

Holidays 2006 Newsletter

Advent Compiled by Todd Ferrell

The season of Advent begins with the fourth Sunday before Christmas. "Advent" is a Latin word meaning "the coming." During the season of Advent, Christians across the world prepare for the celebration of the coming of the Lord into the world through the birth of his Son Jesus Christ. Advent is a time to celebrate light in the midst of darkness, as symbolized best by the Advent wreath.

The Advent Wreath

Items to purchase: Crown of thorns, Bed of hay, Evergreen, Holly berries, 5 candles (3 dark purple, 1 light purple or pink, 1 larger candle white)

Representation:

The crown of thorns represents Jesus' death and the bed of Hay represents Christ's birth. Evergreen represents Christ's resurrection and the Holly Berries represent Christ's blood shed for our sins.

Directions:

First Sunday

Congregation is asked to come forward for communion and to celebrate in the start of Advent. (Be sure to have the word



sheets to the song "O Come, O Come Emmanuel available for congregation as they arrive up front)

A brief reading of the meaning of Advent (Read "Advent") Sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel".

Crown of thorns are placed on bed of hay.

During communion, everyone is asked to come up and take a portion of the evergreen and stick it into the crown of thorns to make a wreath out of it.

Then the holly and holly berries are added to the wreath. Place the 4 candles in the wreath and light the first Purple candle.

After the wreath is made, the elements are explained. The bed of hay represents Christ's birth and serves as a reminder that we should never forget the one who came to this earth to free us from our sins.

The crown of thorns that lies on top of the hay represents Christ's death...the price that was paid to buy our freedom. The evergreen that has been placed in the wreath represents the resurrection of Christ and the life that He has come to give us.

(Start the passing of the bread and wine/juice - Ask everyone to hold the elements until all have been served - spend time in prayer)

The Holly and Holly Berries that we have placed on the wreath serve as a reminder of the blood that Christ shed on the cross. We are reminded of His words in Matthew 26 where Jesus shared his last meal with his disciples. The Bible says, "During the meal, Jesus took and blessed the bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples and said, 'Take, eat. This is my body'. He then took up the cup and thanked

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Happy Holidays from your TEN Council Members

- Todd Ferrell, President
- Elizabeth Storbo
- Franklin Sampley
- Randy Houston

***For a child is born to us, a son is given to us.
The government will rest on his shoulders.
And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6***

Holiday Rewind: A Quick Review of Church Events

San Jose, CA **Celebration of Faith -** **David Harvey, Pastor**

The Sunday prior to Thanksgiving Celebration of Faith's pianist organized a service of older hymns of the church, explaining how they came to be.. We are joining the Local MCC Church in San Jose for a Christmas service along with a meal on Christmas Eve. We will sing carols and exchange gifts.

Hickory, North Carolina - **Abundant Grace Church -** **Dave Thomas, Pastor**

On Oct 28, we hosted a Hallelujah Block Party for our

neighbors. It was the perfect mixture of trick or treat and ministry.

On Thanksgiving day we had a meal for the homeless of our area. Christmas Eve we are having a liturgical midnight candlelight service.

Long Beach, California - **Refiner's Fire - Bonnie Rad-** **den, Pastor**

We are hosting a Christmas Musical Saturday December 23rd. We have invited all of the agencies that work with HIV/AIDS Community to join us.

Dallas, Texas - Grace Oasis **Ministries - Jubilee -** **Charles Morrow, Pastor**

Jubilee always provides a holiday meal for any and all in our fellowship and community who have nowhere to go for Thanksgiving and Christmas. We call this our NOAH program. It stands for "No One Alone for the Holidays."

North Hollywood, California **- Christ Chapel of the Val-** **ley - Jerrell Walls, Pastor**

We held our Annual Church Family Potluck Sunday, November 19. It was a great time of food and fellowship.

This past weekend we hosted our Christmas Outreach and Celebration with "Drama in Christ" putting on a presentation.

