

Spirituality for Children

(ages 8 to 14 and all ages everywhere)

Rev. Dr Joy Kachel

Series I - The Foundation

Unit 5: Holidays - Religious Holy Days

Lesson 2 - **Christmas** (Christian - December 25th)

Christmas is a Christian holy day, the day representing the birth of the baby Jesus to Mary and Joseph (his parents). Traditionally this birth is celebrated around the time of the winter solstice (December 21-22, the shortest day and longest night of the year). This signifies the return of the **sun** as the days lengthen from this point. It also refers to the birth of the **son**, Jesus, the light of the world.

Our Western Christmas traditions come to us from the Celts, a group of native Europeans who had a nature-based spirituality. The symbols of this holy day have survived 4,000 to 12,000 years. **Yule**, the name of the Celtic winter solstice, symbolizes the continuing battle between darkness and light. This time the light wins and slowly gains dominance over the darkness. At Ostara, the spring equinox, light and dark are equal once again, the scale this time tipping in full favor of the light allowing the earth once again to bloom with fertility and renewed life. However, today is **Yule**, which is the longest night and shortest day of the year.

As with all major Christian holidays, the pagan holy days came first and remain almost unchanged as they were adopted by the Christians. Almost all of the symbols of Yule are represented at our Christmas and New Year celebrations: the maiden birth of the sun/son, the lighted evergreen tree, pine wreaths, holly, mistletoe, gifts, feasting, songs, the star and more.

The Christian Christmas story is also a lesson of love and blessings from *God* to us. We can look at the different parts of the story both literally and symbolically. Here is the traditional story as interpreted from the Bible (the holy book of Christians):

On the surface, Jesus' birth was an exceptional story of miraculous proportions. His maiden mother, Mary, was told by an angel that she would conceive a child through the Holy Spirit. She would name her son Jesus and he would be blessed by God. Her fiancé, Joseph, was also informed in a dream of the observable fact that Mary was pregnant. Since both of them were virtuous, devout people, they chose to believe the words of the angels.

Next we have the couple traveling to Bethlehem, their place of origin, it being the City of David (thus proving the child's correct lineage and thereby fulfilling the ancient prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah or new King of the Jews). They went to Bethlehem to be counted and taxed by the Romans. It was a very busy time in the village, so the only inn there had no vacancy for the young couple. They were forced to seek shelter in a cave or stable, where Mary gave birth to the child they named Jesus.

After the birth, the family was visited by two groups of people. First, a group of shepherds had been told by angels that Jesus, the Messiah, was born and told them to go find Him and worship Him. And they did. The next group consisted of three "wise men" or "magi" (sometimes referred to as kings) who had seen a bright star in the East and had traveled to Jerusalem to appeal to King Herod to tell them over which town in his kingdom this star shone that enlightened the location of the new King of the Jews. They wanted to honor him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh and to pay homage (their respects) to this new king. Later, the wise men were directed to Bethlehem to find the child and after were told by angels to not return to Herod as requested, but to travel straight back to their own kingdoms.

Herod, in the meantime, **freaked out** (feeling threatened by the baby, the Anointed One, he being the current, unanointed king of the Jews) and Herod orders the death of all boy children in the area around Bethlehem who were two years old and under. Being told of Herod's plot by the angels, Mary and Joseph take the young Jesus out of danger into Egypt and stay there until Herod's death. And so began the life of Jesus.

Let's look at what some of the important symbols of this story mean when interpreted metaphysically or beyond the literal meaning (taken from Charles Fillmore's *Metaphysical Bible Dictionary*):

- ◆ Angel - a messenger from God
- ◆ Anointed One - the Messiah, one who has the power to judge the thoughts and intents of the heart to purify them to accept the Truth.
- ◆ Bethlehem of Judea - At Bethlehem a union of love & wisdom takes place, and the Christ is born.
- ◆ Christ child - the inner resources of Spirit
- ◆ East - represents "within"
- ◆ Egypt - signifies the darkness of ignorance, thoughts in their unawakened state
- ◆ Gifts of gold, frankincense, myrrh -
 - **Gold** = riches of the Spirit;
 - **Frankincense** = beauty of the Spirit;
 - **Myrrh** = the eternity of the Spirit
- ◆ Jerusalem - the heart center. The abiding consciousness of spiritual peace.
- ◆ Jesus - The *I Am* in human form, the True Self, God's idea of man in expression; the *new man* where the "human" is put away and the "divine" established in its place
- ◆ Joseph & Mary - represent **wisdom and love** which have been ideas in the mind, but are now to bring forth a manifestation in substance.
- ◆ King Herod - the ruling will of the physical, the **ego** in the sense consciousness
- ◆ Manger - the animal life of the body in which new life is manifested.
- ◆ Messiah - Set apart, illuminated, enlightened, with a special mission
- ◆ Star - psychic thoughts, revelations of Truth that are as yet remote, inner conviction of our divine sonship, a spark of divine light in the darkness
- ◆ Wise men - the accumulated wisdom and experience of the soul

So, in brief, the **Message of the Christmas Story** could be told like this:

Today there is wonderful news for the people of the Earth. Hope has shone on us in the form of a spark of eternal light in the temporal universe of spiritual darkness. The spiritual messengers of God have announced that the substance of the union of love and wisdom has been born in the mind, in the innermost parts of the soul, of man. The enlightened son of man and God, Jesus, manifested to show us also how to be fully realized by first letting go of our limitations and erroneous thinking and then by accepting the Truth of our being and living it in non-judgment, forgiveness and love every day. And so we have been given this wonderful message of Love & Joy. May that star shine still a little brighter in us today and every day.

Reflection For Deeper Understanding

I. Meditation -

II. Contemplate and Research the following questions - ask yourself, your parents, other adults, your friends, look it up on the internet or find it in a book. Make sure you understand the ideas:

1. How do you celebrate Christmas? What Celtic symbols do you use?
2. Which interpretation of the Christmas story do you like better - the literal one or the symbolic one? Why?
3. How has the Christian religious holy day been changed into a secular holiday? Which version of Christmas do you like better? Why?
4. Do you believe in Santa Claus? Why or why not?

5. Look up these 15 words in a dictionary:

- a. Holy
- b. Solstice
- c. Equinox
- d. Pagan
- e. Virtuous
- f. Devout
- g. Origin
- h. Lineage
- i. Prophecy
- j. Pay homage
- k. Frankincense and myrrh
- l. Abiding
- m. Manifestation
- n. Revelation
- o. Secular

III. Activity

Interpretation of Christmas Symbols

Put an X in the boxes that apply to the Spiritual and/or Secular versions of Christmas

| | <i>God</i> | <i>Love</i> | <i>Giving Gifts</i> | <i>Angels</i> | <i>Santa Claus</i> | <i>Pine tree</i> | <i>Mistletoe</i> | <i>Star</i> | <i>Chimney</i> | <i>Stocking</i> | <i>Rudolf</i> | <i>Turkey Dinner</i> | <i>Money</i> |
|---|------------|-------------|---------------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Spiritual (Celtic or Christian) | X | | X | | | | | | | | | | |
| Secular | | | X | | | | | | | | X | | |

IV. Reference Materials