

Christmas assembly

So here we are. At the end of a long term, with the prospect of the Christmas break ahead.

Each of us will approach the Christmas season in our different way. Whether you see the time as an opportunity to gather with family, or whether your focus is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, Christmas is a time of goodwill, of fellowship and of joy.

When I think of Christmas, the image that comes to my mind is one of lights. As Christianity celebrates the light of Christ being born into the world, we tend to fill our homes with real lights.

There will be Christmas lights festooned around the tree. There will be candles. You may have draped the front of your house with large scale flashing decorations. Every high street is lit up with Christmas decorations. It is a time of illumination.

Christmas is not the only festival celebrated at this time of year. And nor is it alone in placing light at the centre of the celebrations. I think of Diwali, the festival of the victory of light over darkness, celebrated by Hindus, Jains and Sikhs with lamps and fireworks.

I think of Hanukah, where Jewish people recall the rededication of the second Temple. How is it done? By lighting the Menorah: seven candles, lit one by one by the central servant candle.

And across very many religious traditions we have the celebration of the winter solstice.

Even modern traditions like the 12 days of Christmas took their start from the 12 days it took to burn through the celebration log in the pagan festival called Yule. In ancient times, places like Stonehenge and the burial mound at Newgrange were aligned upon the rising sun on the morning of the shortest day. It seems that from the very start, light was important.

All of these festivals have light at their heart for an obvious reason: here we are in the darkest days of the year. We get up in the darkness to come to school and when we go home at the end of the day we do so at night. Thomas Hood, in 1844, captured the mood in this poem:

No sun - no moon!

No morn - no noon -

No dawn - no dusk - no proper time of day.

No warmth, no cheerfulness, no healthful ease,

No shade, no shine, no butterflies, no bees,

No fruits, no flowers, no leaves, no birds! -

November!

No wonder we all feel the urge to fight the darkness with light - to fill our lives with illumination. For light is more than just a way to see in the darkness. Light stands for hope. Light reminds us of the coming spring. Light is joy.

May your holiday be illuminated with light. Whichever tradition you follow, or none, may the days ahead be full of light, and warmth, and hope. May you find joy in your family and in fellowship.

Merry Christmas.