

**HOLIDAY TRADITIONS**  
and Holiday Customs Around the World  
Developed by Diane Borja (public school parent)

**GOALS**

To inform children of the historical meaning of Christmas, Hanukkah and Santa Claus;  
to teach children to respect the beliefs and customs of others.

**CHRISTMAS**

I. The History of Christmas

- A. Christmas, December 25, is the day our family and about 2 billion other Christians around the world celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. This is the largest multicultural birthday in the world! No one has their birthday remembered like Jesus at Christmas time!
  - 1. Show a holiday poster
- B. The story of Jesus' birth is recorded in the Bible, in Luke 2 and in Matthew 2. Jesus was born in the land of Palestine which is now Israel in the Middle East. He was born into a Jewish culture in the town of Bethlehem. We don't know the exact date. When we say the year is (2007, 2008, etc.), it indicates what people many years ago thought was the date Jesus was born (as in, 2,007 years ago).
  - 1. Read from *The Very First Christmas* and *The Children's International Bible*.
  - 2. The story of the wise men following the star to find Jesus and bring him gifts may have happened that night or possibly 1-2 years later.
- C. Much later, in 354 A.D., a leader in the early Christian church ordered the Mass of Christ to be celebrated on December 25. Later, the two words were put together to form the word *Christmas*.
  - 1. Notice the word *Christ* in the word *Christmas*. *Christ* in Greek means Chosen One. In Hebrew the word is *Messiah* or *Chosen One*. The name *Jesus* is the Greek word for *Y'shua* in Hebrew which means salvation.
  - 2. If you listen closely to the Christmas carols you will hear played in stores, you will hear some of the titles which describe who Christians believe Jesus is and what He came to do. Examples: Immanuel (God with us), King of Kings, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, Son of God.

II. Borja Family Customs and International Friends' Customs

- A. I collect Nativity sets and I make some of my own Nativity sets out of recycled materials. The word *Nativity* means birth and the French word is *creche*. The first Nativity set was designed by Fransis of Assissi in Italy in 1224. He used real people, a doll and live animals.
  - 1. I show nativity sets, beginning with the plastic one I received at age 10. I now have nineteen sets that I place all over the house. (See examples at the end of this document)
- B. In our family, we decorate an eight foot Christmas tree with 28 years worth of ornaments. Many of these are homemade or gifts from friends. (Show homemade ornaments)

- C. Candy canes also serve as decorations, plus they make tasty treats. Look closely. It reminds us of the Christmas story. Right side up, it reminds us of the shepherd's staff and up side down, it forms a "J", the first letter in Jesus' name.
  - 1. Show giant candy cane.
- D. Advent Calendar – used to help us count down the days until Christmas.
  - 1. Two samples: Nativity calendar and an Advent wreath
- E. On December 24th, Christmas Eve, we have a special dinner and attend a church service. Many families around the world will attend church services this night.
- F. On December 25th is CHRISTMAS DAY! We will celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ along with about 2 billion Christians worldwide. My friends in Columbia, Kenya, Nigeria, India, Hong Kong, Thailand, Russia and even Lebanon will be celebrating Jesus' birth in their own languages and according to their own customs.
  - 1. Show foreign language cards with Christmas-related words and let the children guess their country of origin.
- G. The highlights of Christmas day are re-reading the Bible story, opening gifts, and having friends and family in the evening to share a dinner. We will open our house to students from other countries who need a place to spend Christmas. Last, we always have a birthday cake and sing "Happy Birthday" to Jesus.
- H. Summary: for our family, Christmas is the happy celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe is God's Son, the greatest gift to the world.
  - 1. Show a holiday poster.

## HANUKKAH

### I. History of Hanukkah

- A. Hanukkah or the Festival of lights is an eight-day Jewish celebration. This year Hanukkah begins [determine the date]
  - 1. Create and show a holiday poster.
- B. Brief history. In 168 B.C., before Jesus was born, the Jewish people in Palestine—which is modern day Israel—were being ruled by a cruel king named Antiochus.
  - 1. Antiochus made it against the law for Jewish people to worship their God and read their Scriptures.
  - 2. Antiochus vandalized their place of worship called the Temple. A brave family name the Maccabees led the Jewish people to fight against this king. It took three years, but in 165 B.C. the Jewish people won!
  - 3. The people cleaned up their temple and dedicated it to God (Hanukkah means *dedication*).
  - 4. Two important symbols of Hanukkah are the menorah and the dreidel.
    - (a) The menorah was supposed to be burning constantly to remind the people that God was always with them. After the people cleaned the temple, they only found enough olive oil for

one day. However, the oil burned for eight days! A miracle! This is where the eight days of Hanukkah come from.

- Show a menorah and candles
- b. The dreidel was a toy used by Jewish boys to secretly memorize their Scriptures during time their faith had been outlawed. The symbols mean “A miracle happened there.” (Show dreidel collection) Today the game is played during Hanukkah using candy called gelt.
  - Show card with symbols, gelt pieces
- B. Since Jesus was Jewish, He would have celebrated Hanukkah with his family. We believe that without Hanukkah, there would have been no Christmas, because the Jewish faith and culture would have been destroyed by Antiochus.
- C. Jewish families around the world celebrate by (1) singing special songs like *Hanukkah, Oh, Hanukkah*, play games and light the menorah each day; (2) retelling the Hanukkah story and attending temple services; (3) eating potato pancakes called *latkes*—one of the special foods they eat along with jelly doughnuts called *sufganiyot*.
- D. As Christians, our family celebrates the first night of Hanukkah with some Jewish foods, and we light the menorah because of our appreciation for how the Jewish people preserved their faith. We also read some Bible verses from the Hebrew Scriptures that Christians believe foretell Jesus’ coming.

## II. Summary

- A. The Jewish people celebrate that God gave them freedom from their enemies in 165 B.C. They rededicated their temple and the one day supply of oil for the menorah lasted eight days.

## SANTA CLAUS

### I. History of Santa Claus

- A. The first Santa was actually a leader in the early Christian church. His name was Nicholas. He lived in Asia Minor which is now Turkey in about 300 A.D.
- B. He was the Bishop (church leader) of Myra. He was known for his kindness to poor people, especially children. There are many stories about him. One of the most famous is when he saves a family from starvation by dropping bags of gold through open windows or the chimney.
- C. The church changed his name to Saint Nicholas and he became known for giving. In England, he is known as Father Christmas; in Germany, he is called *Cristkind*; in Holland he is called *Sinter Klass*; and in America, he is called *Kris Kringle*.
- D. When the Dutch came to America, they brought *Sinter Klass* whose name was changed to Santa Claus. Gradually, because of the poem, “The Night Before Christmas” (Clement Moore, 1822) and because of American artists, Santa Claus became the jolly fellow we know today.
  - 1. Show Santa books.
- E. Santa Claus is part of our family tradition. For our family, Santa Claus is a reminder to give from the heart because the first Santa loved Jesus.
  - 1. Show a holiday poster and Santa Collection.

## CONCLUSION

In our family, December is a GIVING MONTH.

CHRISTMAS is the worldwide celebration of Jesus' birth as told in the Bible. Christians believe that God gave His Son, Jesus, to be the Savior of the world. That is why we celebrate his birth.

HANUKKAH is the Jewish celebration of the freedom God gave them from their enemies, the rededication of the temple and the menorah oil miracle.

SANTA CLAUS was Nicholas, a man who loved Jesus and freely gave to those in need.

As time allows, let kids share traditions from their families.

### Samples of Homemade Navity Scenes



Soft drink cans



Pine cones



bottles



Aspirin bottles