

Many years ago a respected English journalist and author of several fine books, G.K. Chesterton, penned an article for his own weekly newspaper in which he took dead aim at those who waged war on Christmas. He vigorously defended the celebration of the feast. He wrote the article in 1925, ninety-five years ago. Even in the early half of the last century, the twentieth, there were many detractors of the yuletide traditions. Now fast forward to December of 2020. Two prominent world leaders, Justin Trudeau of Canada and Boris Johnson of England both announced to the citizens of their respective countries that there would be no Christmas this year.

The all too familiar Christmas story of a young couple denied entrance to an inn has been played out time and again in the last four hundred years.

During the French revolution of the late eighteenth century all religious services were banned. Christmas was re-named "Dog Day" and the streets were emptied of nativity scenes. Churches throughout France were dubbed "Temples of Reason" and in the great Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris the goddess reason in the person of a prostitute was enthroned on the high altar. The traditional "Three Kings cake", a Christmas staple, was re-named the "Equality Cake". The bells the French expected to hear on Christmas morning were melted down for their bronze to increase the national treasury.

In 1647 The English Parliament under the influence of the Puritans banned the celebration of Christmas and replaced it with a day of fasting and humiliation. One was discouraged greeting others with the words, "Merry Christmas". Merriment was out.

The Puritan government of one of the original colonies in North America, the Massachusetts Bay Colony banned Christmas celebrations in 1659. For more than a generation it was unlawful, under pain of fine or imprisonment, to observe the Holy Day in public.

Under state sponsored Atheistic Communism, Christmas was banned in Many European countries for the better part of the twentieth century. Those who opposed the restriction on the freedom of worship were shown no mercy. Today, in the lands in which Islam predominates, such as Egypt, publicly celebrating Christmas is, to say the least, risky. Just ask the Coptic Christians who continue to be harassed and even killed for their public witness of faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, never underestimate the staying power of Christmas. If only because of the Church that this sacred day on the church's liturgical calendar has weathered every storm. God would not have entered our world as a poor, defenseless child only to have the annual commemoration of the event, the central event of human history, cancelled, if only for a year, because of a virus. Even during the various horrific plagues that devastated countries in Europe centuries ago, worship was never considered non-essential. Christmas is, and always will be, a public feast. Indeed, the very word "Christmas" means "Mass of Christ", a clear reference to the mystery we celebrate in Church, a public place, as a faith community. In one of his profound Christmas sermons Pope Benedict pointed out that "God does not allow Himself to be shut out. He finds a space, even if it means entering through a stable".

Christmas is unstoppable

True, large gatherings will be few this December, and the customary office parties will undoubtedly be suspended for an indefinite time. Sporting events, alas, will be postponed or even cancelled, but the commemoration of the Incarnation, the God taking for Himself a human nature, cannot be erased from our calendar.

Why is Christmas resented by so many people of influence today? Why is it considered offensive? Perhaps those who wage war on Christmas fear it may be true.

The name given to the child at his birth was “Emmanuel”, which means “God is with us”. It is till the name that best tells us what the birth of Christ is all about. The Lord, the one who is “Light from Light”, now actually appears. He is no longer in eternity, no longer in the Blessed womb of his mother. The child lying in the manger is truly God’s eternal Son.

“There is no room for them at the inn” (Lk. 2:7). In the fourth gospel, the evangelist John takes up this chance comment found in Saint Luke’s Infancy narrative about the lack of room at the inn, which, out of necessity, compelled the Holy family to seek shelter in a stable; he explores it deeply and arrives at the heart of the matter when he writes: “He came unto his own home, and his own people received him not” (Jn. 1:11). In some way we are all waiting for God to draw near to us. But when he finally comes, there is no room for him. There are simply too many distractions in our life to bother with him.

Long ago in the country of Wales, it was a custom to unlock the gates and doors to one’s home on Christmas Eve. This was done to give the Holy family access to one’s home. Behind this lovely tradition lies a deep truth. Christ has indeed come to us on earth and entered into our history, bringing with him hope and comfort but we must make the effort to welcome him in our lives. His coming is like a knock on the door that demands to be answered.

In the years ahead, many of us who are proud to be disciples of Jesus and are deeply committed to the faith may grow unduly alarmed as they sadly see more doors closed to Christ. But we need not panic. Christ has pitched his tent among us. (Jn. 1:14). He is not going away.

Recall the words of the popular Christmas carol: “God rest ye merry gentlemen. Let nothing ye dismay. Remember Christ our savior was born on Christmas day”.

Even in the midst of a pandemic the Spirit of Christmas continues to live in our hearts and in our homes.

Christmas will never be cancelled. Never!