Holidays

## SATURNALIA

[December 17-23]

The ancient Romans honored *Saturnus*, the god of seed and sowing, with a festival after the autumn planting was completed.

\*Classical Fax, copyright 1987, MaryBrown

Source: [penelope.uchicago.edu](http://penelope.uchicago.edu)