



The Background of Christmas



“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth. To a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin’s name was Mary. The “Hail, you that are highly you are blessed among women.” angel) she was troubled about out what his words meant. And not, Mary, for you have found conceive in your womb and Him Jesus. He shall be great the Highest and God will give Him the throne of David. And of His kingdom there shall be no end. The Holy Ghost shall come upon you and the power of God will overshadow you, and that holy thing which shall be born will be called the Son of God. For with God, nothing is impossible.”



(Luke 1:26-37)

At this time Mary and Joseph were not yet married. But, an engagement in those days was a solemn pledge – the vows were taken in a ceremony – but they did not live together yet. When Joseph found out Mary was pregnant – he was going to break off the engagement because he thought she had been unfaithful – but the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him, *“Don’t be afraid to take Mary to be your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. She shall bring forth a son and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save his people from their sins. This was done to fulfill that which was spoken by the prophet, ‘Behold, a virgin shall be with child and bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, which means, God with us.’”* (Isaiah 7:14) (Matthew 1:20-23)



Joseph did as the angel said and married Mary but did not perform the marriage act until after the birth of Jesus. Although Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth, Jesus was born in Bethlehem because Joseph and Mary were required by law to go to Bethlehem – to pay taxes to Caesar. Mary and Joseph were not poor as they are sometimes pictured on Christmas cards. Joseph was a successful carpenter. He helped re-build Nazareth. God did not choose ignorant people to raise His son. God wanted Him raised as a good man, a perfect man.

Mary had nine months to prepare a layette for this baby. She knew she was pregnant by the Holy Spirit from God and she was not going to put the baby in rags. The “swaddling clothes” Jesus was wrapped in after His birth were not rags, they were special softly woven linen cloths that were decorated. And they had money for the hotel where they

(Cont'd)

went first, but they couldn't stay there because it was full. They had money to pay their taxes and to take care of themselves for nearly two years until they could return to Nazareth. The wise men had also come and found Jesus not as a baby, but as a young child in a house in Bethlehem, and they gave Him much gold, frankincense and myrrh which were very valuable so they had money to live 2 years in Egypt before going back home. Some of our customs and traditions are not scripturally correct, but the loving and giving are what matter.



THE DAY:

People began a lot of customs and traditions that began to be associated with Christmas. All of our customs today have very interesting backgrounds, except perhaps, "Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer." The Bible does not tell us the day on which Jesus was born, but all scholars agree it was not on December 25th. So where did we get that date? It all started 167 years before Jesus was born when a man named Antichicus Epiphanes walked into the Holy of Holies (the place of God) in the temple in Jerusalem, and erected a statue of the pagan sun god Zeus, with his (Antichicus') face on it. He then proclaimed himself to be God. He hated all Jews and the God they worshipped, so he demanded that they worship his God. When the Jewish people refused, he cruelly sacrificed Jewish children and pigs on the holy altar in the temple. When he tried to force a young Jewish man named Judas Maccabee, to make these sacrifices, the young man's father fought back and led a revolt in Jerusalem and was killed, then Judas took back the temple, tore down the statue of Zeus and rededicated the temple to God on December 25th. This was celebrated every year and called the Feast of Dedication, because the altar and the temple were once again dedicated to God.



THE LIGHTS:

When they found the golden candlestick and holy oil in the temple, there was only enough oil for 1 day, but God did a miracle and kept the light burning 8 days – so during the last 7 days everyone lit their homes with candles, to celebrate the light from God, so the Feast also became known as the Feast of Lights – and that's why we put lights on our Christmas trees and our homes and celebrate. It was forbidden to mourn, everyone was to rejoice, and Judas Maccabee and his followers exchanged gifts every day for the 7 days to celebrate God's miracle gift of light – this began the exchange of gifts. (The Jews call these days Hanukah or Rosh Hosanna).

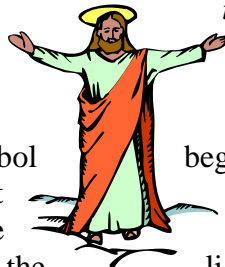


THE GIFTS:

On Feast day December 25th they began to exchange gifts every year – that's why we give gifts. And it was on December 25th, at the Feast of Dedication in the temple in Jerusalem, that Jesus revealed Himself as God when He said, "*I and My Father are one.*" (John 10:30) He went to the priests and leaders and told them who He was – and from that time on, the Jews did not believe Him, but the Christians have celebrated His birthday every year on December 25th for the last 2,000 years. We give gifts to celebrate

(Cont'd)

the greatest gift we can ever receive, God's second gift of light, Jesus. *"In Him was life; and the life was the light of men, every person that comes into the world."* (John 1:4,9)



THE TREE:

Using a tree as a Christmas symbol began hundreds of years ago when a missionary named Boniface went to Germany, which was a pagan nation then. They were worshipping a god of sun and lightning (a warped version of the light from God). Their god was called Odion and they worshipped between December 22nd and January 1st. (Another perversion of the Festival of Lights). They did this to bring back the sun after winter. They would pick an oak tree, call it a sacred tree, build a big bonfire in front of it and exchange gifts. Boniface was getting nowhere trying to get these people born again – after 3 years he had only 2 converts.

Finally, when the ritual started again on December 22nd, he became very angry and took an axe and chopped the oak tree down and threw it in the bonfire. The people were sure their god, Odion was going to strike him down, but nothing happened. 3 days later on December 25th he chopped down a fir tree – stood it up in the middle of the people and talked about the resurrection of Jesus Christ – how that 3 days after His death, He was raised up. Then Boniface took ugly objects and hung them on the tree to show that Jesus took all of our sins and sicknesses to the grave when He died, and when God raised Him from the dead all those things were dead and done away with for every one who would believe on Jesus as their Savior. 3,000 people were born again. Revival broke out. The people replaced Odion with God; the oak tree with a fir tree; ugly sin ornaments with beautiful shining ornaments to represent new life in Jesus; and lights to celebrate Jesus, the light of the world.



So as you celebrate Christmas this year, train your eyes and teach your children to look past Santa Claus (which is a counterfeit of Christ to actually take the attention of children off of the gift of Jesus, on to presents from Santa). Mothers and fathers think it's cute but children actually believe there is a Santa Claus because mom and dad said so. To some children it is very upsetting and devastating to find out they were tricked and that mom and dad would lie to them. Then the parents tell them about Jesus and the children don't know whether He is real or not because they said Santa was, and he wasn't. Tell your children you bought the gifts in remembrance of Jesus – and that reindeer don't fly and land on the roof – and tell them Christmas is a holy day (that's what "holiday" means) – not "holly" day. And don't allow yourself to get so caught up in the stress of deciding what presents to get, and the money you really can't afford to spend, that you miss the depth and majesty of the miracle you are really doing all this for.



Merry Christmas to all!
And God bless you!



The Background of Christmas

There will be no questions and answers.

MEMORY VERSE "Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord!" (Luke 2:11)