**Jesus and Hanukkah**

As a child, I remember being asked by my friends around December, “do you celebrate Christmas or celebrate Chanukah?” It seemed like a sincere, simple question. Maybe because half of my family (my mother’s side) was Jewish, and the other half, (my father’s side) was Catholic, they didn’t know which holiday I would celebrate. The truth is, from the time I was ten-years-old I celebrated both holidays.

Jesus and Chanukah. The two are not mutually exclusive, in fact they are more connected than most people think. Jesus was Jewish. He was very Jewish. By that I mean that he grew up in a traditional 1st century Judean Hebrew household. He worshipped at the actual 2nd temple. He was widely considered an established Rabbi and teacher of the law, even by Nicodemus a ruling Pharisee in the gospel of John chapter 3.

He was also very observant when it came to Jewish holidays and feasts. He was circumcised on the eight day as required by the law (Luke 2) and celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7). He celebrated Passover as his “last supper” (Luke 22) and even directs his followers to remain in Jerusalem for Shavuot (Pentecost) after he leaves them (Acts 1).

But what about Chanukah? It’s not one of the major feasts put forth in the Torah and there are no references to it in the writings of the Prophets. It’s a feast of dedication, remembering the brave Maccabees who recaptured the temple from Antiochus Epiphanius after it had been captured and desecrated over 150 years before Jesus was born. Ancient writings tell us that the eight-day rededication requirement seemed impossible, having only one day’s supply of oil for the temple menorah. Tradition tells us that God miraculously allowed the oil to last the full eight days so that the dedication would be complete. The word “Chanukah” means dedication and is celebrated each year as the Feast of Dedication or the Festival of Lights.

Jesus made sure he was in Jerusalem during Chanukah, The Feast of Dedication in John chapter 10. He did not ignore it, or *any* of the prescribed feasts. He who was called “the light of the world” would’ve taken great joy in the Festival of Lights as a celebration of hope and justice against the dark pervasive tyranny that existed in those days. He told his followers that they themselves were the “light of the world” and should not be hidden away, but to be like a lampstand (or menorah), and “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt 5).

During this season let’s be lights in the midst of darkness. With all the evil, division, oppression and injustice that takes place in this world, it’s important that those who celebrate the lights of this season, *become* the lights of this season for those around us who desperately need light in their darkness.