San Francisco, California - **Freedom In Christ Church -** **Maria Caruana, Pastor**

Our Christmas Eve Service will be a special family style gathering as we will meet early to cook together. We will eat a meal together, share stories, sing songs, and worship.

'Twas the Beginning of Advent

By J. Todd Jenkins

'Twas the beginning of Advent
and all through the Church
Our hope was all dying-- we'd
given up on the search.
It wasn't so much that Christ
wasn't invited,
But after 2,000 plus years we
were no longer excited.

Oh, we knew what was coming--
no doubt about that.
And that was the trouble-- it was
all "old hat."
November brought the first of an
unending series of pains
With carefully orchestrated ad-
vertising campaigns.

There were gadgets and dolls
and all sorts of toys.
Enough to seduce even the
most devout girls and boys.
Unfortunately, it seemed, no
one was completely exempt
From this seasonal virus that
did all of us tempt.

The priests and prophets and
certainly the kings
Were all so consumed with the
desire for "things!"
It was rare, if at all, that you'd
hear of the reason
For the origin of this whole holy-
day season.

A baby, it seems, once had
been born

In the mid-east somewhere on
that first holy-day morn.
But what does that mean for
folks like us,
Who've lost ourselves in the
hoopla and fuss?

Can we re-learn the art of won-
dering and waiting,
Of hoping and praying, and
anticipating?
Can we let go of all the things
and the stuff?
Can we open our hands and
our hearts long enough?

Can we open our eyes and
open our ears?
Can we find him again after all
of these years?
Will this year be different from
all the rest?
Will we be able to offer him all
of our best?

So many questions, unan-
swered thus far,
As wisemen seeking the home
of the star.
Where do we begin-- how do
we start
To make for the child a place
in our heart?

Perhaps we begin by letting go
Of our limits on hope, and of
the stuff that we know.

Let go of the shopping, of the
chaos and fuss,
Let go of the searching, let
Christmas find us.

We open our hearts, our
hands and our eyes,
To see the king coming in
our own neighbors' cries.
We look without seeking
what we think we've earned,
But rather we're looking for
relationships spurned.

With him he brings whole-
ness and newness of life
For brother and sister, for
husband and wife.
The Christ-child comes not
by our skill,
But rather he comes by his
own Father's will.

We can't make him come
with parties and bright trees,
But only by getting down on
our knees.
He'll come if we wait amidst
our affliction,
Coming in spite of, not by our
restriction.

His coming will happen-- of
this there's no doubt.
The question is whether we'll
be in or out.
"Behold, I stand at the door
and knock."

Do you have the courage to
peer through the lock?

A basket on your porch, a child
in your reach.
A baby to love, to feed and to
teach.
He'll grow in wisdom as God's
only Son.
How far will we follow this radi-
cal one?

He'll lead us to challenge the
way that things are.
He'll lead us to follow a single
bright star.
But that will come later if we're
still around.
The question for now: Is the
child to be found?

Can we block out commercials,
the hype and the malls?
Can we find solitude in our
holy halls?
Can we keep alert, keep hope,
stay awake?
Can we receive the child for
ours and God's sake?

From on high with the caroling
host as he sees us,
He yearns to read on our lips
the prayer: Come Lord Jesus!
As Advent begins all these
questions make plea.
The only true answer: We will
see, we will see.

**O Come, O Come,
Emmanuel**

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely
exile here
Until the Son of God appears
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel

O come, thou rod
of Jesse, free
Thine own from
Satan's tyranny
From depths of hell
thy people save
And give them vict'ry
o'er the grave

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel

O come, O Dayspring,
come and cheer
Our spirits by thine
advent here
And drive away the
shaves of night
And pierce the clouds and
bring us light
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel

O come, Thou Key
of David, come
And open wide our
heavenly home
Make safe the way that
leads on high
And close the path to misery
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel

Advent cont.

God, and gave it to them saying, 'Drink this, all of you. This is my blood, God's new covenant poured out for many people for the forgiveness of sins.'

