

CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD

Four Weeks of Family Night Celebrations 2008



Prepared by: Susanne Reeder

For: Emilee, Jacob, and Samuel

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

I Love you ALL!!!

- Mama

Week One: Great Britain

Share the Facts:

In Great Britain the hustle and bustle of the season begins well before Christmas and there is barely anytime for a break until the Twelfth night. There is preparation going on of foods, the sending of Christmas cards, the decorating of houses and churches, and the readying of gifts keep everyone busy even the youngest family members.

On Christmas Eve youngsters hang up their stockings on the ends of the beds or by the chimney so that when Father Christmas comes he can leave them something.

On Christmas morning the family traditionally opens their presents and prepares for a big feast which typically is served just after midday. The table gleams with the best china and glassware, and at every place on the table there is a cracker. The meal begins with a toast, followed by the popping of the crackers. After the meal they sit down in front of the Television for the traditional Christmas speech of the British Monarch.

In the afternoon they exchange visits with neighbors other family members.

Some churches in Great Britain have a Christingle service on the fourth Sunday of Advent. This is a carol service of Scandinavian origin at which every child received an orange and candle wrapped in a red ribbon. The candle represents Jesus and the ribbon stands for the blood of Christ and the love of God embracing the world.

In Britain, children write their letters to Father Christmas and then throw them into the fireplace so they will float up the chimney and fly to the North Pole. If the lists catch fire first, they have to rewrite them.

At Christmas dinner, a plum pudding is served with little treasures hidden inside that bring their finders good luck. Britain was the first country to hang up mistletoe.

Activity:

Check Stockings.

Children write their letters to Santa and put in front of fire-place before bed.

Devotion: Orange Candles/Red Ribbons – Sing “O Come all Ye Faithful”

Watch: The Muppets Christmas Carol

Week Two: China

Share the Facts

The Christian children of China decorate trees with colorful ornaments. These ornaments are made from paper in the shapes of flowers, chains and lanterns. They also hang muslin stockings hoping that **Christmas Old Man** will fill them with gifts and treats.

The Chinese Christmas trees are called "**Trees of Light**." Santa Claus is called **Dun Che Lao Ren** which means "Christmas Old Man."

The non-Christian Chinese call this season the **Spring Festival** and celebrate with many festivities that include delicious meals and pay respects to their ancestors. The children are the main focus of these celebrations, they receive new clothes and toys, eat delectable food and watch firecrackers displays.

Activity:

Order/eat Chinese Meal

Make Christmas Lanterns & Paper Chain

Talk about the Christmas Tree (Read Story Below)

Watch: Kung Fu Panda

The True Meaning of Christmas

Late one Christmas Eve I sank back, tired but content, into my easy chair. The kids were in bed, the gifts were wrapped, the milk and cookies waited by the fireplace for Santa. As I sat back admiring the tree with its decorations, I couldn't help feeling that something was missing. It wasn't long before the tiny twinkling tree lights lulled me to sleep. I don't know how long I slept, but all of a sudden I knew that I wasn't alone.

I opened my eyes, and you can imagine my surprise when I saw Santa Claus himself, standing next to my Christmas tree. He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot just as the poem described him. But he was not the "jolly old elf" of Christmas legend. The man who stood before me looked sad and disappointed. And there were tears in his eyes.

"Santa, what's wrong?" I asked. "Why are you crying?" "It's the children," Santa replied sadly. "But the children love you," I said. "Oh, I know they love me and the gifts I bring them," Santa said.

"But the children of today seem to have somehow missed out on the true spirit of Christmas...and it's not their fault! It's just that the adults, many of them not having been taught themselves, have forgotten to teach the children."

"Teach them what?" I asked.

Santa's kind old face became soft, more gentle. His eyes began to shine with something more than tears. He spoke softly.

"Teach the children the true meaning of Christmas.

Teach them that the part of Christmas we can see, hear, and touch is much more than meets the eye.

Teach them the symbolism behind the customs and traditions of Christmas we now observe. Teach them what it is they truly represent."

Santa reached into his bag and pulled out a tiny Christmas tree and set it

on my mantle." Teach them about the Christmas tree. Green is the second color of Christmas. The stately evergreen with its unchanging color represents the hope of eternal life in Jesus. It's needles point heavenward as a reminder that man's thoughts should turn heavenward as well."

