

CHRISTMAS IN JULY
July 24, 2011 – I John 5:1-6
The Church of the Covenant

Should we, as Christians, celebrate Christmas in December or should we celebrate Christmas in July? Scholars are fairly certain that Christ was not born on December 25th. They are fairly united in their belief that the reason we celebrate Christmas on December 25th is that the early church superimposed the holiday related to the birth of Jesus on top of another ancient, pagan holiday. They did this to snuff out the pagan holiday and to replace it with a Christian one. There is an interesting article by an astronomer who notes that the “star” (better translation from the Greek, “heavenly body”) that the wise men saw was actually a conjunction of planets over a couple year period of time, as the planet Saturn moved in the nighttime sky. If the Star of Bethlehem was the herald of the birth of Jesus this would place His birth at the earliest in 2 A.D. So was Jesus born on December 25th or in April as other scholars argue or in July as other scholars argue? Or may we say that Jesus is born perhaps another way and we ought to focus more on that????

A digression. The early Christian Church superimposed the celebration of Christmas on a Roman pagan holiday, Saturnalia. But perhaps over time the pagan holiday has superceded Christmas more than Christmas has superceded the pagan holiday!!!! The way we celebrate December 25th is with a Christmas Tree –you will search the Bible from front to back and not find a Christmas Tree mentioned in it. This is more about Germanic tree gods than it is the Christ of Bethlehem. The holiday is about excess; it is about consumption. Somehow we have translated the giving of gifts by the wise men to the infant Jesus into the giving of excessive and expensive gifts to one another. Whose birthday is it anyway? How would we really honor Jesus by giving gifts? It is hard to find excess in the simplicity of the manger, a simple, rude feeding trough in which our Savior was placed at birth. The message of Christmas, the Lord Jesus Christ giving up His heavenly throne, and humbling Himself, being born in the likeness of men, and accepting human vesture and accepting a throne that is an animal feeding trough, has been lost in a pagan orgy of material consumption having little to do with Jesus. The message of the incarnation has been relegated to the spiritual ghetto of December 25th and may I say, where Christmas is concerned, it appears to me the pagans have won.

Today I seek to break Christmas out of that spiritual ghetto; I will endeavor to present the incarnation as something to be lived out in July and April as well as on December 25th. I am trying to find the truest meaning of Christmas that has been hidden by the overtly pagan ways we tend to practice it. It is Christmas in July and there is no way you can run out and decorate the tree and buy all those gifts for your family. It is Christmas shorn of the way we have come to celebrate it.

Our scripture from I John is illuminating. It declares that –*“whatever is born of God overcomes the world.”* (I John 5: 4) When Jesus was born in Bethlehem even though He was but an infant He overcame the world. He overcame everything in this world that can hurt us or destroy us. He overcame sin. He overcame death itself. The scripture says: *“Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God...”* (I John 5: 1) Love was born into the world through the birth of Jesus. When we believe in HIM, when we believe that we are loved by God, when we believe that what was born into our world through the birth of the Son of God, then we may also believe that through God’s love we are a child of God. The birth of the child of God, He who is *“born of God”*, makes us children of God, and we become born of God, as well. And this scripture does not suggest that what is born of God is confined to December 25th. No it says *WHATEVER* is born of God overcomes the world. Wherever Jesus is born and reborn into the world, there God overcomes the world. *We are more than conquerors through HIM who has*

loves us! WHEREVER Jesus is born His love overcomes the world. Whatever and wherever the love of God is incarnate into the world there Christ is born, and there is Christmas. This is not the literal birth of the physical Jesus; this is the *spiritual birth* of Jesus Christ born and reborn and born again into our world. *Whatever is born of God overcomes the world;* Jesus is born of God and Jesus overcomes the world.

So, in that sense is Jesus born just on December 25th? Or in another sense, is Jesus Christ born wherever and whenever His living presence is spiritually born? Is Jesus' spiritual rebirth into the world and into the hearts of people confined only to December 25th? No way. Jesus is born wherever and whenever His love is born into the world and into the hearts of men...July 24th just as much as on December 25th.

Think about it this way...a baby is not held by its Mother because the Mother is addicted to crack cocaine and a loving Christian family adopts that baby and holds it and loves it and surrounds it with the love of Jesus...if you listen carefully you can almost hear a baby cry in the distance...and Jesus is born once again. Or a child who has nothing, who may not have a chance in life to get ahead has someone volunteer to be an adult helper over at the Lemoyne Center here in Washington and because of that love the child gets a vision of who they can be and what God can do in their lives...and you can almost hear a baby cry in the distance...and Jesus is born into the world once again. Or someone volunteers to host at Interfaith Hospitality Network where there are children and their families who are temporarily homeless, just like little homeless Jesus in Bethlehem, and because someone cared, because of the love of Jesus in someone's heart, that little child and their family get a fresh start...and up there on third floor you can almost hear a baby cry just like on that first Christmas...and Jesus is born again. Or someone gives a *Christmas* gift that really honors Jesus, someone gives a gift to Operation Christmas Child, simple gifts, a pencil box, some socks, a small toy and some child on the other side of the globe opens that shoe box, packed with the love of Jesus, and that little child believes in Jesus, because of the love they receive from a perfect stranger...and he or she becomes a child of God...and you can almost hear a little baby cry in the distance, you know the one, you know the One I am talking about, the Child of Bethlehem lying in a feeding trough...and somewhere, somehow, some way Jesus is born again into the world. Holding a baby no one else will hold, coaching at the Lemoyne Center, volunteering for IHN, helping with Operation Christmas Child --Now that's giving a gift that's appropriate on Christmas to the baby Jesus! That's the real love God sent into the world through Jesus! That's Christmas in July!!!!

With this I conclude. I discovered that the Operation Christmas Child boxes are not all opened on December 25th. No, they are gradually distributed throughout the world and then are given to children and given away always with the message of Jesus. So there are some shoe boxes opened on December 25th to be sure, but some in January and some in February and some in March and some in April and May and June. And some in July. And somewhere, maybe on the other side of the earth, maybe somewhere in Africa, today, some little child is opening an Operation Christmas Child shoebox on July 24, 2011. And all the prayers and all the love and indeed the very presence of the very ONE born in Bethlehem so long ago is packed within that shoebox, that manger filled with love. And somewhere that shoebox that you filled last year is opened and a little child's life is touched and transformed and changed. Somewhere its Christmas in July. Think about that for just a moment. Think about that.

May the love of God descend to our hearts today...and may it be Christmas right here in our hearts and in our church TODAY... When was Jesus born? July 24th, 2000 and eleven. And Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*