

THE CHURCH IN NEW YORK CITY
CHILDREN'S MEETING LESSON

DATE: December 6, 2015

SUBJECT: THE TRUTH ABOUT CHRISTMAS

SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 15:7-8; Proverbs 15:27; Romans 12:8b (“...he who gives, in simplicity;...”), 13; Philippians 4:11b; Colossians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:8-10; 1 John 2:15-17

AIM: To help the children understand that (1) the celebration of Christmas is not in the Bible and (2) we should be thankful for what we have, rather than wanting more and more material things, like many do around Christmas time.

MEMORY VERSES TO CHOOSE FROM: Acts 20:35b (“It is more blessed to give than to receive”); Philippians 4:11b (“...for I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content.”); 1 Peter 3:15 (“But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, being always ready for a defense to everyone who asks of you an account concerning the hope which is in you.”)

APPROACH: Ask the children what they think of when someone says “Christmas”? Perhaps they may say “presents,” or “Christmas tree,” or “Santa Claus,” etc. Some may say it is Christ’s birth.

CONTENT:

Note to serving ones: We do not necessarily need to give the children all the background details in this lesson, but with prayer and fellowship, we can see how much to say depending on the ages of the children and the type of questions and comments from them.

I. Christmas is not in the Bible. The Bible does not tell us the date of Christ’s birth. There is no indication at all in the Bible that we should observe a holiday called Christmas. The word “Christmas” itself is not mentioned in the Bible. None of the traditions that we see practiced today are in the Bible. Although we acknowledge Jesus Christ’s birth, there is no record of anyone in the Bible celebrating His birthday from year to year. In the Bible, whenever God wanted His people to observe a certain date or event, He specifically said so. For example, in the Old Testament, before the Lord Jesus came to earth, specific dates are mentioned for the feast of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:5-6). In the New Testament, the Lord tells us to remember His death (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

II. December 25th is not the date of Christ's birth.

- A. Luke 2:8 tells us that when the angel of the Lord announced the birth of Jesus, there were shepherds “spending their nights in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.” In Palestine, sheep stayed in the pastures until the cold, rainy season. The first rains fell, at the latest, in late October or early November. The sheep were brought in from the mountains and pastures no later than mid-October. Sheep would not have been in the fields in late December.
- B. At the time of Jesus' birth, there was a census to be taken of all the inhabited earth, decreed by Caesar Augustus. Everyone was required to travel to his own hometown to be accounted for (Luke 2:1-3). Many traveled long distances. Palestine is a hilly country and during the winter the nights are very cold. It would not have made sense for the Roman Caesar to impose a census in the winter, when temperatures dropped below freezing and roads were in poor condition.
- C. The words of our Lord, “And pray that your flight may not be in winter...” (Matthew 24:20a) indicate that the middle of winter was a very difficult time to travel. Mary, in the last stages of her pregnancy, could not have made such a journey (70-90 miles) in the middle of winter.

III. The origin of Christmas is pagan. A pagan is a person who worships (i.e., prays to, exalts, honors) idols. An idol is a false god. Pagans often worshipped idols made from wood, stone, or metal. They also worshipped the things of nature. They worshipped these idols instead of the only true God. “Christmas” was not celebrated until more than 300 years after Christ’s actual birth. Before that time, December 25th was celebrated by several heathen religions in honor of their various gods. Brumalia was celebrated on this day by the Romans to mark the winter Solstice. Also on this day, in the Persian religion called Mithraism, the people worship Mithras, the heavenly light, which is the sun. About 350 A.D., the Roman Emperor Constantine adopted the date and the customs associated with the pagan holiday in order for it to be celebrated as the birthday of Christ. Until today there are a few customs many people still practice:

- 1. **Christmas tree:** Scandinavians worshipped trees before Christmas was adopted by Constantine. In Egypt, the date palm tree was brought indoors as a religious symbol. In Rome, the fir tree was decorated with toys in honor of Saturn’s

birthday; also, candles were fastened to trees to indicate the return of the sun to the earth. The Druids honored Odin (wooden) by tying gilded apples and other offerings on tree branches. Martin Luther popularized the Christmas tree in the 16th century. But it is written, “Hear the word which Jehovah speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says Jehovah, Do not learn the way of the nations, And do not be terrified by the signs of the heavens, Although the nations are terrified by them. For the customs of the peoples are vanity, Because *their god* is a tree cut from the forest, The work of the hands of a craftsman with an ax. He adorns it with silver and with gold;...” (Jeremiah 10:1-4).

