

THE CHURCH IN NEW YORK CITY CHILDREN'S MEETING LESSON

DATE: December 16, 2018

SUBJECT: THE TRUTH ABOUT CHRISTMAS

SCRIPTURE: Jeremiah 10:1-4; Deuteronomy 15:7-8; Proverbs 15:27; Luke 2:1-20; Matthew 1:18-2:12; Romans 12:8b (“...he who gives, in simplicity...”); Romans 12:13; 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: Jeremiah 10:2a-3a (**2a** Thus says Jehovah, Do not learn the way of the nations,...**3a** For the customs of the peoples are vanity...); Luke 2:10-11 (**10** And the angel said to them, Do not be afraid; for behold, I announce to you good news of great joy, which will be for all the people, **11** Because today a Savior has been born to you in David's city, who is Christ the Lord.); Philippians 4:11b (“...for I have learned, in whatever circumstances I am, to be content.”); Deuteronomy 15:7b (...you shall not close up your hand from your needy brother.); 2 Corinthians 9:7b (...for God loves a cheerful giver.); Acts 20: 35b (...He Himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.)

SUGGESTED SONGS: 80 (Jesus bids us shine); 142 (I belong to Jesus); 146 (I want the Lord to have the first place in my heart); 192 (We are different); 1013 (Always rejoice); 6705 (The B-I-B-L-E); 9031 (If you ever see a needy one); 9123 (Blessed to give)

CRAFT IDEAS:

Make piggy banks from recycled cans:

Provide formula cans, Pringle cans, oatmeal cans, etc. with lids.

Decorate the container and lid using glue sticks, pretty paper, washi tape or markers.

Cut a slit on the center of lid.



NOTE TO SERVING ONES: (1) Before the lesson, it would be good to ask the children what they know about Christmas and gauge the children's situations, for example, whether they have family members that celebrate Christmas. We should be mindful that it is the parents who decide, not the children. (2) For older children, we suggest reading the account of the Jesus' birth in Luke chapter 2 to let them know the facts.

CONTENT:

The Bible tells us about the Lord Jesus' birth. We can present some basic facts about Jesus' birth in a simple, age-appropriate manner. The account of the Lord's birth are mainly in Matthew 1:18-2:12, and Luke 2:1-20.

Jesus was born to a woman named Mary, having been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Mary and Jesus' earthly father Joseph lived in Nazareth of Galilee, but were travelling to the town of Bethlehem for a census that was ordered by the Roman emperor. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and was laid in swaddling clothes in a manger, or feeding trough for the animals, because there was no room for them in the inn. After His birth, an angel appeared to some nearby shepherds who were watching their flocks in the fields overnight, and told them of the Lord's birth. Afterwards, a multitude of angels appeared and praised God. The shepherds visited the baby Jesus and praised God. The baby Jesus was also visited by magi, or wise men, from the east who gave Jesus expensive gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The Bible does not tell us when the Lord Jesus was born. Many Christians celebrate December 25th, Christmas, as a day celebrating the birth of Jesus. The Bible gives an account of Jesus Christ's miraculous

and marvelous birth, including many details before and after His birth. But the Bible does not tell us *when* the Lord Jesus was born.

Most likely, the Lord Jesus was not born in the winter. At the time of Jesus' birth, there was a census to be taken of all the inhabited earth, decreed by Caesar Augustus, the Roman ruler. Everyone was required to travel to his own hometown to be accounted for (Luke 2:1-3). Many people including Mary and Joseph 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. This fact helps us to see that the Lord Jesus was most probably **not** born in the winter.

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," (not something the shepherds did in winter time). The shepherds were afraid. "And the angel said to them, Do not be afraid; for behold, I announce to you good news of great joy, which will be for all the people, Because today a Savior has been born to you in David's city, who is Christ the Lord." There is a famous hymn in our hymnal written about this event – Hark the Herald Angels Sing. This hymn beautifully explains many important points about the Lord's birth. It calls Him our Immanuel (God with us), Prince of Peace and the Sun of Righteousness. Many people sing this hymn at Christmas time and only sing the first verse that says Christ is born in Bethlehem. The rest of the song is full of all the reasons the Lord Jesus was born.

There is no indication in the Bible that we should celebrate the Lord's birth as a holiday. Though the fact of the birth of Christ is in the Bible, there is no indication at all in the Bible that we should celebrate the Lord's birth. 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 by the symbols of the bread and cup (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26). There are no accounts of any Christians in the Bible celebrating the Lord's birth after the day He was born.

So how did December 25th come to be known as birthday of the Lord Jesus? It was through a mixture with holidays unrelated to the Lord Jesus, that December 25 became known as Christmas. Historically, December 25th was a day of celebration long before Jesus' birth. It was a pagan holiday. A pagan is a person who worships idols. An idol is a false god. Pagans often worshipped idols made from wood, stone, or metal. They also worshipped the things of nature. 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. The winter solstice is around December 21 and is the day with the shortest amount of daylight and the longest night of the year. Also on this day, in the Persian religion called Mithraism, the people worshipped Mithras, the heavenly light, which is the sun. This was probably also associated with the solstice, since by December 25th the daylight hours begin to get longer again.

About 350 A.D., the Roman Emperor Constantine adopted December 25th and the customs associated with the pagan holiday in order for it to be celebrated as the birthday of Christ. He was trying to keep both the pagan and Christians in the Roman empire happy, so he mixed in the birth of Christ with the pagan celebrations.

Until today there are some pagan customs many people still practice. Gift giving and wreaths are associated with the Roman celebrations of Saturnalia and Kalends. Kalends was a kind of New Year's celebration and both wreaths and gift-giving were for good luck.

Christmas trees, one of the most prominent symbols of Christmas, were decorated many years before the birth of Christ. In Jeremiah 10: 1-4 the Lord says, "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;...” The nations were those people that lived around the children of Israel who did not worship the one true God. In ancient times pagans decorated trees as part of their worship of the sun and planets and some actually worshipped the tree itself.

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.

Early Christians did not celebrate Christmas. Christians did not celebrate Christmas in the early centuries after the Lord’s resurrection. 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 forbidding 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.

Today many Christians celebrate Christmas and try to make it a day to honor the Lord. The Lord, however, never told us to honor Him in this way. We honor the Lord daily as we live a life that is pleasing to Him.

SUGGESTED APPLICATIONS TO CHOOSE FROM:

- **We can be thankful for the birth of the Lord Jesus all year round.** The Lord wants to have the first place in our heart. That means we pray, sing and honor the Lord every day. Many wait until Christmas to remember His birth and give the Lord praise and honor. But we can love the Lord and be thankful for His birth all year long.
- **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. (Matt. 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” (Eccl. 2:10-11).
- **We should be generous in giving.** Rather than wanting for ourselves, we should be generous in giving. (Deut. 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 can use the opportunity to talk about the Lord Jesus.** When our friends and relatives ask, “What do you want for Christmas?” and “What will you do to celebrate Christmas?” You can use the opportunity to say something about the Lord, because many people are more willing to talk about the Lord Jesus around this time.

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

Adapted from the Church in New York City Children’s Meeting Lessons: 12/20/92; 12/19/93; 12/18/94; 12/17/95; 12/12/99; 12/19/99; 12/17/00; 12/16/01; 12/8/02; 12/14/03; 12/19/04; 12/11/05; 12/3/06; 12/9/07; 12/7/08; 12/6/09; 12/5/10; 12/11/11; 12/2/12; 11/24/13; 12/24/17

Craft idea source acknowledgement: lilluna.com/tutorial-easy-peasy-piggy-bank/