

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



A winter bridge

Festival of Immanuel

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Rumor has it that after the seasonal rush to fulfill all their obligations for concerts and such, the angels have taken off a few days to relax in a warm southern clime. Not being one to rush into such a vacuum, it has come to my attention that perhaps with all the evil increasingly showing its presence this season of the year, we should hold their petal to the metal for a few more days, before they can take their hiatus to Mazatlan.

Did you notice this holiday season that we had moved as a nation far beyond taking Christ out of Christmas. This year there seemed a very sense of removing Christmas completely from the calendar. Could that be the reason that retail sales this season were more lack luster than predicted. Why spend money on Christmas presents if we don't believe in Christmas as more than just a Christian holiday?

"Let the Christians have Christmas and I will celebrate Festivus, or Sir Isaac Newton's birthday, or Hanukkah, or Kwanzaa, or just forget it all together. Come to think of it, I will celebrate Football Bowl Week and get drunk because I don't have to do any real work, even if I do have to spend a couple of days at the office. Christmas used to be fun, but now it is only commercial hype."

This year I noticed when I wished people "Merry Christmas," much of the time their response was more like, "Huh? Oh, Yea, have a Happy Holidays." "Bah, Humbug," everyone seemed to be infected with Uncle Scrooge Disease. Christian friends were only a little better, they too while returning the "Merry Christmas" seemed distracted and demonstrated little emotion considering this is one of the two high Christian Holidays.

I know I was an exception, after all, I finally went out and purchased a fake Christmas tree and all the trimmings for half price, or less. What good is a commercial holiday that no one takes seriously anymore? And if all the pagans are content to remain pagan even this one day of the year, I'm afraid that my childhood memories of Christmas morning can no longer lead to a pleasant remembrance for present youngsters.

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Anyway, there is strong evidence that Christmas was just the incorporation of pagan religious festivals into the church calendar at the time of Constantine. It is amazing how the light of truth can take away the religious zeal of more than a millennia. Both Christmas and Easter are really just ancient Babylonian religious festivals, conceived in the depths of depravity, to take glory away from the true God and His people. There seems to be but three choices:

1. Get so depressed by the who situation and withdraw into a cloister, or cave at Christmas time and not come out until after May Day.
2. The Bible says that Jesus was born on Christmas, and if God said it I believe it.
3. Redeem not only Christmas time, but this whole season of winter darkness. If it is always winter and never Christmas, maybe some of that deep magic from before time, can again bring light to this dark season. Aslan must return.

“The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,” C.S. Lewis’ tale offers the real wisdom of the Bible, being a symbolic story about the advent of Immanuel in Isaiah in Chapter 7:14, and quoted in Matthew 1:23: “*The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel*” –which means, “*God with us.*”

The real problem with our current Christmas is that it is too pagan to be of any redeeming social value without some tie to redemption itself. Jesus born in a manger sometime in the fall, little over two thousand years ago, is difficult to link to that redemption, because the Christmas story is usually told without the context of God’s grace, or our need for that grace.

Tied to redemption, the birth of Jesus can and should be celebrated during the deepest and darkest days of winter. Into a world without any spiritual light, Immanuel, God with us, deprived condemned sinners, is the gift of life, of love, of grace, and of light. Looking at Immanuel in that illumination, Christmas must be just one day in a long festival of light, love, and joy. Christmas should be celebrated everyday of the year, but as a practical matter, we can and should adopt a whole season.

On the first full day of the Winter Solstice begins the modern Festival of Immanuel. We celebrate at this season, not the light of our own worthiness, but of acceptance of our sinful pagan life without God. The Festival of Immanuel celebrates for ten long days that fact that into that darkness, God’s love became a man, to become the propitiation for our sinful darkness. He carried that curse to a wooden cross, so as Messiah, Immanuel, has become our Brother by His resurrection, and that dead tree has become an evergreen. We, who believe by faith this finished work, are adopted as children of light, of love, of holiness, and shall celebrate forever this blessing.

Therefore, the Festival of Immanuel, the Feast of God with us, is a festival of light celebrating the gift of the illumination of Immanuel, and His ability to redeem a Holy people from their pagan roots, the ultimate gift and blessing in this world. To that end, each day of this festival is to be lived in service and blessing and not for worldly pleasures.