Eat together, spend a moment in silent prayer, share in song (Mercy to Me)

Second Sunday:

Light the First and Second Purple candles

Read "Twas the Beginning of Advent"

Sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

Third Sunday:

Light the First, Second and Third Purple candles



Light the Lighter Purple/Pink candle to signify the second half of advent

Read "The History of Christmas"

Sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel"

Fourth Sunday:

Start the service with all candles lit.

Read from Isaiah 9:6 "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty

God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

Have someone come in with the Large White Candle & place it in the center of the wreath lighting it and putting out the rest while singing "Joy to the World".

Soups and Carols By Randy Houston

A great way to celebrate Christmas with friends and family is to have a Soup and Carols get-together. There are no gifts, just the gift of love.

Start with three crocks of different soups (chili, veggie, broccoli & cheese, etc.). Add breads crackers and Christmas drinks (eggnog, hot cider, sodas, etc.) and voila you have the beginning to a wonderful get together. After

people have had a bowl or two gather in the living room. The host begins with the Christmas story read from Matthew 1 and Luke 2. After the reading, he (she) tells of his (her) favorite Christmas memory and what they are most thankful for this Christmas season. The host then picks a Christmas Carol for the group to sing. After the song, the person to the host's right follows with their favorite memory and

what they are most thankful for. They then pick a Carol to sing. This goes until the last person goes. Ending with the Hallelujah Chorus with everyone chiming in with their own rendition can be a lot of fun. Another song that is fun is the 12 days of Christmas and everyone makes up their own day. Be creative. It can be one of the most enjoyable get togethers you have.

Depression By Elizabeth Storbo

This time of year is the highest for people battling depression. My recommendation first is to check if there is a medical imbalance. Sometimes it is a chemical dependency that can be corrected. Many people I know have been able to control this by being on medication.

Sometimes we battle depression because we do not

have a focus. We can curb that by having a focus in our life. The first thing is to give of ourselves to someone else's need. That sometimes is the best thing in order to heal ourselves.

When we are so inward this promotes depression. Allow yourself to fellowship with other people which can be a support for you during this time.

The most important fact is to keep looking to Jesus. He will never fail you.



A History of Christmas Compiled by Franklin Sampley

Ever wonder where holiday customs come from? Here are some historical facts that may surprise you. Much of what we celebrate as Christmas started before the birth of Christ.

In Genesis 10:8-9, it states that Nimrod (a great grandson of Noah's) was a mighty hunter before the Lord. Reading that might cause you to think well of him, but if you look further you will find that the word used was 'Gibor', which means tyrant. The name Nimrod means, "let us rebel."

The Jewish Encyclopedia vol. 9 pg. 309 states, Nimrod was "He who made all the people rebellious against God." The phrase "Before the Lord" in Genesis 10: 8 & 9 means Nimrod was a man who set himself higher than God or before God. The word gibor in Hebrew translated to before also means against – reference of the same can be found in Numbers 16:2 and I Chronicles 14:8.

Now some history from Babylon – Nimrod served as a leader of Babylon and acted as a King – when he died his wife Semiramus took reign in his stead. History says that she was both an idolatrous and adulterous woman, and long after Nimrod's death, she had an illegitimate son – Tammuz. In order to put the situation into a better light, she claimed that after Nimrod's death he

had become the Sun God, and that he had visited her after his death and that Tammuz was Nimrod's son by divine conception.

Note how even in Genesis, the devil knew the Lord's plan for salvation and set out to circumvent it. He introduced a child with a claim of birth by



divine conception, even if it did not come to the level of the virgin birth – it moved the people away from God and towards idolatry.

In Nimrod's deity, he was called Baal. Fire was his earthly representation. In other forms the sun, fish, trees, pillars (read phallic symbols) and various animals symbolized Nimrod/Baal.

Even the Christmas tree started as part of this deception. Semiramus claimed that overnight an evergreen tree sprang up from a dead tree stump.

