

The celebration of **Hanukkah** focuses on the lighting of the menorah. It is a special time for families and friends to spend together singing, playing, giving gifts, telling stories, and **meditating on the meaning of Hanukkah**.

Eight Days of Hanukkah (day 2 of 8)

The Feast of Dedication and The Feast of Light

by Michael Gibson, Key2Changes.com

The True Meaning of Hanukkah The “Conception” of the Light of the World

“Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus (Yashua – I am Salvation, I am the Light of the World).” Luke 1:31

On the second night:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who present darkness as light and light as darkness; who present bitter as sweet and sweet as bitter!

Woe to those who are so wise – in their own opinion; so clever – in their own judgment!

Woe to those who are so heroic – as drinkers of wine, and so valiant – as mixers of drink!

Who vindicate him who is in the wrong in return for a bride, and withhold vindication from him who is right.

Assuredly, as straw is consumed by a tongue of fire and hay shrivels as it burns, their stock shall become like rot, and their buds shall blow away like dust.

For they have rejected the instruction of the Lord of Hosts, spurned the word of the Holy One of Israel. Isaiah 5:20-24

Prayer on the second night:

Daily Exercise - Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina is a Latin term that means “divine reading.” It is a way or method of reading the Scriptures in such a manner that facilitates the reader in receiving a “specific word” from God. The practice was developed early in the church’s history with Origen first expressing its principles around 220 AD. The system consists of four parts: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation. It may be practiced privately or in a small group setting. There are four elements to be considered in preparing for this exercise:

1. Set aside enough time to complete the exercise so that you don’t have to rush through it. Usually thirty minutes is adequate.
2. Find a quiet place free of distractions.
3. Read the Selected Passage Above of Scripture.
4. Transition from what you have been doing by calming you mind and body. This can be done by taking a few slow, deep breaths and inviting the Lord to speak to you through His word.

Reading

1. Read the passage aloud slowly a couple of times.
2. Be silent for one-to-two minutes.
3. Is there a word or phrase that is meaningful to you?
4. Repeat the word or phrase several times silently as if to memorize it.

* If in a group share it in turn. Do not elaborate simply state what it is.

Meditation

1. Read the passage again.
2. Be silent for two to three minutes.
3. Think about how the reading applies or touches your life today.

* If in a group share it in turn. Briefly state “I hear, I see, I feel ...”

Prayer

1. Talk with God about what he is showing you.

* If in a group pray quietly.

Contemplation

1. Read the passage again.

2. Be silent for two to three minutes.

3. Reflect on “I believe God wants me to _____ today/this week/etc.”

* If in a group share in turn. At this point you can elaborate somewhat on what you believe God is telling you to do.

Study on the second night:

The Christmas Connection:

One of the unusual traditions that are celebrated at the feast of Hanukkah is that women always light the lamps on the menorah. The reason for this is that the rabbis (learned teachers) have said, “Women are obligated to light the Hanukkah lamps for they took part in the miracle.” For the basis of this tradition they cite the Apocryphal book of Judith. But can this be? Lets do a quick summary of the story.

The story takes place according to most scholars around 650 BCE, almost 500 years before the actual commemoration of the feast itself. The story indicates the Jewish people are at war with the Assyrians (Syrians). Judith, a Jewish woman enters one of their camps. The general of the Syrian army desires her so she prepares a feast of cheese for him. Since cheese makes a person thirsty, the general drinks a lot of wine to slake his thirst and consequently falls asleep. While he is sleeping Judith beheads him. In the morning the Jews attack the Syrian army with the general’s head on a pole and the Syrians flee. It is a great story, but how does it show that a woman takes place in the miracle of the lamps being lit or staying lit? The rabbis can’t explain it!

However, there is one woman who qualifies to light the menorah lamps because she took part in a miracle of light ... the Virgin Mary. She brought the true light into the world and that light has continued to burn. Its all part of what we call the Christmas Story. Most Christians are familiar with the basic storyline but we’ll take a more in depth look at this miracle. Before we begin though, I’ll try to explain why we celebrate Jesus’ birth on December 25th.

In the first 200 years of Christian history, there is no mention of the date of Jesus’ birth (The first recorded mention of Jesus’ birth date is 336 CE.). During that time the early church fathers considered a person’s date of death worthy of celebration in view of the way he lived his life. Therefore, the date of Jesus’ death was of most worthy commemoration.

It wasn’t until the 3rd and 4th centuries that the idea of fixing the date of Christ’s birth came into being. And with it came heated controversy among the church leaders. Origen (185 – 254 CE) strongly recommended against such an innovation. He said, “In the Scriptures, no one is recorded to have kept a feast or held a great banquet on his birthday. It is only sinners who make great rejoicings over the day in which they were born into the world.”

