

Reclaiming the Wonder of Christmas

Read Time: 5 Minutes 14 Seconds

Have you ever felt guilty about celebrating Christmas because there are so many naysaying, doom-and-gloom, “Christmas is a pagan holiday” people out there? If so, you’re not alone. I wanted to share my story with you today about reclaiming the wonder of Christmas.

Here’s my story:

I leaned forward in my seat, caught up by the music coming from the choir and symphony orchestra. It was the church’s annual Christmas concert, and the melodies coming from the stage pulled at my heartstrings. Strangely, though, the music made me both happy and sad at the same time.

You see, I grew up in a very legalistic religious environment.

In that tradition, joy was not a highly-valued character trait. Neither was hope. Instead, the people around me endorsed somber attitudes, doom-and-gloom and a lot of conspiracy theories. The theology I was taught included the theory that “Christmas is a pagan holiday.”

My family celebrated Christmas anyway, but I didn’t feel the joy of the season. How could I be joyful while I was being told that I was sinning against God?

Fast forward many years. There I was, a woman in my mid-30s, sitting in a church listening to the wondrous melodies of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” and “O Holy Night.” I was trying to worship with everyone else, and I may have succeeded ... halfway. However, the other half of me was wracked with worry and condemnation. Was I sinning against God by celebrating

what I had always been told was a pagan holiday?

In that moment, sitting in that church seat, I cried out to God for help.

I prayed, "Lord, I want to enjoy Christmas. I want to celebrate Your birth. I want to worship You as Emmanuel, without feeling condemned for it. Please help me. Give me back the wonder of Christmas."

It was a start.

Max Lucado's movie "The Christmas Candle" came out that year, and my husband and I went to see it. As the story rolled across the screen, I realized that I was watching a Christmas movie and actually feeling "Christmas-y" while I did so. I was suddenly inspired to decorate a tree, cook special meals, spend time with my family in special ways and—yes—even hang a stocking by the chimney with care.

More importantly, I was overcome with wonder at the miracle of the Christ-child.

I suddenly saw the beauty of my Lord Jesus, the King of heaven and earth, who humbled Himself and came to earth as a man. I saw the beauty of His heart, even as He was a babe lying in that manger, so submitted to the Father's will. What kind of God divests Himself of His royal privilege and stoops so low?

And mostly, I saw the miracle of Emmanuel.

In my mind's eye, I saw this Baby lying so humbly in His bed of straw, come to dwell among men. This same Jesus flung the galaxies into their places with a flick of His fingers. This same Jesus is celebrated, worshiped, and adored by all the hosts of Heaven.

This Jesus came to live with men—with me. He came to walk and talk among us. We got to touch and talk with Him. We got to eat with Him, walk with Him and listen to His teachings in

person with enraptured ears.

Emmanuel. God with us.

God, Himself, with US.

I had been missing the wonder of Emmanuel all this time. That year, however, the Lord redeemed my sense of Christmas.

To be perfectly honest, I have no idea if the Christmas holiday has any undesirable traditions associated with it from medieval history or not. But to be just as honest, I don't care.

Why?

Because any traditions associated with any Christmases other than the first one don't matter to me. It's that first Christmas that makes all the difference because once I was lost, but now I am found.

Once I was caught up in sin, but now I've been forgiven. Once, I was hateful, angry, vengeful, bitter, depressed and suicidal, but now I've been redeemed. My life has been changed. I've been healed, restored, made whole, filled with joy and gladness and all my sorrow and sighing has fled away.

And all that happened because of this baby, the Christ-child.

It happened because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory: the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. I now have a new life because this baby chose to humble Himself and come to earth as a man, walk among us and trudge one day up a lonely hill called Calvary, pouring out His life-blood for you and me.

Today, though, He's alive and doing well. He didn't stay in that grave. And because of His life, I can live also.

But none of these things ever would have happened if He had

not first come to earth as a baby and laid in a manger, when there was no room for Him in the inn.

That's why I choose to celebrate Christmas—no matter what any naysayers, gloom-and-doomers or conspiracy theorists think.

I celebrate Christmas because I need this truth of Emmanuel.

Taking a month each year to focus on celebrating the birth of Christ doesn't even seem like enough. My soul needs this. My spirit needs this. I need this.

I want to experience and celebrate the fullness of God's Word. I want to stare in wonder and worship at my King, lying in stinky, smelly, dirty bed of straw by choice. I want to join my song with the song of the angels—the song that still echoes down the ages from those shepherds' fields: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"

That "goodwill toward men" changed my life, you see.

So, I have decided to thank Him. I have decided to ponder the wonder and miracle of Christmas. I have decided to give honor where honor is due—to Christ the Lord, born a man beneath His privilege.

God rest ye merry, beloved. May the blessing and wonder of Emmanuel be yours this Christmas season as well. {eo2}

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