



date _____

BONUS

A BIRTHDAY PARTY FOR JESUS



Inspire (for parents)

It was our church's annual Christmas Eve service. We sang the usual carols, our pastor shared the nativity story, and we read poems and Scripture. But nothing moved me quite like the ending of this special service. Each of us was given little candles. We lit them one by one. Then the lights were turned off. As the glow of the candles illuminated the sanctuary, we sang "Silent Night" in warm harmony.

Our service could have very well ended like that—but what came next was my favorite part. Our pastor instructed all of us to lift our candles high in the air. There were hundreds of us with our arms reaching up together. The entire room looked like the top of a birthday cake. We were then led in a cheerful, boisterous version of "Happy Birthday"—to Jesus. The kids, the adults, the grandparents—everyone sang at the top

of their lungs. I looked over at my children's smiling faces and I cried out of sheer joy.

I will never forget that moment. The all-too-familiar birthday song held a different meaning for me and my family that night. It actually became a moment of worship to the One whose birth changed everything.

by Justin Fox

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This resource is designed to allow your family to have time in God's Word **before your children attend church**. Because God's plan is for parents to be the primary spiritual nurturers of their children's faith, we know that as you grow spiritually, your children will grow spiritually as well.

Equip (for parents)

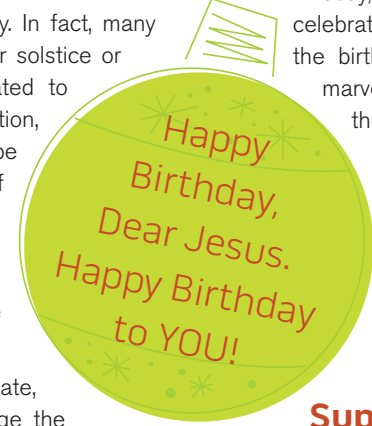
Up until the late 1800s, December 25 was not recognized as a "holy" holiday. In fact, many cultures celebrated the winter solstice or other winter festivals dedicated to pagan gods. To avoid persecution, many Christian homes would be decorated with the icons of the festivities. Drawn in by the atmosphere, many believers would engage in the revelry short of paying homage to the gods of the festivals.

In response to the social climate, the church began to challenge the pagan traditions by holding services on the 25th of December. Eventually, the church decided to celebrate the birth of Christ on this day and declared it to be "Christmas." In preparation for the celebration, the early church celebrated Advent, a time of fasting, prayer, Scripture readings, traditions, and reflecting on the internal life of the individual.

Some scholars believe that in the middle of the fourth century, Constantine the Great built the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, declaring Jesus' birthday a national holiday, and Julius, bishop of Rome, set the date as December 25. Christmas was said to have taken on a happier, more celebratory feel and became a time of joyous anticipation. However, its cultural position and traditions were upheld not by the church leaders, but rather those in royal or political power.

It was not until the late 1800s that the celebration of Christmas began to resemble the celebrations we know today. *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens helped to enlighten society toward many of the qualities we associate with Christmas: family, charity, hope, and love. This work encouraged people to take a second look at their values.

Today, Christians all over the world celebrate Christmas to remember the birth of Christ. It is a time to marvel at the prophecies fulfilled, the miracle of the virgin birth, the proclamation from a multitude of angels, and the wonder that God became flesh in order to provide the way for us to be in relationship with Him forever. ☺



Support (for parents & kids)

This week, **JUST FOR FUN**, read the account of Jesus' birth in **Luke 2:1-16**. Then, have a birthday party for Jesus! Bake a cake, light some candles, and sing Happy Birthday to Jesus with glee. After you've finished singing, allow each family member to share what gift they would like to bring to the King. Maybe they would like to make a promise to show extra love to others this year. Or perhaps they feel Jesus would appreciate them finding a time each day to talk with Him in prayer. The possibilities are endless.

Remind your children that what they just heard is a part of The Big God Story, and they'll learn more about Jesus' birth in church this week. Pray together, thanking Jesus that He was willing to come to earth to be our promised Redeemer. ☺

