

“Christmas Around the World: Ukraine”

Joshua 4:1-9

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All Scripture quoted from ESV unless otherwise noted

The predominant religion in Ukraine is Eastern Orthodoxy, though about 2/5 of the population describe themselves as non-religious.[1] In the Ukraine, there are often two celebrations of Christmas every year; the first is on December 25 (Catholic Christmas) and January 7 (Orthodox Christmas). On the morning of January 7, people greet each other with the phrase, “Christ is born!” and the response is, “Glorify Him!”[2]

One of the major observances among Ukrainians is the celebration of St. Nicholas’ Day, a simple gift-giving day in early advent that helps preserve a Christmas Day focus on the true meaning of Christmas itself.[3]

In Ukraine, Christmas dinner is usually served on Christmas Eve, but only after someone has spotted the first star, in honor of the wise men who followed a star to find Jesus. In the room where the meal is eaten, there is often a decoration made from a sheaf of wheat, bringing to mind those family members who had passed away.

This Christmas season, pause and reflect on the people and events of your own life, paying special attention to specific times that God has shown up in a big way – times that He has seen you through or out of or around some difficult situation.

God’s Word reveals several times in which a memorial is put in place, such as Joshua 4, in which we read of God instructing the Israelites to take stones from the Jordan River, which they had just crossed over, and create a memorial with them so they would not forget the goodness, faithfulness, kindness, and provision of God.

It is important to create memorials that remind you of how God has come through for you in the past, in order to strengthen your faith and provide opportunities for you to explain the significance of these memorials to the next generation. You probably don’t have a pile of rocks that reminds you of God’s deliverance whenever you see them, but maybe you have something else that serves that same purpose, whether it is a Christmas ornament, a household decoration, a tattoo, or something else.

Tell your stories; stories of God’s providential care – that is, “Yay, God” moments; stories of times when God provided, when God guided, when God protected, or when God helped you in some way. The next generation needs to hear your stories!

In seasons of drought, memorials become incredibly important. When the Jordan River grew low during drought seasons, the stones Joshua put in place would become visible,

reminding all who saw them of God's presence and love, even in the midst of difficult circumstances.

This Christmas season, what memorial stones do you have? What are the things that remind you of the people, places, and events that God has provided for you in this life? Celebrate those memorials, and the memories that they bring to mind. Allow them to help you think back to a specific time when God came through, melting desperation and fear into deliverance and faith.

The next generation is working their way through all the many questions of faith that you've faced, and maybe more; they need to hear your stories... and you need to remember those stories. Sit quietly and ask God to bring those memories back to you, and when He does, put a memorial in place that will make people ask, "What does that mean to you?" in order to help you use the power of story to connect your faith to your daily life.

[1] <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/Languages>

[2] <https://ukraine.ua/visit/christmas-in-ukraine/>

[3] <https://www.almanac.com/st-nicholas-day>

Takeaways from this message.

The predominant religion in Ukraine is Eastern Orthodox.

One of the major observances in Ukraine is the celebration of Saint Nicholas' Day. (December 6th.)

Christmas decorations often include a sheaf of Wheat. (In remembrance of their ancestors.)

Create Memories - Memorials

- What do your Knick-Knacks bring to remembrance?

Tell your Stories

- Share "Yay God!" moments.

In seasons of Drought, memorials become incredibly important.

- This Christmas and Advent season, Celebrate!

DIG IN!

Here are some farm-fresh questions that will help you to personalize and apply this morning's message.

1. *What was most surprising, unexpected, or helpful from today's passage/message? Why?*
2. Name each of the individuals/groups who are involved in Joshua 4:1-9. What do you learn about the faith of each one? How is your faith doing in these areas?
3. What do we learn about God from this passage? Why is it important that you know this about Him?
4. What is the best store-bought cookie?
5. What are some important "God moments" in your life that you would be wise to remember? How do (or how could) you help yourself remember these moments?
6. Why do you suppose God instructed Joshua to have one man from each of the 12 tribes of Israel gather a stone from the river? What do we learn about God in this?
7. In what ways is the taking of communion a 'memorial' of sorts?
8. *What have you learned through your personal time of Bible reading this week?*