

Encouragement and help for our children during the Christmas season

The members of the Church of God do not celebrate Christmas or New Years' because of the pagan origins of these holidays.

In some respects, the Christmas season seems to get easier for God's people as each year goes by. But in other ways, it seems to get harder! It may be that, as the public becomes more disillusioned by its commercialism, the television, radio, magazine and newspaper advertising people are working earlier and more diligently to promote the "Christmas spirit" in order to rake in higher profits for their clients. It also may be that Satan is working harder to get his enemies off track.

Local charities say that donations have been way down in recent years. Yet local businesses selling high priced electronic luxury items say that they have been enjoying bumper Christmas seasons! What does this tell you about this "season of giving"?

Let me remind you, however, that this time of year is especially difficult for the young people in God's church. With God's Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we adult members have learnt to reject this season with all of its enticing pagan trappings. As commanded by God, we have passed our beliefs and practices on to our children but, because of their natural, youthful need to "belong" within their circles of friends at school and in their neighbourhoods, it is much harder for them.

The purpose of this article is to let our children know that we adults appreciate their courage in what they must endure at this time of year, and to give them a few tips on how to make it through these few difficult weeks.

Appreciation and encouragement

I'd like to begin by making a plain statement to the young people of God's church:

We love you!

Yes, we love you all. We really do care about you – sincerely – and we don't want you to be hurt by anything. We don't want you to be hurt by any of the ways of Satan's world, including the lure of the Christmas and New Year season.

We truly appreciate your courage in enduring the hardship of being different from the other kids in your school and in your neighbourhood. We want you to know that we adults really do understand how hard it is for you before Christmas in school when all the other kids are participating in Christmas parties, Christmas plays, Christmas concerts, and Christmas crafts – when you have to separate yourselves and go and do something else.

We understand how hard it is for you to be perhaps the only one on your block without Christmas lights adorning your house. I heard of the young son of one church member saying that he felt guilty about thinking how pretty these lights look. There really is no need to feel guilty about such feelings! They *do* look pretty! To deny it would be like saying that the lights on Victoria's parliament buildings are not pretty!



Parliament Buildings - Victoria, British Columbia

But we need to remember that it is one of the traits of Satan the devil to make his ways and his holidays attractive, especially to children:

**And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.
(II Corinthians 11:14)**

We understand how hard it is for you when you return to school after the Christmas break, and all your friends are telling each other what they *got* for Christmas – with the accent on the word "*got*"!

I know how hard that is! Many of us adults do! Most of you church children have never kept Christmas, as many of your parents have. I was about sixteen years old when I first came in contact with God's church, and stopped celebrating Christmas. It certainly was not easy! Before being called to God's way of life, I had loved the Christmas season dearly – almost as dearly as I had loved bacon and eggs! Looking back, I probably did not go about my rejection of Christmas in a very balanced way. But I was a teenager, on my own regarding spiritual matters, with no local congregation to support me and, of course, my parents (who were not church members) were not too pleased with what I was doing.

But you young people *do* have the support of your parents – plus that of the other members of your local congregation or group – people who feel and believe the way that you do.

The prophet Elijah felt like you sometimes do at this time of year – like he was all alone in his true beliefs and ways of worship. God helped him by putting him in contact with other true believers (Read I Kings chapters 19 and 20). So, if you feel like an alien from another planet when you are around your non-church friends at this time of year, seek the support of your parents, and try to spend time together with some of your church friends.

To help you through the Christmas and New Year season, this year and in future years, I would like you to remember these three points:

1. Jesus was not born on December 25th

This is a very well-known fact. Look it up on the internet or in your encyclopaedia! This date was chosen to conform to some old pagan Roman holidays called "Saturnalia" and "Brumalia." These holidays were based around the time of the shortest day of the year: the Winter Solstice. Here are some excerpts from "The Book of the Bible" by Riedel, Tracy and Moskwitz:

Because the Roman emperor Aurelian fixed December 25th for the winter solstice holiday in AD 274, it is thought that the early Christians adopted this day for their Christ-mass so that they would be less conspicuous in the observance of their holiday.

Most scholars believe that the birthday of Jesus was never known and that the December date was chosen solely for convenience.

The earliest known observance of Christmas on December 25th was the year 336 AD in Rome, as recorded in a calendar of the period.

Throughout antiquity other dates for the birth were advanced: March 25, April 19, November 17, among others, but there is no evidence, literary or historical, that supports any of these dates.

Almost everywhere in Europe, in both Roman and Teutonic [*Germanic, northern European*] countries, the period around the winter solstice was celebrated with lights, to celebrate the increase of sunlight to come, and with greenery, usually evergreens, to represent the coming of spring and eternal cycles of growth. At the Saturnalia festival (December 17-24), Romans would present each other with sprigs of holly as gifts for the holiday. When Teutonic tribes began to usurp power from the Romans in Europe, they brought their Yule, or winter feast, traditions with them. The Yule log and wassailing (i.e. toasting each others' health with alcoholic drinks) are two of these traditions.

The origin of the Christmas tree is usually traced to Saint Boniface, who in the 8th century persuaded the Teutonic tribes to abandon worship of the sacred oak of Odin, a remnant of Druidism, and to confer it instead on the fir, a more appropriate symbol of Jesus and eternal life.