During the 3rd and 4th centuries, various groups proposed eight specific dates during six different months for Jesus’ birth. These dates were: January 6th, March 28th, April 2nd, the 24th or 25th day of Pharmuthi (April/May), 25th day of Pachon (about May), May 20th, November 18th, and December 25th. The Eastern Church chose January 6th (January 6th is called Epiphany (Appearing) but was first observed as the date of Jesus’ baptism.) ... a date the Greeks had celebrated as the birth of the god Dionysus and the Egyptians as the birth of the god Osiris. Pagans commonly celebrated the birthdays of their gods, however in the Bible a birthday is never celebrated to the true God, who being eternal has no birth or day of origin.

Although one of the last dates to be proposed, December 25th was the one finally accepted by the leadership of the Western Church (The Armenian Church uses January 6th and the Eastern Orthodox Church uses January 7th). It was made popular by Pope Liberius in 354 CE and became the rule in the West when the first “Christ mass” was officiated by Pope Sixtus III. December 25th coincides with the pagan feast day of *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* or “Birthday of the Unconquered Sun” which was celebrated as the birth of the god, Mithras, “the conqueror of darkness.” This day fell within the Roman

weeklong celebration of Saturnalia, a feast honoring the renewal of the sun at the winter solstice (The winter solstice is the shortest day of the year.).

As to the year of Jesus' birth it too is the subject of much debate. In 525 CE, Pope John 1 commissioned the scholar Dionysius Exiguus to establish a feast calendar for the Church. Unfortunately, because of insufficient historical data at the time he arrived at a date at least a few years later than the actual event. The Gospels record Jesus' birth as occurring during the reign of Herod the Great. Herod's death according to the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus occurred in the spring of 4 BCE. Therefore, Christ's birth had to take place before that date.

Most current Biblical scholars using modern research methods are in agreement that Jesus' birth occurred in either the months of September or October, at or near the feast of Tabernacles in one of the years of 5 or 4 BCE. With that as a basis, the Virgin Mary would have conceived Jesus during the feast of Hanukkah in the previous year.

The four primary evidences presented in the case of Jesus' birth are as follows:

1. He was born in the years 5 or 4 BCE.
 - a. Based on the date of Herod's death (This date has been contested with some suggesting a date of January 29, 1 BCE as the date of Herod's death. The evidence for his death is based on the observance of a lunar eclipse prior to his death. There were observable lunar eclipses only in the years 5 BCE, 4 BCE and 1BCE.).
 - b. Herod's killing of children under two years of age.
 - c. Jesus' age at his baptism and the beginning of His ministry in connection with the known dates of Tiberius Caesar's reign.
 - d. Jesus death fulfilling the Passover on the correct days.
2. The census of Quirinius.
 - a. The census required everyone to travel to his own city. This would not have occurred during winter.
 - b. Since it involved taxation it would have naturally occurred near the end of the harvest season in late summer or early autumn.
3. The shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. It is generally agreed that this would never occur after October 31 due to the cold temperatures.
4. The evidence surrounding the birth of John the Baptist.
 - a. Zechariah, John the Baptist's father was a priest in the line of Abijah, which stood eighth in the order of service. Each of the twenty-four lines of priests served twice a year in their order beginning on the first day of the month Aviv (Aviv is the first month of God's calendar. It falls within our March/April time frame. The Jewish people currently call this month Nisan.). All the priests served an additional week at each of the three feasts that all the men of Israel were required to attend: Unleavened Bread, Weeks and Tabernacles.
 - b. Therefore, Zechariah would have been serving on the 10th week or about mid-June.
 - c. Zechariah and Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist after the angel spoke to Zechariah while he was serving.
 - d. It appears that John the Baptist was born at or near Passover the following year.
 - e. Each year during the Passover meal a special cup of wine (the Cup of Elijah) is set apart awaiting the return of the Prophet Elijah. This is done in accordance with the last two verses in the Old Testament from the prophet Malachi 4:5-6. They read, *"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."*

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah in the Temple, he used very similar words concerning Zechariah's future son, John the Baptist. The angel said, *"And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."* **Luke 1:16-17**

On the Mount of Transfiguration, three of Jesus' disciples saw Moses and Elijah. After that they asked Jesus about the coming of Elijah. *"Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" And He answered and said, "Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also, the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist."* **Matthew 17:10-13**

- f. John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin was born six months prior to Jesus. Therefore, Jesus would have been born in September or October at or near the feast of Tabernacles.

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“The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.” John 1:9