Santa reached into his bag again and pulled out a shiny star and placed it at the top of the small tree. "The star was the heavenly sign of promise. God promised a Savior for the world and the star was the sign of the fulfillment of that promise of the night that Jesus Christ was born. Teach the children that God always fulfills His promises and that wise men still seek Him."

"Red," said Santa, "is the first color of Christmas."

He pulled forth a red ornament for the tiny tree. "Red is deep, intense, vivid. It is the color of the life-giving blood that flows through our veins. It is the symbol of God's greatest gift. Teach the children that Christ gave His life and shed His blood for them that they might have eternal life. When they see the color red it should remind them of that most wonderful gift."

Santa found a bell in his pack and placed it on the tree. "Just as lost sheep are guided to safety by the sound of the bell, it continues to ring today for all to be guided to the fold. Teach the children to follow the true Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep."

Santa placed a candle on the mantle and lit it. The soft glow from its one tiny flame brightened the room. "The glow of the candle represents how man can show his thanks for the gift of God's son who was born that Christmas Eve long ago. Teach the children to follow in Christ's footsteps, to go about doing good. Teach them to let their lights shine before men that all may see it and glorify God. This is what is symbolized when the twinkly lights shine on the tree like hundreds of bright, shining candles, each of them representing one of God's precious children, their light shining for all to see."

Again, Santa reached into his bag and this time he brought forth a shiny red and white striped candy cane. As he hung it on the tree, he spoke softly, "The candy cane is a stick of hard, white candy. White to symbolize the virgin birth and sinless nature of Jesus and the shape 'J' to represent the precious name of Jesus who came to earth as our Savior. It also represents the crook the Good Shepherd uses to reach down into the ditches of the world to lift out the fallen lambs who, like sheep, have gone astray. The original candy cane had three small red stripes which are the stripes of the scourging Jesus received by which we are healed, and a large red stripe that represents the shed blood of Jesus so that we can have eternal life.

Teach these things to the children."

Santa brought out a beautiful wreath made of fresh, fragrant greenery and tied with a bright red bow. "The bow reminds us of the bond of perfection which is love. The wreath embodies all the good things about Christmas for those with eyes to see and hearts to understand. It contains the colors of red and green and the heaven-turned needles of the evergreen. The bow tells the story of good will towards all; and its color again reminds us of Christ's sacrifice. Even its very shape is symbolic, representing eternity and the eternal nature of Christ's love. It is a circle without beginning and without end. These are the things you must teach the children."

"But where does that leave you Santa?" I asked.

The tears gone now from his eyes, a smile broke over Santa's face. "Why, bless you my dear," he laughed. "I'm only a symbol myself. I represent the spirit of family fun and the joy of giving and receiving. If the children are taught these other things, there is no danger that I'll ever be forgotten."

"I think I'm beginning to understand at last," I replied.

"That's why I came," said Santa. "You're an adult.

If you don't teach the children these things...Who will?

Week Three: France

Share the Facts:

On Christmas Eve, children leave their shoes by the fireplace to be filled with gifts from **Pere Noel**. In the morning they also find that sweets, fruit, nuts and small toys have been hung on the tree.

In cathedral squares, the story of Christ's birth is re-enacted by both players and puppets.

Nearly every French home at Christmastime displays a Nativity scene or **crèche**, which serves as the focus for the Christmas celebration. The crèche is often peopled with little clay figures called **santons** or "**little saints**." In addition to the usual Holy Family, shepherds, and Magi, the craftsmen also produce figures in the form of local dignitaries and characters. The craftsmanship involved in creating the gaily colored santons is quite astounding and the molds have been passed from generation to generation since the seventeenth century. Throughout December the figures are sold at annual Christmas fairs in Marseille and Aix.

The Christmas tree has never been particularly popular in France, and though the use of the Yule log has faded, the French make a traditional Yule log-shaped cake called the **buche de Nol**, which means "**Christmas Log**." The cake, among other food in great abundance is served at the grand feast of the season, which is called **le reveillon**. Le reveillon is a very late supper held after midnight mass on Christmas Eve. The menu for the meal varies according to regional culinary tradition. In Alsace, goose is the main course, in Burgundy it is turkey with chestnuts, and the Parisians feast upon oysters and pat de foie gras. Le Revellion may consist of poultry, ham, salads, cake, fruit and wine.

