

What's the Big Deal about
Halloween?
A Christian Perspective on a
Popular Celebration



October 12, 2003

Ascension of Christ Lutheran Church
16935 W. 14 Mile Road
Beverly Hills, MI 48025
(248) 644-8890
ascensionofchrist.org



Table of Contents

A Brief History of Halloween

A smattering of notes compiled from the sources below

“What About Halloween?” By Bob and Gretchen Passantino

From the Christian Research Institute (www.equip.org)

<http://www.equip.org/free/DH011.htm>

Reprinted with permission from CRI

“Halloween: Oppression or Opportunity?” By Hank Hanegraaff

From the Christian Research Institute (www.equip.org)

<http://www.equip.org/free/DH010.htm>

Reprinted with permission from CRI

“Blest Halloween!” by Mark Loest

The Lutheran Witness, October 2001, pp. 16-19

Reprinted with permission from The Lutheran Witness



Additional resources for you are available at the following:

www.cph.org

www.equip.org

www.atstracts.org

www.atkids.com

www.october31st.org



Questions? Contact Pastor Tom @ tzucconi@ascensionofchrist.org

Or

248.644.8890



What's the Big Deal about Halloween? A Christian Perspective on a Popular Celebration

October 12, 2003 Ascension of Christ Lutheran Church

Then...

Halloween has deep roots. In fact, they go back further than Christ. The day we know as Halloween was part of the Celtic Feast of Samhain (Sah-ween or So-wen). It was a celebration led by Druid priests in Britain and France and commemorated the beginning of Winter.

To them, it was a night on which the veil between the present world and the world beyond was pierced. It was believed that on this night, demons, witches, hobgoblins, and elves were allowed to harass and oppress the living. The night was marked by animal sacrifice, offerings to the dead, and bonfires in recognition of departed souls. For self-preservation, many Druids would dress up in "disguises" and involve themselves in demonic activities to make themselves immune from the attacks. Also, grotesque faces were carved in pumpkins, gourds, turnips, and other root vegetables as another means of warding off evil.

In direct response to this, the early Christian church moved All Saint's Day, a Christian festival remembering those that had died in Christ, from May to November 1st. A sacred vigil took place in the church the night before All Saint's Day and was called "All Hallow's Eve." It was an overt attempt by the church to stymie a pagan tradition with the truth of the gospel. It demonstrated that only the power of the resurrected Christ could protect people from Satan, sin, and death. The practices of the Druids died hard, however, and over the centuries the church denounced them as witchcraft, thereby earning the association with All Hallow's Eve or Halloween.

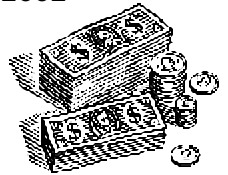
...and Now



Halloween became an American holiday with the immigration of the working classes from Great Britain in the late 19th century, though the "trick or treat" tradition is purely an American invention. It seems the mischievous aspects of the holiday were attracting more people than the ancient pagan religious practices, as people used that night for pranks and mischief. To counteract the growing damage being done, organizations began to posit alternatives. One such alternative, which caught on quickly, encouraged children to go door-to-door and receive treats from homeowners. Simplified, that's how we've gotten where we are today.

Yet, with renewed interest in old pagan religions and practices, has come a renewed interest by Hollywood and manufactures. Capitalizing on this, the entertainment industry has produced such shows as "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," "Sabrina the Teenage Witch," and John Edward's "Crossing Over." Over the years, Halloween has gone from Linus in the Pumpkin Patch to something strongly associated with the occult and the dead and marketed to a younger and younger audience ("Sabrina" is now a Saturday morning cartoon on ABC, a Disney company.)

So today Halloween is the "buying and selling" of ancient religious practices. And apparently, it's going quite well! According to statistics from the National Association of Convenience Stores, the total amount of candy, decorations, and costumes for 2002 was approximately \$7 billion, second only to Christmas.



A Christian Response: Three Possibilities

Non-participation

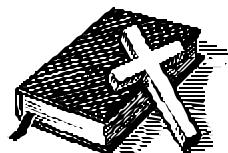
Some Christians absolutely refuse to participate in Halloween. They have the legally protected right to keep their public school children from participating in any potentially compromising activity, such as listening to ghost stories, or coloring picture of witches. They may decide to completely ignore the holiday, not answer their door to trick-or-treaters, and instead have a family evening watching Bible story videos or playing family games.

For parents who choose this course, they need to explain to their children why they have taken this stand; they need to give the children strong encouragement to deal with the teasing and ridicule from classmates.

Limited Participation

Some Christians decide to have a limited, but creative, non-compromising participation in Halloween. Parents can dress their children up as Biblical characters and distribute Gospel tracts with the candy. Parents can limit their children's trick or treating by having them attend a community party or a party in the home of a friend. Most Christian families restrict their children's costumes to exclude evil, pagan, or demonic costumes.

Many churches approach Halloween by hosting alternatives such as "Harvest Festivals" or Reformation parties (oldlutheran.com). Others sponsor "Hell Houses" for older children and teenagers where the gospel is preached as the way to avoid the horrors of eternal punishment. Churches should seek God's direction for them in providing alternatives, not all congregations are suited for such activities.



Information for this presentation is unashamedly lifted from the articles enclosed in your Bible Study packet. You're encouraged to read all the materials to gain a well-rounded perspective on this popular holiday.

Full Participation

And, lastly, some Christians participate fully. That is, they believe that the holiday is nothing but a “secular time of fun and games—an excuse for kids to dress up and overload on sugar.” Most of us grew up in households of “full participation” because at that time Halloween wasn’t such a big deal. The marketing emphasis on the demonic or dark side just wasn’t there; horror movies such as “Halloween” and “Friday the 13th” were more campy than scary, while Linus and the Great Pumpkin got more attention than it does today!

Time For Reflection, Discussion, and Comments

How has Halloween changed since you were a “trick-or-treater?” How has it remained the same?

In what ways can my participation dishonor Christ and the Christian faith?

In what way(s) can my participation in Halloween become a Christ-honoring voice in the midst of rampant consumerism and secularism?

In the end, the best direction is to NOT compromise your faith or bring dishonor to Christ. Participation or non-participation should not bring about feelings of guilt; if it does, you should rethink why you’re doing what you’re doing!

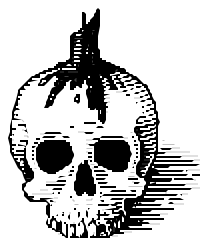
Some Biblical Texts to Chew On While You Eat Your Candy!

‘Do not practice divination or sorcery. –Leviticus 19:26

⁹ When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. ¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, ¹¹ or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. ¹² Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you. ¹³ You must be blameless before the LORD your God. –Deuteronomy 18:9-13

¹⁶ They forsook all the commands of the LORD their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal. ¹⁷ They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination and sorcery and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, provoking him to anger.

¹⁸ So the LORD was very angry with Israel and removed them from his presence. Only the tribe of Judah was left, ¹⁹ and even Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God. They followed the practices Israel had introduced. ²⁰ Therefore the LORD rejected all the people of Israel; he afflicted them and gave them into the hands of plunderers, until he thrust them from his presence.—2 Kings 17:16



Information for this presentation is unashamedly lifted from the articles enclosed in your Bible Study packet. You’re encouraged to read all the materials to gain a well-rounded perspective on this popular holiday.