

FESTIVALS IN DECEMBER 2005

Bodhi Day (Buddhism)

The prince, Siddhartha Gautama, left his home and family and all his possessions behind at the age of 29 to discover the meaning of life, particularly its hardships. After six years of rigorous discipline and asceticism under the guidance of a number of spiritual teachers, he still hadn't found what he was looking for. While travelling with a small group of fellow seekers, he went off by himself, broke his fast, and sat down under a pipal tree and vowed not to arise until he understood. He sat through the week, day and night, and on the eighth morning came the realization which became the founding principles of what the modern world calls Buddhism. **Bodhi Day**--Usually observed December 8 or the Sunday immediately preceding is the date, according to Mahayana tradition, of Siddhartha Gautama's realization and presentation to his fellow seekers of the Four Noble Truths:

1. All beings are subject to suffering. No one escapes... suffering is universal.
2. The cause of suffering is Ignorance. And Ignorance of oneself is the greatest Ignorance.
3. Ignorance, the cause of suffering, can be overcome, and
4. The way to overcome Ignorance is the [Eightfold Path](#).

From that point forward, he was referred to as the Buddha, the Enlightened One. He is also referred to as Shakyamuni (the sage of the Shakya clan) Buddha, Gautama Buddha, Shakanyorai (in Japanese), and many other names to distinguish him from [Amida Buddha](#), who in our Temple's interpretation, is not seen as a historical figure but the idealized Buddha of unlimited wisdom and compassion and is equated with all of life itself, and thus signifies all of us.

The Eightfold Path

The Buddha-Dharma is the realization within one's deepest consciousness of the Oneness of all life. For the attainment of this purpose, Buddha showed us the Eightfold Path.

1. **Right Views** means to keep ourselves free from prejudice, superstition and delusion... and to see aright the true nature of life.
2. **Right Thoughts** means to turn away from the hypocrisies of this world and to direct our minds toward Truth and Positive Attitudes and Action.
3. **Right Speech** means to refrain from pointless and harmful talk... to speak kindly and courteously to all.
4. **Right Conduct** means to see that our deeds are peaceable, benevolent, compassionate and pure... and to live the Teachings daily.
5. **Right Livelihood** means to earn our living in such a way as to entail no evil consequences. To seek that employment to which can give our complete enthusiasm and devotion.
6. **Right Effort** means to direct our efforts continually to the overcoming of ignorance and craving desires.
7. **Right Mindfulness** means to cherish good and pure thoughts, for all that we say and do arises from our thoughts.
8. **Right Meditation** means to concentrate on the Oneness of all life and the Buddha that exists within all beings.

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Immaculate Conception (Christian – 8th Dec 05)

This article refers to the theology of the immaculate conception of Mary, Mother of Jesus. For the story of the immaculate conception of Jesus Christ, see [Virgin Birth \(Christian doctrine\)](#).

The **Immaculate Conception** is a [Roman Catholic doctrine](#) which asserts that [Mary, the mother of Jesus](#), was preserved by [God](#) from the stain of [original sin](#) at the time of her own conception. Specifically the doctrine says she was not afflicted by the privation of sanctifying [grace](#) which afflicts mankind, but was instead filled with grace by God, and furthermore lived a life completely free from [sin](#). It is commonly confused with the doctrine of the [virgin birth](#), though the two doctrines deal with separate subjects. Mary was conceived in a "normal" way, but was acted upon by God (preserved) at the time of her conception.

The Immaculate Conception was solemnly [defined as a dogma](#) by [Pope Pius IX](#) in his constitution *Ineffabilis Deus*, published [December 8, 1854](#) (the Feast of the Immaculate Conception). From [1483](#), Pope [Sixtus IV](#) had left Roman Catholics free to believe that Mary was subject to original sin or not, after having introduced the celebration; this freedom had been reiterated by the [Council of Trent](#).

The Roman Catholic Church believes the dogma is supported by scripture and by the writings of many of the [Church Fathers](#), either directly or indirectly, and often calls Mary the [Blessed Virgin \(Luke 1:48\)](#). Roman Catholic theology maintains that since Jesus became [incarnate](#) of the Virgin Mary, she needed to be completely free of sin to bear the Son of God, and that Mary is "redeemed 'by the grace of [Christ](#)' but in a more perfect manner than other human beings" (Ott, *Fund.*, Bk 3, Pt. 3, Ch. 2, §3.1.e).

In the Roman Catholic church, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on [8 December](#) is generally a [Holy Day of Obligation](#), and a public holiday in countries where Catholicism is predominant. Prior to the spread of this doctrine, 8 December was celebrated as the Conception of Mary, since 8 September is the Feast of the Nativity of Mary.

See www.wikipedia.org for definitions

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Christmas (24th & 25th Dec 05)

Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The word "Christmas" comes from the words *Cristes Maesse*, or "Christ's Mass". Jesus Christ is thought to be the "saviour" of man; who was sent to the earth by God. 'Christ' means 'Messiah' or 'Anointed One' - the title given to Jesus - and 'Mass' was a religious festival. According to a Roman almanac, Christmas was being celebrated in Rome by 336 AD. In 354 AD Pope Liberius instituted the Nativity on 25 December and since then, the birth of Christ continues to be celebrated on that day every year.