In Southern France, a log is burned in people's homes from Christmas Eve until New Years Day. A long time ago, part of the log was used to make the wedge for the plough as good luck for the coming harvest.

The traditional Christmas is a chocolate log.

In France families once had a Three Kings Cake with a bean hidden in it. Whoever found the bean in their slice was made King, or Queen, for the day.

In France the children go out to look for the Kings, taking gifts of hay for the camels.

Another name for this day is **Twelfth Day**. It is the last of the Twelve Days of Christmas, which used to be one long holiday. It was the last night of the **Feast of Fools** before the Lord of Misrule had to give up his crown and become themselves once again.

In France it is a time for the whole family to come together at Christmas time to holiday and worship. On the eve of Christmas beautifully lit churches and cathedrals, ring out Christmas carols with the church bells.

Once dinner is over and the family has retired to bed, they leave a fire burning and food and drink on the table in case the Virgin Mary calls in. Children leave their shoes or wooden clogs called **sabots** in the hearth for the Christ Child or **Pere Noel** to fill. In the north of France, children are given gifts on December 6, which is St. Nicholas' Day, instead of Christmas Day. The adults give each others presents on New Year's Day.

French children set out their shoes in hopes that **le petit Jesus** will fill them during the night with small gifts.

Activity:

Prepare a "french" meal.

Check stocking for special prize. (Fruit/Nuts)

Devotion: Nativity Scene (See Below)

Sing: Twelve Days of Christmas

Watch: Ratatouille

DEVOTION: THE SURPRISES OF CHRISTMAS

We have all heard the true Christmas story of how Jesus was born, right? Is there anyone who hasn't? (If anybody raises their hand, make sure you go over it with them after or before class, when the children are coming in).

Its my favorite story of all time! But sometimes we don't realize all the miracles and surprises that really happened. Let's take a minute to think of the things that happened that were not the usual things that happen every day. These things could never have happened without God making them happen.

First of all, when the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary. Just think how surprised you would be if an angel came to visit you! Wouldn't that be awesome -Let's all pretend right now, that all of a sudden, there is an angel from heaven, beautiful and white, with bright light all around him. He was sent by God, and he is giving us a message directly from God! That is a fun thing to pretend, isn't it? As we think about the story of Jesus' birth, we also remember how the angel also came to Joseph. The angel came to Joseph to give him a message from God too. How surprised Joseph must have been too.

Then another surprise was the humble way our Savior chose to come to us. Since God is the above all, the greatest name there is, and in control of all of heaven and earth, he

could have chosen to come to us in a palace, and have rich parents and have the best of everything! He could've had the best toys and softest, fluffy baby bed you ever saw.

But, baby Jesus didn't have a nice comfy, crib with a soft puffy mattress. All Mary and Joseph had to lay him in was a trough. (ask the class: Who remembers what a trough is?, after they answer, say:) That's right, a trough was a box where they put the food for the animals. Mary and Joseph didn't have a normal place to stay. They couldn't be at home, and they couldn't find a hotel to stay in. Remember how they had to go stay in the stable, where the animals were kept, because there was no room for them at the inn. He didn't have a hospital with doctors and nurses taking care of him either. Jesus didn't have any of that nice stuff. He simply came...in love. Because he loves you and me so much.

Another surprise from the story was How God made the big star shine so bright that the kings from far, far away could see it. He did this so that it could guide the wise men to baby Jesus. They had to come many, many miles to the place where Jesus was born, but they did it because they knew what the star meant. It meant that a great King had been born. But, God was with them the whole time. He made sure they got right to the exact spot where baby Jesus was...all by the light of a star.

Another surprise was when the angels came from heaven to visit the shepherds to tell them that their Savior was born. First just one angel, then many, many angels lit up the sky. They were praising God and about the happy, joyful birth of Jesus. Have any of you ever seen a light show? A light show is a beautiful show of many different colored lights. I bet when the angels came from heaven, it was better than any man-made light show! It was a heavenly light show with the beautiful singing of the angels in the background. And, do you remember what the angel said when he came to the shepherds? He said, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" NKJV. God was telling us through the angels that he was making peace with us. That our Savior was born - Jesus was the one he sent to save us. He was telling us he wanted to be our friend. That's why it was such good news. Now there was someone to bring us close to God.

