

Celebrating all Traditions this Holiday Season

Written by Jeff Smith, State Senator District 31
Wednesday, 08 December 2021 07:25 -

<http://newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/capitol-xmas-tree-s5.jpg>



Sen. Smith writes about the holidays celebrated and traditions observed during this time of year. It is truly a time of reflection for many reasons—the end of another calendar year and the cross section of cultural beliefs.

MADISON - For most of us, this time of year is for celebrating. Once we hit the final week of November, we're in the holiday season—Thanksgiving leading up to Christmas before the New Year celebrations.

As much meaning that Christmas has for most of us, there can be no arguing that exchanging gifts has overshadowed the religious significance of the holiday. After all, Black Friday is aptly named as the day when retail outlets make their greatest profits from consumers buying Christmas gifts.

Yet, this season raises our spirits in so many ways. It's a time when we can forget our differences and reflect on what could be.

I was raised in a Catholic family and attended a Catholic school. As a child, I was taught in catechism with the expectation that it was all I needed to know about religion. But I was always curious and even disappointed that I didn't know more about the many other cultures and religious beliefs around me—and there are so many. I do know that if I knew more about other

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beliefs I'd almost certainly better understand people who are different than me. With that in mind, I thought it'd be fun to learn how others celebrate and honor their beliefs.

Throughout the year there are religious holidays with so much meaning to their followers. Trying to learn and understand other beliefs or cultures can be challenging, but it's also interesting and surprising. What we learn from other religions isn't really so different from the religious beliefs and values so many of us hold so dear.



Christmas is the culmination of what we consider our traditional year, but other religions follow their own calendar. Knowing when important religious holidays happen can tell us a lot about each other. I learned a lot just from looking back on the 2021 calendar.

Christians celebrated Epiphany on January 6th, commemorating the arrival of the three kings to honor the birth of Jesus. On January 14th the celebration of Makar Sankranti happened, which is a time of peace and prosperity in the Hindu religion. On January 17th, the Baha'i celebrated World Religion Day. Those are just three important days in January that reminded me we share so much with others in what we value and hope for.

Continuing to look back through the 2021 calendar, I found other important and historical dates. While most of our attention was on St. Patrick's Day on March 17th, Jews celebrated Purim, the survival of ancient Persian Jews. March was also when the Jewish faith began the seven-day Passover commemorating the freeing of Jewish slaves from Egypt.

Religions remain abundant in similarities. For instance, there is Lailat al Miraj, the Muslim holiday observing Muhammad's nighttime journey from Mecca to Jerusalem where he ascended into

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heaven. In 2021 that was celebrated on March 11th, less than a month before Easter which commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

For an entire month, between April 12th and May 12th, Muslims celebrated Ramadan—a full month of fasting and prayer. Of course, Christians might understand Ramadan for the same reasons they recognize Lent before Easter.



Last week, the Wisconsin State Capitol Holiday Tree was lit. Wisconsinites of all backgrounds came together during the tree lighting ceremony to share diverse stories and traditions. This memorable time together showed just how important cultural traditions are to all Wisconsinites. We all celebrate the desire for justice, peace and good for all. The desire to get along and the way in which we should treat each other is reflected in nearly all religious holidays throughout the year.

I'd recommend taking time to reflect on the major religious holidays observed around the world to begin to understand how close we really are. This time of year is truly a time of reflection for many reasons—the end of another calendar year and the cross section of cultural beliefs. Whatever your beliefs, I wish you the greatest of joys to your family and friends while we endure the hardships in this world together.