The Feast of Immanuel really is a celebration of contrasts, rather than some desire to present our lives as worthy or righteous. The coming of “God with us,” shows us that are best efforts are pagan in the eyes of God. But still God’s love for mankind offers a path out of this darkness into the glorious light of God’s presence, even in the despair of this dying world. The Feast also offers a contrast between those who by God’s grace alone have accepted that gift of light, and those who are content to live within their own darkness and isolation.

The Feast of Immanuel

A developing synopsis.

Day 1: December 23; Color of light: None or totally Black, Wisdom: The chaos of worldly wisdom; sin, is represented in the darkest and shortest day of the year, the Winter Solstice. In that world of hopeless despair, all creation groans for the coming of Immanuel.

Day 2: December 24; Color of light: Red, the first of the seven prismatic colors. Wisdom: Blood is the source of life and the eternal life of the children of Immanuel. Grace flows from the bodily sacrifice of Immanuel which became God’s propitiation.

Day 3: December 25; Color of light: Orange, Wisdom: The orange sun, the source of natural light, represents the light of the world, on a day of redeemed pagan practices. The sun now symbolizes the birth of Immanuel in the Christmas feast. The Holy God became a man. But only a few shall ask to have their darkness lifted. But it remains the day of boundless love.

Day 4: December 26; Color of light: Yellow, Wisdom: Gold the ultimate precious gift, is symbolized as a gift to and from Immanuel. His golden gift to us is beyond all the riches of this world, as His gold represents God's mercy.

Day 5: December 27; Color of light: Green, Wisdom: The symbol of this day are green fields of plenty, and also represented in an evergreen tree. All creation will one day be restored by the second coming of Immanuel. We look forward to a time when hopeless darkness is eliminated by the joy of eternal life in fields forever fertile and green.

Day 6: December 28; Color of light: Blue, Wisdom: The symbol of water of the earth, and also the living water of Immanuel. He who drinks His water shall cease from spiritual thirst.

Day 7: December 29; Color of light: Indigo, Wisdom: The color of human enterprise in which Immanuel redeems us from the drudgery of human slavery, to ourselves and to others, into a paradigm of service to others, to stewardship of God's creation, and work in God's kingdom.

Day 8: December 30; Color of light: Violet, Wisdom: The color of royalty. The garments by which Immanuel clothes His adopted children as His brothers and sisters in this world and in the reality of the age to come.

Day 9: December 31; Color of light: White, Wisdom: The color of oneness of the seven prismatic colors. New Birth Eve. All the colors together make one unity found only in Immanuel. This white light is capable of piercing any darkness, and changing the service of self into a willing sacrifice for others.

Day 10: January 1; Color of light: The rainbow, or the seven prismatic colors divided into their unique diversity but still with out separation, Wisdom: The New Era Day of Immanuel's presence is symbolized in the first day of a New Year. A time for another feast, with food, friendships, allowing Immanuel's presence to redeem all creation for the glory of God and the enjoyment of His people. The rainbow being a perfect example of the unique nature of each eternal personality as the spectrum of God's own nature.

To use a mining metaphor, after staggering through the desert for many months you stumble across a shining stone, that leads to the discovery of a mine of great wealth. But just as the Feast Day of December 26th represents gold who's value is priceless, this concept of the Feast of Immanuel seems to hold rich blessings beyond what I can now grasp.

There is a saying, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." We don't hear as much about the corollary, "If it is broke, either fix it, or get a new and better one." Perhaps the Christmas holiday was broke all the time we have been using it, we were just so enchanted with our own light, we couldn't see that it was in need of serious repair. In the Feast of Immanuel, Christmas does not disappear, but it becomes a day to look at Christmas with all its pagan roots and say, "As God has redeemed a pagan festival for His Glory, over many centuries, He can also redeem and provide a contrast to our sinful darkness by His grace alone. Therefore, we can celebrate the coming of Immanuel with even a greater feast than Christmas and the miracle of Hanukkah combined.

The claims of Christianity is that Jesus Christ was fully God, fully human. He was not just another prophet in whatever line of prophets that fit our fancy. With the coming of Immanuel as proclaimed by the prophet Isaiah, the world forever changed. This time of year is the season when that miracle has been proclaimed historically. And in this dark time that message needs to be proclaimed with renewed vigor and celebration. The Feast of Immanuel can be that Christmas tool, that cannot be returned, because it truly is a gift beyond temporal value.