She used this as proof that her conception was divine and that Nimrod had visited her. She stated that the dead tree stump symbolized her husband, Nimrod; the new evergreen tree symbolized that Nimrod had come to life again in the person of Tammuz. The use of the 'green' tree in

ship. Although all trees are indeed green at sometime or another; the 'green' tree is a tree noted for its greenness even in winter, thus the evergreen tree. (Check out Jeremiah 10:1-5 – Hear ye the word which the Lord speaketh unto you, O house of Israel: Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen, and be not dismayed at the signs of heaven; for the heathen are dismayed at them. For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workmen, with the axe. They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers that it move not. They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not; they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good.)

worship started with this deception. The 'green' tree used during the winter Saturnalia was decorated with gold and silver to reflect the sun and thus lure the Sun God (Nimrod's new personae) back to earth. The various formations of this pagan worship are the premise behind the Christmas tree, the Yule log and holiday wreaths that are still used in this holiday.

In at least ten Biblical references, the 'green' tree is associated with idolatry and false wor-

Following Semiramus' deceptive story – Tammuz became known as the son of the Sun God. He was represented by a golden calf. The people worshiped both Semiramus and Tammuz as the divine Mother and Child. Once Nimrod became known as Baal, his wife (Semiramus) became known as Baalith. Semiramus declared herself the Queen of Heaven, and a goddess. Jeremiah repeatedly condemned her worship (Jer. 7:17 & 18; 44:16-19, 25 – 26.) Worship of the Sun God and

A History of Christmas cont.

his wife as the divine mother and the child Tammuz became annual events that some referred to as Saturnalia, but also became known as the 'nativity' as it was a time to celebrate the birth of the Sun God Baal. (Nimrod, Semiramus and Tammuz were the first revered as the holy trinity - godhead of three separate persons.)

Today, folks know the images as Madonna and child, but this did not originate with the Virgin Mary and Christ – this originated with Semiramus and Tammuz. Semiramus became known by many names in the various cultures, but always as the wife of the Sun God and divine mother, to the Israelites she became known as Ashtoreth (Judges 2:13). In Rome she was called Venus; in Ephesus she was called Diana (Acts 19:27/28). The Assyrians knew her as Ishtar, and in Nineveh her name was Easter. Baalit translated over the centuries to various forms – in old Germanic English it became *mi lady*, in Latin – *Mea Domina*, and in Italian – *Madonna*.

The people of Babylon scattered throughout the world when God confused their language and with them took their religious beliefs – including worship of divine Mother and Child. Historically, all nations have had some form of this worship. Statues much like those of Madonna and Child have been found in ar-

cheological sites dating far before the birth of Christ. In Chinese, the mother was called Shing-moo. The Germans worshiped the Virgin Heartha and child. Romans called her Venus or Fortuna and her child Jupiter. In Asia, the mother became known as Cybele and the child as Desius. Regardless of name and place, the story was much the same.

[Just as an aside, the origin of Lent – Tammuz died at the age of 40. Upon his death, Babylon set aside an annual mourning period for him of 40 days – a day for each year of his age. When this practice was adopted by the Israelites, Ezekial sternly condemned it – Ezekial 8:13/14.]

Therefore, with the deception that started in Babylon, we find the use of the 'green' tree during the winter solstice, the idolization of the divine mother and child, and many other Christmas practices that have melded over the years to what we have today. How did it happen?

It happened in the Fourth century as the church departed from the faith of the Apostles. Many forms of paganism and Christianity began to mix as Christianity spread throughout the world. Seeing that the Pagans refused to give up their religious beliefs and their feast days the church decided to place a religious doctrine behind the pagan holidays.

Pope Gregory wrote St. Augustus advising him that the wisest way of converting the Anglo-Saxon pagans was to allow them to continue their heathen practices but to teach them to do so the glory of God. Thus began part of the process of converting pagan worship rituals to Christianity. Some converted easily, such as the Madonna and Child and some not so easily – such as the 'green' tree which became the Christmas tree.

