

The Feast of the Incarnation

The Rev'd. Dr. John Roddam | www.pleromainternational.ca

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Interestingly the BAS describes Christmas Day as The Feast of the Incarnation. Historically, the Incarnation (when God became a human being) is tied to the Annunciation (March 25th) – when the Archangel Gabriel stated that Mary would have a child. Thus, the Incarnation was seen throughout the centuries to be initiated by Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit.

While I'm not advocating a particular position on Life Issues by raising this point, it appears the framers of the BAS had some agenda by changing the nature of the Christ Event! This phenomenon is known as "revisionism" - changing the original intent of an historic event, founding documents, etc. to accommodate a more modern agenda.

As a person committed to renewal, I tend to resist revisionism in whatever realm it appears – in the church, political arena, etc. This practice has been rife in the Church since the latter half of the 19th C. Historians call this the Modernist Controversy. The Church in response has not addressed this well! The Roman Catholics responded to this and other cultural dynamics by introducing the doctrine of "Papal Infallibility." Protestants responded in the early 20th C. with the formation of the Fundamentalist Movement... seeking to protect the 'fundamentals' of the Christian Faith. Neither of these reactionary stances have fared well.

Holy Scripture is the Bedrock

So... how can we understand the Faith. The bedrock of Christianity is the Holy Scripture. A plain reading of the Bible is a good place to start. This is enriched by an understanding of the original audience and culture without adding our contemporary spin or interpretation. Some of the Bible is hard to grasp. Deeper study is in order, not simply dismissing tough questions!

As Anglicans, the Historic Formularies beyond the witness of the Old & New Testament Scriptures are significant – The 3 Historic Creeds, The 39 Articles, The Catechism and The Ordinal - all in our original Book of Common Prayer (1959). These provide a framework of how we understand the Christian Faith.

Understanding and Awe

I encourage my parishioners to ask the Lord for a fresh understanding and awe during the Christmas Season... as if they've never heard the message of God's Love in Jesus Christ before! Read and reflect on the Nativity stories, ponder the profound truths of our rich Christmas Hymnody in Carols, and ask our Heavenly Father for a fresh and "simple devotion to Jesus." (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:3) These disciplines can be enriched by a study of the 39 Articles – what they say about Jesus! The three Historic Creeds emerged from the Patristic Period and share a common concern of presenting Jesus as fully God and fully human. Ponder the phrasing.

The Catechism which many of us memorized by rote can take on fresh meaning as we reflect on its sage counsel. There are statements available from sister traditions – i.e. the Lutherans with whom we are in a special relationship, sharing ministry, Eucharistic hospitality, etc. There is much richness in the Lutheran Tradition affirming the person of Christ.

All that being said... May you enjoy a Blessed Christmastide, encountering Jesus in new and deeper ways!