Then, the biggest surprise of all, was the surprise that Jesus was God with skin on. God loves us so much that he wanted to be near us and save us. His whole plan from the beginning was to love us and make a way for us to live with him forever, enjoying friendship with him always. So he came to earth, in the form of a little baby. He did all that just for you and me. He could've stayed in heaven, where life is perfect and pure. But he was so full of love for you that he couldn't stay away. He came to earth just to be with you. He loves you so much and wants to be near you, so that his Spirit can live in you and teach you, and so that he can forgive you and make you right with him. He loves us so much that he wants us to live with him forever. He made you and loves you, and doesn't want anyone to be far away from him.

Are you overwhelmed by now? Me too. That's a lot to think about. See, we can't really understand all of the greatness of God's love. That's because we're only people. We can't figure out how he did all the wonderful miracles and surprises that he did. But, we don't have to. We don't have to understand everything. Even adults don't understand everything. But the thing I want you to understand about the Christmas story is just how much God loves you.

So, this Christmas, since God did this wonderful thing to be with us, won't you come near to him too. He's only a prayer away. Let's pray now, and remember all the wonderful surprises of Christmas this year and all year long.

PRAYER:

Dear God,

Thank you for loving me so much that you sent your one and only Son to save me.

Thank you for all the other great surprises and miracles that you have done and are still doing...things that I don't even understand.

And, thank you for coming to the earth to be near me. I want to be near you too.

Help me to remember that I can always just call out to you and you are there.

In Jesus' name

Amen!

Week Four: Africa

Share the Facts:

Preparation for Christmas in the Congo begins when some group is designated to prepare the annual Christmas pageant.

Christmas day begins with groups of carolers walking to and fro through the village, along the roadway, by the houses of the missionaries, singing the lovely carols known the world around. Often people may be awakened by a group of carolers beginning to converge on the house of worship. They return home to make final preparation as to the clothes one must wear and also as to his offering for the Christmas service.

The most important part of their Christmas worship service is the love offering, this is the gift in honor of Jesus. Then at about 8 or 9 o'clock everyone makes their way to the celebration of the birthday of Jesus.

Everyone who attends the service goes forward to lay down their gift upon the raised platform near the Communion table. Not one person will attend the service without giving a gift.

Now people have Christmas dinners after the service, preparing tables out in front of their home and inviting many of their intimate friends to share.

Christmas in South Africa is a summer holiday. In December, the southern summer brings glorious days of sunshine that carry an irresistible invitation to the beaches, the rivers, and the shaded mountain slopes. Then the South African holiday season reaches its height. Schools are closed, and camping is the order of the day. In South Africa there is no snow, but it has many flowers, many beautiful varieties of cultivated and wild flowers being in their full pride.

In the cities and towns carolers make their rounds on Christmas Eve. Church services are held on Christmas morning. Christmas Eve celebrations in larger centers include "Carols by Candlelight" and special screen and floor shows.

Homes are decorated with pine branches, and all have the decorated Christmas fir in a corner, with presents for the children around. At bedtime on Christmas Eve, children may also hang up their stockings for presents from Father Christmas.

Many South Africans have a Christmas dinner in the open-air lunch. For many more, it is the traditional dinner of either turkey, roast beef, mince pies, or suckling pig, yellow rice with raisins, vegetables, and plum pudding, crackers, paper hats, and all. In the afternoon, families go out into the country and usually there are games or bathing in the warm sunshine, and then home in the cool of the evening. Boxing Day is also a proclaimed public holiday usually spent in the open air. It falls on December 26 and is a day of real relaxation.

In Ghana, on Africa's west coast, most churches herald the coming of Christmas by decorating the church and homes beginning with the first week in Advent, four weeks before Christmas. This season happens to coincide with the cocoa harvest, so it is a time of wealth. Everyone returns home from wherever they might be such as farms or mines.

On the eve of Christmas, children march up and down the streets singing Christmas Carols and shouting "Christ is coming, Christ is coming! He is near!" in their language. In the evening, people flock to churches which have been decorated with Christmas evergreens or palm trees massed with candles. Hymns are sung and Nativity plays are presented.