The next step was formalizing this process and this occurred at the Nicean Council of 325 A.D. At this council of churches, the church solidified the process of making many of the pagan rituals into Christian forms. The Saturnalia or Nativity typically lasted about two weeks during the shortest days of the winter, as it was a pagan practice designed to worship the Sun God and to lure him back to the earth. It was also a celebration of the birth of the Sun God. The holiday was known as Tammuz Mass and as T-Mass, which the church replaced with Christ making it Christ Mass – Christmas.

Historian debate and put various reasons forth as to why December 25 was chosen as the day to celebrate Christ birth. One is that the birthday of the current emperor was December 25. Others have pointed out that many Roman soldiers

were adherents of Mithraism, its most important feast day was "Dies Solis Invicti" (Birth of the Unconquered Sun), and this feast occurred on December 25. The Jewish Feast of Dedication of the Temple also occurred at this time. Therefore, although the reasons for choosing December 25 are uncertain, what can be stated is that it would not have been the date of Christ birth.

Some other points of interest in all this:

- The early church refused to celebrate Christ's birth, as they did not want to put it on a par with pagan carnivals. Origen – an early church leader – declared against such practice, asserting that it was sinful to keep Christ's birthday 'as though he were a King Pharaoh.'

- In 1659, because of their continued enmity toward these holidays, the Pilgrims passed this law: Whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas and the like, either by forbearing labor, feasting, or any other way, upon such account as aforesaid, every such person so offending shall pay for each offense five shilling as a fine to the country.

The holiday did not become lawful in Massachusetts until 1856 and not all of New England entered into Christmas celebrations until late in the 19th century.

Sources:
Babylon, Mystery Religion by Ralph Woodrow
All About Christmas by Maymie R. Krythe
The Story of Christmas by R. J. Campbell

Eight Great Musical Holiday Ideas! By Todd Ferrell

I love the holiday music...I think in the rush of the season, it helps to bring calm and perspective. There are several things churches of any size can do to include music into your holiday services. Here are just a few ideas both in and out of the church:

1. Invite a special guest singer (outside the church) to come and do a concert. Several ideas might be Marvin Matthews, Jeff Ferguson, Jason & DeMarco, Cynthia Clawson, Kirk Talley, Joyce Martin and more.

2. If you want to do something musical yourself - consider joining the Brentwood-Benson or Word Records Choral Clubs. They will send you single octavos as well as cantata's which can either be done live with your

own musicians or you can purchase their track music with full orchestra.

3. Another option along this idea would be to take the Christmas story and read it interspersing season Christmas songs or congregational worship songs.

4. Other options would be to make a family sing out of with your church and ask your church for their favorite carols. Have your musicians or that congregant prepare the song either vocally or musically and do it for the church and share why the song is meaningful to them before they sing/play it.

5. Go onto CCLI.com and check out their seasonal music. Each year they re-construct their website to include a section of songs that are ap-

plicable just to the Christmas Season. Pull songs together from there.

Outside the church:

6. Take a group Christmas caroling to shut in's, hospices, senior homes. If you can afford it, take along a care package like warm (no-skid) socks for them or something personal they can use. Then dress in seasonal attire and go singing carols and bringing a little cheer to these people in need.

7. Go sing at a homeless shelter or to homeless kids. We did this last year...lot's of screaming kids, food everywhere...chaos, but huge fun. Dress up in your craziest Christmas outfits and go with the fun songs, like Rudolph, Frosty etc.

Again, if you can afford it take them a gift, scarves, gloves, stocking caps, all work great. Everyone loves it, the staff, the parents and the kids.

8. Go into the streets and carol. What is Joy to the World if the World doesn't hear you. If you have a gay community or district, find a night during the season when the community will be out shopping or moving along the street and sing. Either find a spot, like a community Christmas tree and sing, or just walk up and down the sidewalk singing. Stop along the way and invite people to sing along. Take extra Christmas song books to use and handout for people on the street to join you.

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