

What About Halloween?

In order to understand Halloween, it is important to understand the history of this fall holiday. Halloween, which directly stems from Irish, Scottish, Welsh and British folk customs, was celebrated as the Druids' autumn festival. The Druids were an order of priests who worshiped nature. They were accomplished magicians and wizards at the height of their influence some 200 years before the birth of Jesus.

This holiday was originally celebrated to honor Samhain, lord of the dead, on October 31 (the end of the summer). The Druids believed that on this date, Samhain called all the wicked souls that had been condemned within the last year to live in animal bodies. He was believed to have released them in the form of spirits, ghosts, fairies, witches and elves.

According to Druidic tradition, these souls of the dead roamed the city on Halloween night and returned to haunt the homes where they once lived. The only way the current occupants of the house could free themselves from being haunted was to lay out food and give shelter to the spirit during the night. If they didn't, the spirit would cast a spell on them. That is where the phrase "trick or treat" comes from: They would be *tricked* if they didn't lay out a *treat*.

The jack-o'-lantern was also a part of this belief system. The carved pumpkin symbolized a damned soul named Jack. According to the tale, Jack was not allowed into heaven or hell. So, he wandered around in the darkness with his lantern until Judgment Day. Fearful people hollowed out turnips (and later pumpkins in the United States), carved an evil face on them, and a lit candle inside to scare him and other evil spirits away.

The Druids had other outlandish beliefs which have since turned into tradition. For example, they were afraid of black cats because they believed that when a person committed evil, he would be turned into a cat. Cats were thus considered to be evil. To scare them away, the Druids decorated their homes with witches, ghosts and the like. They also decorated with cornstalks, pumpkins and other goods in offering of thanks and praise to their false gods.

In addition to being Halloween, October 31 was also the New Year's Eve of the Celts and Anglo-Saxons. To celebrate, they built huge bonfires on hilltops to frighten away evil spirits, and often offered their crops and animals to them as a sacrifice - sometimes they even offered themselves or others.

The Romans began the conquest of the Celts around A.D. 43 and ruled much of what is now the United Kingdom for about 400 hundred years. During this period, two Roman autumn festivals were combined with the Celtic festival of Samhain. One of them, called Feralia, was held in late October to honor the dead. The other festival honored Pomona, the Roman goddess of fruit and trees. The practice of bobbing for apples became associated with Halloween because of this festival.

Some people have thought that Halloween's only significance was as the evening before All Saints' Day, a festival of the Catholic Church honoring all Christian saints. The Mass said on All Saints' Day was called *Allhallowmas*. The evening before became known as the Eve of All Saints, the Eve of All Hallows, All Hallows' Eve, or Hallow Even, which has given us the name *Hallowe'en*.

Although All Saints' Day contributed to the naming of Halloween, All Saints' Day itself did not exist until A.D. 700 when it was instituted by Pope Boniface IV. Originally it was celebrated in the spring on the first Sunday after Pentecost. Its date was changed to November 1 by Pope Gregory III (reigned A.D. 731-741) in an attempt to add a Christian influence to the traditional pagan customs still being celebrated on October 31 by Celtic converts. When sending missionaries to convert native peoples, the Catholic Church encouraged the redefinition of local customs into Christian terms and concepts. Therefore, All Saints' Day and Halloween became unified, because of the same ties to reverencing the dead.

The combination of these customs eventually became the traditional celebration we call Halloween. It is important for parents to consider these "harmless gestures of enjoyment" and the distorted images they make in a child's heart. We must realize Halloween is a holiday centered around fear and death.

Modern day witches and wizards believe this night to be the most suitable night of the year for magic and demonic activity. In Deuteronomy 18:10-11, God forbids us to participate in any kind of occult practices or witchcraft. Further, in the New Testament, we are told to abstain from the appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).

As Christians, we should not celebrate Halloween, rather we should recognize October 31 as the day the Lord has made - a day we can rejoice in (Psalm 118:24). And we don't need to be fearful, for God has not given us a spirit of fear (2 Timothy 1:7).

Parents should teach their children *faith* in God. Children can have just as much fun on a Halloween centered around the Word of God and family fellowship. Make a commitment today to give your children the Word of God instead of the fairy tales the world offers - it will help them grow in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Ephesians 6:4).

Here is a prayer of safety you can pray for your family on Halloween:

*Father, in the Name of Jesus, I thank You that You watch over Your Word to perform it. I thank You that my family and I dwell in the secret place of the Most High and that we remain **stable** and **fixed** under the shadow of the Almighty, Whose power no foe can withstand.*

Father, You are our refuge and our fortress. No evil shall befall us - no accident shall overtake us - nor any plague or calamity come near our home. You give Your angels special charge over each one of us, to accompany and defend and preserve us in all our ways of obedience and service. They are encamped around about us.

Lord, I will train my children in the way they should go; and according to Your Word, when they are old, they will not depart from it. And I bind the devil from trying to influence them in any way this holiday.

*Father, You are our confidence, firm and strong. You keep our feet from being caught in a trap or hidden danger. When we lie down, You will give us peaceful sleep. Father, You give this family safety and ease us - **Jesus is our safety!***