

“The Birthday of Light”

John 1:1-14

Today we celebrate the birthday of Jesus. Now, birthdays to us are a regular part of our lives, but we haven't always celebrated birthdays.

In fact, did you know that the early Christians refused to celebrate birthdays because birthday celebrations among the pagan Romans were so immoral and extravagant.

In fact, many of the traditions that we follow when we celebrate birthdays came from the Greeks and Romans.

For instance, what's the best part of celebrating birthdays? Presents, right? Well that tradition probably came from Romans.

What else do you like about celebrating birthdays? How about...

(pull out the plain birthday cake)

...birthday cake?!

This also came from the Greeks and the Romans.

Of course, for the Romans it wasn't exactly like this, it was probably more like honey bread. But it was probably round.

Why do you think that was the case? Why was it round?

Because the Greeks and Romans followed the lunar calendar. In other words, their calendar was based on the position and appearance of the moon. So, the moon was very important to the Greeks and the Romans because it told them what time of year it was – like when their birthday was.

The moon was so important to them that they associated a goddess or a female god to the moon. Her name was Artemis. And they worshipped the goddess Artemis in a temple. And all through the year Greek or Roman people would be watching the midnight sky waiting for the moon (or Artemis) to tell them when their birthday.

On that day, when the moon was in the right position telling them that their birthday had come, they would go to the temple to offer a round shaped cake to the goddess Artemis.

Now, what is missing from this cake?

The frosting, right? Well, I'm pretty sure that the ancient Romans and

Greeks didn't have frosting, but they did want this cake to look like a moon.

When I see the moon, it looks pretty white to me, so let's put on some frosting.

So it looks like the moon.

(get some volunteers to spread out the frosting)

(as the frosting is being spread) Now, we don't worship many gods do we? No, we worship one God. We worship the God who made the moon. It says in the first part of the Bible that God made the moon "to light up the night."

And we don't take offerings and sacrifices to temples anymore either. But we do come to church and we do bring our money, our tithes and offerings to God. We do give God ourselves which is what God wants the most.

(add some sprinkles)

So, now we have a nice round moon-shaped cake. But what's missing. Candles!

See the Greeks and Romans did this because they wanted it to glow like the moon and so they put candles on top and they lit them. And they would take them to the temple.

(Light the candles)

Now the Greeks and Romans believed the fire and smoke carried their prayers up to the gods in the sky (which is why we wish something silently or we say a silent prayer), but we believe God is not only in the sky but is all around us.

So, later on, people in countries like Belgium and Germany placed candles on their birthday cakes to indicate life.

And these German Christians also thought that around Christmas time, the time when we celebrate Jesus' birthday, we shouldn't be making cakes that are in the shape of a moon, they should instead be in the shape of the one we worship and celebrate, they should be in the shape of Jesus.

And so they would take three round balls of sweet bread dough and they would put them together like this.

Then they would put raisins right here for the eyes and then bake the dough. And later it would come out of the oven looking like the baby Jesus who the Bible says was wrapped up or swaddled like you were as a baby. They called this sweet bread, "Cougrou" (pronounced "KooNoo").

And they would put a candle on the cake to remind them that Jesus is alive and they would enjoy it with a cup of

hot chocolate to remind them of the warmth and goodness of God's love.

You see, instead of celebrating the birth of Jesus with a cake that looked like the moon they celebrated the birthday of Jesus with a cake that reminded them of Jesus.

Do you know that in the Bible, it says that when Jesus was born, "the light of life" was also born? This cake reminds us of this. In Jesus (point to the bread) there is life (the trick candle) and even if this candle is blown or snuffed out (blow out the candle), through Jesus it will come back to life.

That's why we celebrate Christmas.

Let's pray...

LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS
For Sunday, December 25, 2011's Sermon
Foundational Scripture:

Scripture: John 1:1-14

Sermon Series: "Expecting"

Sermon Title: "The Birthday of Light"

Question: Why are birthdays important? Why is Jesus' birthday important?

Synopsis: Jesus' birth is significant because of the light that he brings.

Featured Scripture Reflection: "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." – John 1:3-5

Opening Icebreaker: How do you usually celebrate your birthday or the birthday of a member of your family? Share about a memorable birthday you have had.

Additional Question: What stands out to you when you read about the birth of Jesus?

Scripture Questions

What is the scripture saying?

- Read John 1:1-14. What stands out to you about this passage? What questions does it raise? What does it tell you about Jesus? What does it tell you about God?
- Read John 12:35-46. What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this verse? How does this passage complement the previous passage?
- Read Matthew 5:15-16. How does this passage compliment what was read in the previous passages?

How is God speaking through Scripture?

- What is the "Good News" in these passages of Scripture?
- After discussing and pondering these passages, how do these passages affect me? (i.e. - How are these passages speaking to me?)

God's word

- What is God's invitation to you?

A prayer

God, we thank you for sending your son, Jesus to be a light to our world. Help us to shine that light in our world. Amen.