On Christmas Day, children and older people, representing the angels in the fields outside Bethlehem, go from house to house singing. Another church service is held where they dress in their native attire or Western costumes. Later on there is a feast of rice and yam paste called **fufu** with stew or okra soup, porridge and meats. Families eat together or with close neighbors, and presents are given.

On the west coast of Africa, in Liberia, most homes have an oil palm for a Christmas tree, which is decorated with bells. On Christmas morning, people are woken up by carols. Presents such as cotton cloth, soap, sweets, pencils, and books are exchanged. Also in the morning a church service is held in which the Christmas scene is enacted and hymns and carols are sung. Dinner is eaten outdoors with everyone sitting in a circle to share the meal of rice, beef and biscuits. Games are played in the afternoon, and at night fireworks light up the sky.

Activity:

Prepare African Meal: Roast Pork, yellow rice, vegetables, fruit cobbler.

Go Christmas Caroling: "Christ is Coming! He is Near!"

Devotion (See Below)

Write our Gifts for Jesus and place at the foot of the tree. (Red Envelopes/Green Ribbon)

Watch: The Lion King

DEVOTION: THE BEST GIFT OF ALL

For many people, Christmas is their favorite day of the year! They wish every day was Christmas! It's so much fun to wake up on Christmas morning! Your stocking is full of yummy treats! The Christmas tree looks so-o-o beautiful with all the presents and bright lights. You get together with your family for a big feast and then gather around the tree to open

presents. You can hardly wait to open your gifts! When it comes your turn, you're so excited you rip off the wrapping paper! Then when you open it, its usually something you really like! Sometimes its just what you asked for, and it becomes your new favorite toy! But, once in a while, its the wrong size, or the wrong color. Sometimes its something you just don't need. Other times, its something that you like a lot at first... Maybe you like it so much that you play with it all day...maybe even for a few days. But, then you get tired of it. After a while you forget about it and it just sits in the corner of the closet for the rest of the year.

But, did you know that there is one gift that is perfect? There is one gift that is so precious...no amount of money could ever buy it. Its a gift that is never broken. Its something we *all* need. Its something that we never get tired of. It never wears out. Something that is always right and never wrong. That gift is really not a *some-thing*, but rather a *some-one*. Can guess what that gift is? If you guessed Jesus you were right! Jesus is the best gift that anyone has ever given us! It was God who gave us his Son, Jesus. Jesus was the one who God had promised to send us long ago - his Son, Jesus, who would save the people of the world. God loved us so much that he sent his Son, Jesus, to the earth to be born as a baby. And Jesus loved us so much, that when he grew up, he was willing to suffer and die for us. He died on the cross to pay for all the wrong things we do. (If that makes you sad that he died..don't worry; It has a happy ending. God also raised Jesus to life again, just as he raises us to life again if we believe in Him.)

You see, we *all* do wrong things...and that is called sin. But, God is holy...he never sins, and he hates sin. He made us and loves, and wants to have a friendship with us. He wants to be close to us. But, we can't be close to God if we have sin in our life. But God gave us the priceless gift of his Son, Jesus. Jesus died for us on the cross to take the punishment for our sin, so that we could be close to God again. Jesus is the *only* way that we can ever be right with God. Isn't that awesome! If we believe in Jesus, and ask him to forgive us for our sins, he will forgive us. He is the only one who can take away our sin.

When we admit that we are a sinner, and we turn from our sin, and ask Jesus to be our leader from now on, he forgives us, and makes us right with God. And, that's not all. when we become a follower of Jesus, he also gives us his promise that we will one day live with him forever in heaven. So after we die, we don't really die...but we will be raised to life again to live with him forever. And there is more! When we ask Jesus to come into our heart and lead us, he doesn't leave us alone. He gives us a helper, the Holy Spirit, to come and live in our heart, and help us do what is right.

So you see, in a way, Christmas *really is* every day of the year -- because Jesus is the best gift of all - and Jesus is with us every day! He is *always* there for you, waiting for you to talk to him. He wants to be close to you. And, when you draw close to him, he promises to be close to you too. Then nothing will stand in the way between you and God. You can enjoy his friendship forever! Isn't that the best Christmas present ever!

Devotions and Facts found at:

<http://biblekidsfunzone.com/devotions/00sundayschoollessons.html>

<http://www.santas.net/aroundtheworld.htm>