Influence of Constantine in Christianity

One of the three great religions of Mesopotamia.

Saturday

Comes from the word “Sabbath” day
Sabbath = holy
Hebrews consider Saturday their holy day

So why do Christians consider Sunday the holy day?

Emperor Constantine

Emperor of Rome 306-337 CE
His father was co-emperor with Diocletian
First Roman emperor to practice Christianity

At the time, Romans practiced polytheism
-most popular religion was Mithraism, a sun-worshipping religion

Christianity was a small, underground movement
-some emperors actually persecuted Christians, some outlawed the religion
Emperor Constantine

- 312 CE – Battle of Milvian Bridge
- It was a Sunday – the day to worship the sun god
- Sees flaming cross in sky
- Is this a sign I should convert to Christianity?
- He does, as do his men, and he wins the battle

Was he a true Christian?

- No – continued to be worshipped as a god himself ...

Spread of Christianity

- Constantine's influence spreads the religion
- Legalizes Christianity
- Priests & churches exempt from taxes
- Protection of Christians from persecution
- Gives jobs & perks to Christians
- This gets many converts, but not all were sincere
  - Brought some of their previous religion's traditions with them

Mixing of Mithraism & Christianity

- Giving people something familiar makes them more likely to follow a new religion
- "The Venerable Day of the Sun" is the day they worshipped their sun god
- He kept that as the holy day of the week
- Declared it an official day off so Romans could attend church
- To this day Christians consider Sunday the holy day

Mixing of Mithraism & Christianity

- Also, adoption of Dec. 25 – Saturnalia - the birthday of the Roman Sun God – as Jesus' birthday

Christians were more than happy to make the change

- Jews consider Saturday the holy day, and Christians blamed Jews for the execution of Jesus, so they had little problem breaking away from a Jewish tradition
When Christians were underground, they shared leadership.
Constantine changed the physical layout to show hierarchy.

His mother was a devoted Christian.
Took 1st recorded pilgrimage to Holy Land.
This popularized the idea & others followed.

Mom wanted to know where important events had taken place.
Constantine had his men research & mark locations.
Today some scholars disagree with some of his locations.

Christianity was anti-political.
Many early Christian writings were very anti-government (remember, they were being oppressed by the Roman government).
Christianity says God’s law is supreme over man’s law.
How can that work when he is emperor?

Christianity was not standardized.
Called a meeting to nail down basic beliefs of the church.
Council of Nicea 325 CE.
300 Christian bishops in Nicea, Italy.
Nicene Creed

- Statement that encompasses the basic beliefs of all Christians
- We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father. Through Him all things were made. For us men and our salvation He came down from heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit. He was born of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered, died, and was buried. On the third day He rose again in fulfillment of the scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. He has spoken through the Prophets. We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

One other question ...

- Was Jesus god or man?

Constantine’s Contributions to Christianity

- Constantine’s influence spreads the religion
- Legalizes Christianity
- Priests & churches exempt from taxes
- Protection of Christians from persecution
- Gives jobs & perks to Christians
- Makes Sunday a holiday (holy-day)
- Changes physical layout of church
- Identifies important locations in Holy Land for pilgrims
- Council of Nicea/Nicene Creed