

Promises of God

Christmas Traditions – Message 1

December 2, 2018

I. Introduction: New series called Christmas Traditions.

- We will consider why and how we celebrate this occasion.
- More importantly, we will discover what Christmas teaches us about God's nature, since His *every* action is deliberate, purposeful and reflective of Himself, especially His plan to redeem mankind through the incarnation of His Son.
- Today's focus is the Faithfulness of God, seen in how He keeps His promises.
- Theme verse: Hebrews 10:23 (NLT)—*Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.* [Dt.7:9;Mic.7:20]

A. What is the origin of Christmas?

1. [Screen] The word, *Christmas* comes from Old English *Christes maesse*, which means, "Christ's mass," and referred to a worship celebration for the birth of our Savior—a word still used by Catholics for services involving communion.
2. At least ten different dates were suggested as the day Jesus' birth.
3. As early as 273 AD, Christians were celebrating Christ's birth on December 25th, likely to provide an alternative to the Roman celebrations of the birthdays of "the unconquered sun" (Saturnalia) and the Persian god Mithras, whose worship had spread to Rome, which were both observed during the winter solstice. (from December 20th—23rd, typically 21st)
4. Many of our Christmas customs have origins in Saturnalia, which was marked by feasting, parades, special music, gift giving, lighted candles, and green trees.
5. In 336 AD, Roman Emperor Constantine declared December 25th as Christ's birthday and made it a holiday; it is not likely the correct date since shepherds would not be living in the fields in the coldest winter months. (Lk.2:8)
6. The earliest Christians did not celebrate Jesus' birth, they recognized only His baptism and resurrection.
7. Some 2nd-3rd century Christians opposed the celebration of Christ's birth because only Pharaoh and Herod celebrated their birthdays in the Bible. (Jehovah's Witnesses don't celebrate birthdays, including Christmas.)
8. Because many of the traditions were related to pagan (polytheistic) celebrations, Christians have often been resistant to celebrate the holiday; Puritans in early America deliberately worked on December 25th to show their disdain.
9. A Christian writer explained in 320 AD: We hold this day holy, not like the pagans because of the birth of the sun, but because of Him who made it.
10. The central issue is *how* we observe Christmas, not *which day* we do it, since certain days are not sacred according to Romans 14:5-6.
11. APP.: Does your recognition of Christmas honor God's gift of His Son?

II. An important Christmas tradition is recognizing God's faithfulness.

- A. #1 - God keeps promises. (Genesis 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 15; 17:1-8; Luke 2:22-35; Galatians 3:8-9,14,28-29)

1. Over 2000 years before Jesus' birth, God made a covenant (a unilateral, unconditional, promise) with 75-year-old Abram (means *exalted father*) to give him land, descendants, and to be a blessing to all the families on earth.
2. Abrahamic covenant: Genesis 12:1–3 (NLT)[2091BC]—*The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father's family, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. ³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you."*
3. God's covenant was confirmed ceremonially at Genesis 15 and evidenced by the rite of circumcision at Genesis 17:9-14.
4. God reaffirmed His promise 24 years later, when He also changed 99-year-old Abram's name to Abraham (means *father of many*) at Genesis 17:1-5.
5. Genesis 17:6–8 (NLT)[2067]—⁶ *I will make you extremely fruitful. Your descendants will become many nations, and kings will be among them!* [But there would be no king for over 1000 years!]
⁷ *"...This is the everlasting covenant: I will always be your God and the God of your descendants after you. ⁸ And I will give the entire land of Canaan, where you now live as a foreigner, to you and your descendants. It will be their possession forever, and I will be their God."* [Disputed today.]
6. These promises of God for land, descendants and blessing are fulfilled literally.
7. God gave Abraham the land described at Genesis 13:14–17, and, centuries later, following the Exodus, his descendants, led by Joshua, controlled the land (Josh.21:43), which was returned to them in 1948 following World War II.
8. God gave this childless 75-year-old man many descendants, literally (Gen.22:17; 49:3-28) and spiritually, since believers are considered children of Abraham.
9. [Screen] Galatians 3:29 (NLT)—²⁹ *And now that you belong to Christ, you are the true children of Abraham. You are his heirs, and God's promise to Abraham belongs to you.* [Gal.3:8-9,14; Rom. 4:16-25; 9:6-8]
10. God's promise to *bless all the families of earth* through Abraham would be fulfilled through Jesus Christ—a descendant of Abraham.
11. Mary said in her song (Magnificat) at Luke 1:55 (NLT) that her child was fulfillment of God's promise to *Abraham and his children forever*.
12. Forty days after His birth, Jesus' parents took Him to the temple to make a purification offering; they encountered a righteous, devout, Spirit-led man.
13. [Screen] Luke 2:28–32 (NLT)—²⁸ *Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying, ²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. [v.26] ³⁰ I have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared for all people. ³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"* [Fulfilling God's promise to Abraham!]
14. APP.: What promises has God made to you? He keeps His promises!

God faithfully...

B. #2 - Provided a king. (2 Samuel 7:16; Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Matthew 2:1–6; John 12:12–15)

1. 1000 years before the birth of Jesus, God spoke to King David through the prophet Nathan at 2 Samuel 7:16 (NLT)—¹⁶ *Your house and your kingdom will continue before me for all time, and your throne will be secure forever.* ” [Referenced in Psalm 132:11-12, a song of ascent.]
2. 700 years before Jesus’ birth, the Old Testament prophet Isaiah promised a king.
3. [screen] Isaiah 9:6-7 (NLT)—⁶ *For a child is born to us, a son is given to us [pre-existent deity]. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
⁷ *His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven’s Armies will make this happen!* [The promise of a righteous king was reasserted 100 years later at Jeremiah 23:5-6.]
4. The magi asked at [screen] Matthew 2:2 (NLT)—“*Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him.*”
5. Jesus entered Jerusalem at Passover: [screen] John 12:12–13 (NLT) —¹² *...A large crowd of Passover visitors* ¹³ *took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted, “Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the LORD! Hail to the King of Israel!”*
6. “But Jesus didn’t reign as king on earth!” He did—and does today—but His government operates in secret; His kingdom is seen in the lives of those who trust and obey Him as sovereign Lord, He rules in their hearts (Lk.17:20-21).
7. One day, Jesus will return and He will reign as sovereign over all the world as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Zech.14:9; Dan.2:44; Rev.17:14;19:16)
8. APP.: Is Jesus, the king who came at Christmas, the ruler of your life?

God faithfully...

C. #3 - Sent a Savior. (Jeremiah 31:31–34; Matthew 1:20-23; Luke 1:69-73; 2:8-11; 1 Corinthians 1:7-9; Hebrews 8:6-13)

1. 600 years before Jesus birth, God promised a new covenant which included forgiveness—salvation from sins—through the prophet Jeremiah.
2. [Screen] Jeremiah 31:31,–34 (NLT)—³¹ *“The day is coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah.* ³³ *I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. ...* ³⁴ *And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins.”*
3. Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was filled with the Spirit and prophesied: [Screen] Luke 1:69–70,72-73 (NLT)—⁶⁹ *He has sent us a mighty Savior from the royal line of his servant David,* ⁷⁰ *just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. ...* ⁷² *He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering his sacred covenant—*⁷³ *the covenant he swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham.*
4. Joseph received the same information from an angel in a dream: [Screen] Matthew 1:21 (NLT)—²¹ *And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”*
5. APP.: Has Jesus, God’s promised Savior, forgiven your sins?
6. Read the Christmas passages found at chapter 1&2 in Matthew and Luke.
7. Reflect on what each passage teaches you about God.