

World Kids PAL Project



Number 7 - Christmas 2008

One of the most famous traditional holidays celebrated all over the world is CHRISTMAS! It is usually celebrated on December 24th and 25th or around January 6th so we want to wish you all a very happy Christmas season throughout the coming weeks however you celebrate it in your part of the world! The word tradition means "custom or habit" and it describes certain activities that are done to remember a special event.



Did you know that God started the first traditional holiday? It was to help men remember God's powerful deliverance of His people from Egypt. You can read about this special holiday in Exodus 12:14

Can you think of 2 other times in the Bible when God commanded His people to start a new tradition?

Read Esther 9:20-38 and Luke 22:14-20

It is no surprise that many Christmas traditions started in Europe where Christianity was first firmly established. From there they spread around the world as people traveled and discovered new lands, and gradually the traditions became adapted to the different conditions and cultures. Sadly, over many centuries, many Christmas traditions became so changed that they lost their focus on Jesus. Today, even in the West (the so-called "Christian nations"!!) many people celebrate Christmas and never even think of Jesus! Television commercials and stores are filled with reindeer, elves and Santa; people are busy buying special food and expensive gifts; and it is even called the "Holiday season" rather than Christmas!! Some Christians feel it is so bad they don't even want to celebrate Christmas at all any more! But I believe God WANTS us to remember the Birth of Jesus and to still celebrate it. Satan is still allowed to roam around the earth and tempt people to corrupt good things (or change and make them bad) but that should not stop us from still remembering and celebrating the truth of Jesus' birth!

Let's look at some of the oldest and most widely known Christmas traditions:



CHRISTMAS TREES - many now are colored and man-made and elaborately decorated; and some Christians say that it is not good to have a Christmas tree because they were originally a pagan tradition. But I believe that decorating an evergreen tree (cedar, pine, spruce or similar tree that doesn't lose its leaves in winter) is a wonderful way to remind us of Christmas. These trees are still colorful and green even in the middle of winter when all other plants have died of the cold and everything is bleak and dead. They remind us that Jesus Christ came to bring everlasting life, and light and joy to a cold, sad world!

CHRISTMAS CARDS AND GIFTS - these are sent and given to friends, and sometimes even strangers. Sadly many people feel they must spend a lot of money on such things, but even a very simple gift is a good reminder that God sent His baby son, Jesus, to live with us on the earth and show us God's love. The Christmas story also tells us that wise men traveled a long way to visit Jesus and bring him gifts because they recognized him as a king.



CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS - shaped like stars, candles, angels and even showing the manger scene, they can remind us of the Christmas story. When children and others ask us "why?" or "what does it mean?" we can tell them the wonderful story of Jesus' birth. Why do you think a candle reminds us of the Christmas story?

CHRISTMAS FOOD - special foods help us celebrate with family and friends and remember how God has always been faithful in past years just as He is today. When God commanded His people to celebrate a special holiday it usually included gathering together to share a special meal.





CHRISTMAS CAROLS (SONGS) - singing songs is a wonderful way to tell stories, and in many parts of the world, Christians go around in small groups and sing Christmas carols, visiting homes and businesses and telling others about Jesus' birth and the Christmas story. Sometimes church groups act out a Christmas play or the Nativity scene as a way of telling others the story.

In past years we have shared about many different Christmas traditions around the world (you can still see these issues on our website www.imofinc.org). But the truth is that many of you that are reading this PAL Page live in places such as India or parts of Africa, and you have never celebrated Christmas in your home before - maybe because your family is very poor, or because your parents don't know about Jesus or the Christmas story. What can YOU do to celebrate and remember Christmas? It's not necessary to try to copy certain traditions - what IS important is to find a meaningful way to celebrate so that when others ask you "why?", you can tell them the story of Jesus' birth. Maybe some of you have always had a very busy Christmas in the past and have forgotten to remember Jesus - maybe this year, you want to make a change and have a simpler Christmas so that you can focus better on Jesus! Here are some ideas that don't need money, just a little work - and they are good reminders!

You may not be able to have an evergreen or Christmas tree - but you could still use a plant and decorate it, to remind you of having eternal life with Jesus. Years ago in North America, people used kernels of popcorn strung together to decorate a tree! One year we decorated a dead tree branch with brightly colored berries, leaves and flowers. You could make a wreath like that (from twisted vines or hay) then decorate it and hang it on the door to welcome visitors.



If we want to give a gift to a friend or family member, we could always make something ourselves (in fact, since we have 18 grandchildren now, I usually still DO make most of our Christmas gifts!!). A special drawing, a bunch of fresh-picked flowers, a small doll made from rags, or a toy carved out of wood, can be a special blessing and show how much we care. Sometimes we can do something to HELP someone who is elderly or very busy - and that is always appreciated!

Celebrations often include colorful decorations that make us feel happy and friendly. As a child growing up in England, my sister and I always made chains of strips of colored paper that were glued into rings and linked together. These colorful "paper chains" would then be draped around the room. In some countries, strips of plain white paper are cut into lacey patterns and decorative shapes like angels and stars that remind us of Christmas. Many years ago my husband Gerald carved small figures from wood and made a simple Nativity scene, which we still use every year.



Sadly in many homes around the world it's not possible to celebrate with special food at Christmas because it may be hard to get ANY food at all! But even that itself reminds us of the Christmas story - as we read through it in Luke 2 and Matthew 2 we notice that not only were Joseph and Mary very poor and had to make their home for a while in a cave or barn while Jesus was born, but there is no mention of them eating a special celebration meal or in fact any food at all! If we CAN enjoy special food to celebrate Christmas that's good, but even if we can't, it doesn't stop us remembering what is most important about Christmas - that God loves us so much that He sent his own Son to be with us here on earth, so now we can feel His presence with us every day wherever we are!

I pray that no matter how you celebrate Christmas this year, you will remember and tell others about the wonderful story of Jesus' birth that started it all! Remember to check out the past Christmas issues on our website, which also has several fun games and activities to help you celebrate!

With much love - 'til next year!

Your friend, Shirley