Jesus

According to the legends, the birth of Jesus dates back to the time of the Roman Empire that was ruled by Caesar Augustus. Israel was then under the rule of King Herod.

Jesus' birth was miraculous in that his mother Mary was a virgin. Joseph was a carpenter in the small village of Nazareth. He was to be married to Mary. Mary once dreamt of an angel who told her she would bear the Son of God who should be named Jesus. One day everyone was instructed by the emperor to go back to his or her town of birth. So Mary and Joseph left Nazareth for Bethlehem.

Mary was going to have a baby, so she rode a donkey and Joseph walked beside her. It was night soon and a storm came on. The couple took shelter in a nearby stable. It was there that Jesus was born. Christmas is celebrated to commemorate that day.

In the Christian Bible, the books of Matthew and Luke, chapters 1 and 2, describe the real Christmas story.

When Jesus was born, a bright new star appeared in the sky. Three wise men, in an area now either in Iran or Saudi Arabia, saw this bright new star and knew that it told of the birth of a special king. The star they saw was probably a supernova and is known from astronomical records. They followed the star and eventually found the place where Mary, Joseph and Jesus were staying. To bring honour to the child, they brought rich gifts for Jesus: Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. This is why the wise men are often referred to as "Three Kings".

Herod, the evil king of Judea, heard about the extraordinary child. He considered Jesus as a threat and sent soldiers to kill Jesus. However God told Joseph in a dream to escape to Egypt with Jesus and Mary. They stayed there until King Herod died and then went back to live in Nazareth.

In this view, Jesus can be considered an incarnation of God, whose purpose of existence was to morally purify human beings in order for them to be freed from suffering. God, in all his mercy, gave us the opportunity to cleanse ourselves spiritually. Christmas signifies the necessity for this cleansing, and the need for redemption. Since Jesus is no longer alive physically, Christmas serves as a reminder that his teachings are forever present for us to make use of. At first, Jesus said, 'I am the messenger of God.' Later, this transformed to, 'I am the son of God.' Finally, the message was, 'My Father and I are one.'

According to the 1994 *Encyclopaedia Britannica Book of the Year*, there are 1.8 billion Christians in a total world population of 5.5 billion, making it the largest religion worldwide. In America, 241 million out of a total population of 281 million people are Christians -- that's 85 percent. Because Christians follow Jesus, the birth of Jesus is important to them.

Christmas is both a holiday and a holy day. The Christmas festival lasts for twelve days, from 25 December (Jesus' birth) to 6 January (Epiphany).

Although Christmas is mainly celebrated by Christians, do not make the mistake that it is only for Christians. It is a holy and happy occasion to be celebrated by the entire mankind. Get rid of religious and philosophical differences and enlarge your mind (Matha - religion and Mathi - mind).

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You house the single divinity only in your heart. Then the entire humanity becomes a single race. There is only one religion in the universe and that is divine love (Prema). The one without this principle of love in his heart is not a Christian, Muslim nor a Sikh and is no better than a demon. This principle of complete unity of all religions is now manifested only in Prashanti Nilayam. Imagine what a phenomenon it is that Christians from so many countries in this world have joined together here to celebrate Christmas. There are people from sixty-four countries assembled here. They are all of one heart. This is true devotion. Swami reiterates it is not a celebration for Christians only but is a holy occasion for the entire humanity. It is the desire of Swami that such differences are completely eradicated.

(Divine Discourse: 25th December 1999)

When Jesus was born three Arabian kings came to see Him. They were overjoyed at seeing the newborn babe. While returning, the first king said to Mary, "Mother, you have given birth to a child who loves God." The second king said, "Mother you have given birth to a child who will be loved by God." The third king said, "Mother Mary your child is not different from God, both are one and the same." Once we understand the inner meaning of these three statements, we will know the truth. The one who loves God is the Messenger of God; the one whom God loves is the Son of God; the one who understands the principle of unity becomes one with God.

Worship Jesus by following His ideals. Jesus pointed to three stages. The first one is, "I am the Messenger of God." He wanted to propagate the message of God. The second one is, "I am the Son of God." The son has a claim to father's property. What is the property of God? Truth, Love, Forbearance, Peace and Righteousness are the properties of God. So, man has to strive to attain these qualities. He has to practice, experience and propagate these virtues. Only then man deserves to be called Son of God. The third one is "I and My Father are One." This stage is attained when the principle of unity is realized. When Jesus reached this stage, He had no suffering at all. He was always blissful and was prepared for anything. Even at the time of crucifixion, Jesus was smiling, because he realized that He was not the body. Body is bound to perish, but the in dweller has no birth and death. Truly speaking the in dweller is God Himself. Jesus understood that body was merely vesture, and He was the in dweller.

You should have the firm faith that you are the Messenger of God. Propagate Swami's message to the entire world. Some people may like it and some may not. Do not bother about what others say, be it "yes" or "no." 'No' and 'yes' relate only to you, but for Sai everything is yes, yes, yes. There are no defects in God. All words and deeds of God are perfect. You see the reflection, reaction and resound of your feelings. They are psychological in nature. God always gives only good things. Understand and experience this truth.

(Divine Discourse: 25th December 1998)
