

I. At this Holy Season of the year observed by the Christian Community, and enjoyed as well by your Jewish neighbors, I think it is particularly appropriate to examine the Jewish observance of Chanukah as there is a very important relevance between the two holidays.

Chanukah - known as the Festival of Lights or the Festival of Dedication - begins on the 25th day of the ninth month of the Jewish calendar and extends for a period of eight days. The celebration of Chanukah occurs very close to the observance of Christmas. *The festival this year begins on Dec, 19th.*

II. Historical Background:

When Alexander the Great, the Emperor of the Greek Empire, died, the Empire was divided among his generals and the portion of Asia including what is now the State of Israel came into possession of the Syrians. *Judea*

Under Alexander the Great, the religions of minority groups in the Greek Empire were respected; however, in succeeding years beginning with the reign of the Syrian King, Antioch^{us} Epiphane^s, 168 B.C., an edict was issued compelling every inhabitant of the Syrian Kingdom to adopt the religious beliefs of the Syrians and forbidding the Jews to observe their religious rites under pain of death.

Many Jews under threats of death acceded to the King's edict; however, in the Village of Modin, which was about fifteen miles from Jerusalem, a family called the Hasmoneans consisting of Mattathias and his

five sons refused to abide by the King's decree, and calling ~~for~~ "whoever is for God, let him come unto me" fled to the hills and with his followers waged a guerrilla warfare against the Syrian Army for three years until in 165 B.C., under Judas Maccabee (son of Mattathias who had died) the Syrian Army was driven from Jerusalem.

III. Religious Significance:

During the Syrian occupation of Jerusalem, the Holy Temple had been despoiled, idols had been installed, the Torahs or holy scriptures had been destroyed and the building greatly damaged. Upon re-entering the Temple, Judas Maccabee appointed priests who cleansed the Temple, removed the idols and restored the Temple to the worship of God. In order to kindle the eternal light, the priests used olive oil which had to be ritually purified. A search of the Temple revealed that there was only a small flask or cruse of pure oil which would furnish only one day's supply; however, miraculously, the small cruse of oil burned for eight days until the priests were able to refine new oil for the lamp. In observance of this miraculous event, it is customary at sundown on each evening of the eight day of Chanukah to light first one candle, the next day two candles and on each succeeding day an additional candle until the eighth day. The candles are placed in a ^{Menorah} ~~Menevah~~ - an eight branch candle stick, and as the candles are lighted, a prayer is recited thanking God for his wonderous deeds, for bringing retribution upon the evil doers, delivering the strong into the hands of the weak, the many

into the hands of the few, the wicked into the hands of the just, and the arrogant into the hands of those devoted to thy Torah, in enabling us to enjoy religious freedom and recalling the miracle of the small cruse of oil.

- OBSERVANCES:
1. Lighting the Chanukah Candles.
 2. Gifts - some small gift each evening, finally culminating in a major gift on the eighth candle.

Chanukah also means dedication significant of the re-dedication of the Holy Temple and it calls on the Jewish people to rededicate themselves to their faith, to renew their dedication to the moral and ethical teachings of Judaism and to resolve to continue to put these teachings into practice in all phases of everyday life.

IV. Closing:

As I stated at the outset, there is a very important relevance between Chanukah and Christmas. ^{In world history} Chanukah marks the first battle for religious freedom, and this is where the two festivals have the real point of contact. Had Antioch^{us} succeeded in obliterating Jewry a century and a half before the birth of Jesus, there would have been no Christmas. The feast of the Nativity rests on the victory of Chanukah.

In closing, I wish to take this opportunity on behalf of those of us who observe Chanukah to extend to you who celebrate Christmas our best wishes for a happy and meaningful Christmas with ~~the~~ ^{the} hope for peace on earth and good will to people everywhere.