



**ROSS HETHERINGTON  
ELECTRIC**  
STOUFFVILLE, ONTARIO

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON**

**GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY**  
Matthew 2:1-12; Luke 2:1-20  
(Lesson for December 24)  
**GOLDEN TEXT**—And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. — Luke 2:10, 11.  
**THE LESSON AS A WHOLE**  
Although Micah the prophet had predicted some seven centuries earlier that the Messiah would be born in David's city of Bethlehem (see Micah 5:2), as the time approached, there seemed little likelihood of any literal fulfillment. The chosen maiden who was to be the mother lived in Nazareth, many miles to the north. She was poor, and traveling was both costly and dangerous. Furthermore, her physical condition made such a journey hazardous. In view of all this, it certainly appeared that any prospects of the Babe being born outside of Nazareth were remote.

Jehovah, however, had spoken. The Son of God was to be born in the royal city of the famous King David. No word of His could become void, no prophecy miscarry. God moved upon the spirit of the emperor, heathen though he was, causing him to issue a directive that the entire Roman world should be taxed. Because Mary and her fiancé, Joseph, were both descendants of David's house, they found it necessary to travel southward to Bethlehem. While in that town the divine Babe was born. Thus the ancient prophecy was completely honored, and hope provided for the fulfillment of all predictions for the future.

**The Heart of the Lesson**  
The advent of the Lord Jesus combined dignity and glory with deepest humility and grace. He was perfectly divine and yet perfectly human, both Son of God and Son of man.  
Matthew's account stresses the fact that He was the divine King. Both creation (the star) and the revelation (the Scriptures), bore witness to this (see Matt. 2:2, 5, 6). And yet, des-

pite these powerful witnesses, human opposition flared up. While the scribes were too utterly indifferent to travel the six or seven miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem to ascertain if the prophecy of Micah, which they could readily quote, had been fulfilled, the brutal Herod and his court plotted His assassination! But against this somber background God saw to it that His Son was not only acknowledged but adored. And so the Oriental philosophers bowed in worship and presented their gifts.

Luke's account stresses the humanity of our Lord. His manhood was perfectly sinless, despite the fact that His genealogy contained the names of four Old Testament women — Thamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba — three of whom had foul stains against their characters. Hence with an ancestry so tainted, it would have been impossible for the sinless nature of Jesus to be produced had it not been for His miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit.

**Reunion and Feasting**  
Through the ages, Christmas has always been a time of reunion and feasting.  
In this country, Christmas is not considered complete unless the entire family gathers at "mom's" or "grannie's." Turkey on the table is a tradition and, in some sections, ham is considered a menu necessity.  
In the time of the Saxons, the festive board was spread with a "bord-cloth" and the guests waited impatiently for the two specialties that marked Christmas: the peacock and the boar's head.

Legend has it that before the Crucifixion the berries of Christmas Holly were white instead of red as now.

**It's Merry Christmas In Any Language**

From Tokyo to West Berlin, from Buenos Aires to Copenhagen — and even in the cities of Russia and the satellite countries — the glow of the Christmas spirit spreads around the world, for Christmas is truly a universal holiday.  
The legends and traditions gathered about it are many, and customs can, and do, vary from country to country. All nations, through their folklore, have made their special contributions to the traditional ways of celebrating the birthday of Christ.  
When the customs of one country are compared with another, it's sometimes hard to believe that the same holiday is being commemorated!

**How to Say It**  
Along with the different ways of observing Christmas, there are, of course, different ways of extending greetings, according to the language of the country. To give just a few examples — in Sweden it's "God Jul," in French "Joyeux Noel," and

in German, "Froliche Weihnachten." In Russia, it's "S Rozhdstvonom Khristovym."

Whatever the language, the words mean, "Merry Christmas" — and that's the key to the variety of Christmas customs. Although the peoples of many lands have unique Yule traditions, each is a way of expressing the spirit of Christmas — a spirit that is the same everywhere, in every place and time.

At Christmas, the thoughts of people around the world turn to the joys of home, of being with family and friends, the merriment of feasting and parties, the pleasures of giving and receiving gifts, the satisfaction of helping others. The affirmation of faith, the renewed promise of life eternal and the hope for "Peace on earth, good will toward all men" bring spiritual rewards in a season of worship and prayer.

**Share in Tradition**  
All these things find expression in the Christmas customs of many lands. And the customs travel from country to country, so that, on a day when sharing with others is a most important part of the celebration, nations share in the memories and traditions of other nations.  
Some of these customs are compiled below by editors of *The Book of Knowledge: Old Customs Live* —  
Christmas in the United States reflects a heritage of customs from many lands and times. Trees, candles, bells, carols and other well-loved traditions came, like the people of the U. S., from other countries. In many communities, people still celebrate Christmas as their ancestors did.

The U.S. has made its contributions to Christmas customs around the world, too. Santa Claus, bearded and red-suited, was first personified in "The Night Before Christmas" by Dr. Clement Moore. Street decorations, Santa in stores, and special store displays of gifts are U.S. ideas that have been adopted on a global scale.

**Saint Is Reality**  
Swedish Yuletide ceremonies begin officially on December 13, St. Lucy's Day. According to legend, St. Lucy went about carrying food and drink to the needy. The Swedes give the legend reality by choosing one of the girls in the family to represent St. Lucy. St. Lucy rises early and wakens each member of the family, serves them coffee and bakes buns.

**Norway Prepares**  
In Norway, preparations for Christmas traditionally start 6 months before December 24. The Christmas celebration itself lasts three weeks. The period, according to Book of Knowledge researchers, is known as the Julafred, or the Peace of Christmas.

**Glow Like Stars**  
In Switzerland, Christmas Day, or Weihnachten, is the traditional opening day of the winter sports season. A colorful sight on Christmas is the fires which are burned on the peaks of the Alps. Like flaming stars, they hang in the dark heavens during Holy Night.

**Statues Honoured**  
In Italy the Presepio, or crib, is as characteristic of Christmas as is the tree in other countries. To the Presepio, people bring gifts of nuts and apples, which they place in the hands of life-sized figures.


**Picnics Planned**  
Australians go in for outdoor picnics at Christmas time since it's summertime "down under" then.

In various central European countries the Christmas Crib, staged in a box, is carried through the streets by groups of singing children during Christmas time.



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