2. **Gift giving:** Gift giving comes from the Roman celebrations of the Saturnalia and Kalends of January (Roman New Year). But it is written, “...you shall not respect persons, nor shall you take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and perverts the words of the righteous” (Deuteronomy 16:19b).
3. **Wreaths:** It was customary at the Kalends of January to present people with green branches for the sake of good luck in the new year. But it is written, “Blessed is the man who makes Jehovah his trust” (Psalm 40:4a).
4. **Santa Claus:** The belief in Santa Claus comes from an old Norse legend about a man named St. Nicolas who distributed toys to the poor on Christmas Eve.

IV. We have the example of other faithful Christians. Christians did not celebrate Christmas in the early centuries after the Lord’s resurrection. Its celebration and practices crept in slowly. Throughout the centuries, however, there always seems to have been a few who realized that this holiday was not from God. As early as 230 A.D. there were those who stood up to resist. In the mid 1600s there were several ordinances in England prohibiting church services and festivities on December 25th. In America, under the influence of Puritans, a law was passed in 1659 in New England which forbade the observance of Christmas. It was repealed in 1681, but Christmas was not made a legal holiday in Massachusetts until 1856. Quakers, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Mennonites, Brethren, and Amish originally did not celebrate Christmas. (However, eventually they all gave in.)

SUGGESTED APPLICATIONS TO CHOOSE FROM:

- **We should not do things just because it seems like everyone else is doing it.** Even though other people, including Christians, celebrate Christmas, we should do what pleases God and not just follow what other people do. There are many in the Bible such as Noah and Daniel that stood for the Lord.
- **We can be thankful for the birth of the Lord Jesus all year round.** Many wait until Christmas, which is not really Jesus’ birthday, to remember His birth. But we can be thankful all year round.
- **We should be thankful for what the Lord has given to us.** We should not get caught up in the buying and selling of the holiday season. Many people agree that Christmas is too commercial—the main emphasis is on buying and selling. Stores promote the newest toys. Children and grown-ups alike are asked what they want for Christmas and make wish lists. They expect gifts, and some children think it is their right to receive gifts. People run to stores to buy presents, and many spend more money than they have and later may become depressed. When people receive gifts they do not like, they stand in long lines to return them to get something that they really want. People are looking to material things for their satisfaction. But God knows what we need, and He takes care of our needs. (Matthew 10:31; Luke 12:7) We should be thankful for what He has provided for us. Consider have you ever gotten a toy you really wanted? Did you still enjoy it a year later? King Solomon seemingly had everything. He said, “And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them;...and indeed, all was vanity and a chasing after wind; and there was no advantage under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:10-11).
- **We should be generous in giving.** Rather than wanting for ourselves, we should be generous in giving. (Deuteronomy 15:7-8; 2 Corinthians 9:7). When we see or hear of someone in need, we can give our time, energy, belongings, or even money as an offering to the Lord and as a blessing to the one in need.
- **We need to be prepared.** We should not be caught by surprise when our friends and relatives ask, “What do you want for Christmas?” and “How come you don’t celebrate Christmas?” We can tell them that the Bible does not tell us the date of Christ’s birth and does not tell us to celebrate Christ’s birthday. The serving ones can try role play with the children to see if they are able to respond to their friends concerning Christmas.
- **If others around us do celebrate Christmas, we should not look down on them or judge them.** Many believers who celebrate Christmas love the Lord. May they come to the realization that this holiday is not from God.

References: The Truth about Christmas. By Charles Halff. The Two Babylons. By Alexander Hislop.

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