

WHY WE CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS

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What do you think about when you think about Christmas? Perhaps you think of a Christmas tree, all the pretty lights and balls. Perhaps you think about the presents you would love to get on Christmas day, the special things that you very much want. Or, perhaps it's the presents you're going to give. Will the thing that you have picked for someone else really make them happy? Will it be "just what they wanted"? Maybe you think about Christmas dinner, a special feast, or maybe, when you think of Christmas, your thoughts turn to the really important things about Christmas.

You know why we celebrate Christmas. We celebrate Christmas because it's the Lord's birthday, a day which happened long, long ago, and has been celebrated by people ever since. You remember the wonderful story of Christmas, the story of Mary to whom an angel appeared telling her that she would be the mother of the Lord. What wonderful news the angel told her. But Mary wondered how it could happen, even as she humbly accepted the fact that it would happen. Joseph, when he heard the news, at first wanted to put Mary away. But then, in a dream, he was told about the birth of the Lord, the wonderful good news which later, when the Lord was born in Bethlehem of Judea, was proclaimed by angels, who spoke to humble shepherds, saying the words, "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Then suddenly there was with the angel a great multitude of angels all saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"

What wonderful news! The world at last was to come out of the spiritual darkness caused by selfishness, the darkness of falsity, and shine in the new light of the Lord's truth which He would tell all people.

For centuries people all over the ancient world had heard prophecies of this wonderful event. Many of their myths described the birth of God as a man. Some wise people in Syria, a land east of the Holy Land, had learned of His coming from their prophets. One of their prophets was a man named Balaam. Balaam told them that this special Savior would be born in the land of Judah, and that there would be a new star shining in the sky as a sign of this wonderful birth. So it was that these wise men kept records of the stars, looking carefully to see when the event might happen. Suddenly they saw a new star in the eastern sky and rejoiced because they knew it was a sign that the Savior had come. Immediately, the wise men wanted to see the Lord, so they prepared for their journey. Since they expected the Lord to be a King, they followed the sign of the star to the capital city of Judah, the city of Jerusalem. But to their sorrow all they found there was Herod, a wicked king who knew nothing of the wonderful prophecy of the Lord's coming. Nevertheless, Herod, when he asked his advisors about this prophecy, learned that the Lord would be born in Bethlehem of Judea, and so sent the wise

men to that city. When they left Jerusalem a wonderful miracle happened. They looked to the east to see the star which they had seen earlier, and suddenly that star started moving. As it moved the wise men rejoiced for they realized that this star was going to lead them to the Lord. So in joy they followed that star as it came out of the east down over the city of Bethlehem and at last came low, right over the place where the young Child lay. The wise men, following the star, went into the house and there presented beautiful gifts to the Lord, gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The beautiful story of Christmas is full of miracles. It is a wonderful story that can excite us to joy and happiness, to warmth and comfort in the knowledge that the Lord is with us and will help us. His truth is now here, and you know, it is like a star, a star that can lead you straight to the Lord. Sometimes, although you try very hard to understand things, you don't understand them well at all, you don't see the Lord. But then, if you look to the east, the spiritual east, where the Lord is seen in heaven, you may get a special light, a special kind of wisdom. Spiritually you look at the east when you pray to the Lord to help you understand. When you ask Him for help He can give you light or new wisdom, like the light of the Christmas star. As you study the Word, that wisdom can guide you, it can guide you to see the Lord. Just as the star moved and guided the wise men from the east, so the truth of the Lord's Word can move into your mind and guide you in your mind to the place where the Lord Himself can be found.

But when you find the Lord what will you have to give Him? What will your gifts be? The wise men gave gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Spiritually these gifts stand for loves, good loves that we use in life. They describe special gifts that you can give to the Lord—gifts of goodness. Have you ever thought how much the Lord wants you to do good things for other people, how much He wants you to make special gifts to Him? You give special spiritual gifts to the Lord—just as precious to Him as the gold, frankincense, and myrrh the wise men gave—by doing nice things for other people. These gifts are the best Christmas presents you can give. Yes! Christmas is a special time. It's a time to think of the Lord. It's a time to think of the happiness the shepherds and wise men must have felt as they discovered the baby Jesus.