Please don't ask me why Mr. Boniface thought that the fir would be an appropriate symbol of Jesus Christ or of eternal life. I have no idea! Trees, however, have been used in pagan, idolatrous worship for many thousands of years. Numerous references to this can be found throughout the Old Testament. See I Kings 14:23; II Kings 16:2-4; 17:10; II Chronicles 28:4; Isaiah 40:18-20; 57:5; 66:17; Jeremiah 2:20; 3:6; Ezekiel 6:13, and noting especially the outstanding quote in Jeremiah 10:1-5:

Hear the word which the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel. Thus says the LORD: "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles; do not be dismayed at the signs of heaven, for the Gentiles are dismayed at them. For the customs of the peoples are futile; for one cuts a tree from the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with nails and hammers so that it will not topple. They are upright, like a palm tree, and they cannot speak; they must be carried, because they cannot go by themselves. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, nor can they do any good."

Returning to our quotes from "The Book of the Bible":

Surprisingly, Christmas was not celebrated in *[the U.S. state of]* New England until a hundred years ago. The Puritans, like Charles II, who abandoned the practice of Christmas in England in 1644, were suspicious of its pagan origins.

Those Puritans were on the right track! Now let us see what God's Word has to say about the timing of Jesus' birth:

And in that region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. (Luke 2:8)

Not in late December there weren't! December nights, even in Israel, were cold and wet with the occasional snowfall. Shepherds in that area were known to have brought their sheep from the fields into the folds in the fall of the year. The evidence currently available indicates that Jesus was born in the autumn of the year 4 BC – perhaps on the Feast of Trumpets!

The main point here is that, if God wanted us to celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ, he would have given us clear dates and instructions – as He did in Leviticus chapter 23 for His true holy days. For example:

And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD, which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are my feasts. Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation; ye shall do no work therein: it is the sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings. These are the feasts of the LORD, even holy convocations, which ye shall proclaim in their seasons. In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD'S passover. (Leviticus 23:1-5)

God continues by giving His people detailed instructions regarding exactly when to keep His feasts.

Because God's church does not observe Christmas, some people get the impression that we do not believe in the miraculous nature of the human birth of Jesus Christ. But that is not so. We certainly *do* believe that the Bible record of the human birth of Jesus Christ is true. We can read it with interest, and believe that it happened exactly the way the gospel writers, Matthew and Luke, tell us. But nowhere in the whole Bible, Old Testament or New, can we find any command to observe and celebrate Jesus' birthday.

The world has the whole event twisted around. They have the wrong year, the wrong date in the year and, even if God did want His people to observe Jesus' birth, it certainly would not be with a whole series of symbols from pagan, heathen, idolatrous religions:

When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? Even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it. (Deuteronomy 12:29-32)

2. Jesus, the apostles and the early church did not keep Christmas

Jesus, the apostles and the early church kept the same holy days that we keep. God's church in the twenty-first century should be endeavouring to practice and preach the same things that Jesus and the early church did. When anyone asks me what our church believes, I tell him or her that we look into the Bible, that we try to find out what Jesus and the members of His early church believed and practiced, and that we try, as much as we reasonably can, to emulate them.

Jesus and the members of His early church kept the weekly Sabbath, and the Holy Days that God commanded in Leviticus Chapter 23. God's true festivals are referred to throughout the New Testament. If Christmas, Easter, etc. were being kept, then those holidays would be the points of reference that the New Testament writers would have used. But they were not!

Jesus and His early church kept the Passover (Matthew 26; Mark 14; Luke 2 and 22; John 2; 6:4; 11:55; 12:1; 13; I Corinthians 5:7; Acts 12:4)

They kept the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Matthew 26:17; Mark 14; Luke 22; Acts 12:3; Acts 20:6; I Corinthians 5:7-8).

They kept Pentecost (Acts 2:1; 20:16; I Corinthians 16:8).

They kept the Day of Atonement (Acts 27:9).

They kept the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7).

They kept the Last Great Day (John 7).

We are to keep the Holy Days that God commanded us to keep forever (Leviticus 23:14, 21, 31, 41). These are the same Holy Days that Jesus kept. The same ones that the apostles and other members of the early church kept.

3. God will bless you

Even though it is tough for you young people while you're going through it, God will richly bless you for having the courage to stand up for what you believe: His truth and His holy days. Look! He says so. He promises:

And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The LORD shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. The LORD shall open unto thee his good treasure, the heaven to give the rain unto thy land in his season, and to bless all the work of thine hand: and thou shalt lend unto many nations, and thou shalt not borrow. (Deuteronomy 28:2-8 &12)

So young people of God's church, please remember these things:

- We adults are very proud of you for enduring what you do at this time of year,
- Jesus Christ was not born on December 25th – nor anywhere near that date!
- Jesus and His early church kept the holy days that God had commanded His people to keep - the same holy days as we in God's church keep today.
- God will richly bless you for rejecting the wrong holidays and for keeping His true holy days.

So let us all help each other to make it through this Christmas and New Year season. Let us look forward to God's true new year's day which follows about three months days after its counterfeit. And let us look forward, once again, to the beginning of God's holy day season, which will begin shortly thereafter!

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