

PDF - Sunday, December 18, 2022 - A Personal View of Christma - Rev. Wil Darcangelo

We are entering one of the more sacred times of the year. Across so many cultures these next two weeks are adorned with dozens of occasions, festivals, and religious observances representing a myriad of belief systems.

There's a pattern to be seen in this. And it points to things which are intrinsically human among us. But also, exploration of these various traditions can lead to valuable insights about where we each fit within the pantheon of world spiritual belief.

Christmas, to me, is the recognition of the birth of a spiritual master whose teachings I happen to follow most closely. There are several others I look to for inspiration as well, but his I tend to perceive as a particularly clearly defined example of the active practice of raising the vibration of this planet through our actions.

I am less focused on the birth of a savior in the traditionally observed sense, so much as I am focused upon someone who taught us a practice through which we might save ourselves. That he might be the savior of humanity for reasons celestial in nature, I can't argue with, for, or against.

There's obviously more to the story and theology of Jesus Christ than a simple life practice. Narrowing a focus to the teacher and his teachings does leave out considerations of the miraculous as well as the mundane, admittedly. Which it is not my intention to negate. But upon the teachings themselves, nearly everyone can agree they are wise and useful. These ancient lessons on forgiveness, compassion, hospitality, non-resistance, empowerment, and gratitude are meant to build bridges and strengthen communities rather than act as excuses to tear them apart by over-focusing on theological differences.

Since the teachings themselves prescribe a way of life intended to help us be in good relationship with one another, out of mutual respect and religious diplomacy, it's preferable to focus on the teachings. Everything else can be respected as articles of personal faith which need not be proven to one another in order for the teachings to function. I personally believe in many of them, or at least hold open the possibility, but it's not my place to insist that anyone else does. If it challenges you, stick a pin in it and save it for later, as a close pastor friend of mine advises.

Since I am glad Jesus was born and lived, I honor Christmas. Since the vast majority of the Christmas culture around me celebrates it in a particular fashion, I take pleasure in those traditions just like many people. I love holiday decorations and the traditional music and, of course, the intention toward charity and hospitality during the season. I just choose also to be sure not to forget that there is an honoring of wisdom to be observed as well.

And though I center myself in this faith tradition, I love learning about other traditions from other faiths whose ideas overlap in ways that help me better understand my own and better remember that my neighbor truly is me.

Have you ever looked into how other faiths celebrate at this time of the year? Have you ever wondered how much we all have in common? Have you ever looked at these span of dates throughout human history and taken note of the hundreds of different occasions and festivals that have occurred at this time?

It's the exact reason why the birth of Jesus is celebrated this week. It's not because he was born at this time. (For the record, the Buddha wasn't born on his birthday celebration either.) But Jesus' birth was deemed appropriate to be celebrated at the time of the returning light. Well, that, and to compete in the religious marketplace. #Reality.

I accept Christmas for what it has become, but still honor it for the purpose of its presence on the liturgical calendar. And because at this time of the year I do need to be reminded of the birth of light in the world. It's kind of dark around here right now.

By honoring the teacher, I am remembering the teachings. I am remembering that Jesus did not invent Christianity, he left a legacy of spiritual wisdom and a pathway toward inner peace and outer service that in the generational practice of it leaves its own steady legacy behind.

I'm also remembering that Jesus did not convert people from their original faiths, but added a layer to them. It revealed a newness within them. He did not tell people not to be Jewish, nor did he expect the Gentiles to be anything but Gentiles. He taught them how to find new life within who they already were. That's pretty welcoming. And this week that thought is meaningful as I ponder what the return of the light means, culture to culture.

So, Merry Christmas from me, and Happy Holidays to you all.