

Happy Chinese New Year 2010



The Chinese New Year Calendar

With Its Associated 12 Animals



Rat is Number One



- *Rat ranks number 1 in the 12 calendar animals. There is a related story for children.*

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The Chinese have a rich cultural heritage which is largely intertwined with religious philosophies and beliefs.

Very often, Buddhist and Taoist practices are mistaken as traditional Chinese customs.

This leads to confusion between Chinese cultural and religious practices. The struggle for Christians, therefore, lies in how to maintain an active appreciation of the Chinese cultural heritage without compromising the Christian faith.

Hence, we struggle with this question - how can we celebrate the various Chinese festivals without going against the teaching of the Bible?

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To address this, we need to understand the meaning of the Chinese festivals, their significance and importance. Let me bring out one of the festivals.

The Lunar New Year celebration is tied to the arrival of spring.

In ancient China where there was no electricity and winters were cold and dark, the arrival of spring was a major occasion for celebration.

Spring brings life and joy to all.

Everything starts to grow again. Birds and animals return to the land once again.

It was in this context that the Lunar New Year, also known as the Spring Festival was celebrated.

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What should be the Christian's response to the Lunar New Year.

The Spring festival is an occasion to celebrate and rejoice that there is the newness of life.

Spring brings forth life to plants and animals.

On such an event we affirm that all life comes from God and we are to depend on Him completely.

God is the Giver and Sustainer of all life and blessings. Hence a man is considered blessed when he is in a proper relationship with Him.

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We should celebrate the Lunar New Year with a deep sense of thanksgiving to God that He has given us new life in Christ.

The Bible teaches us that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, the old has gone, the new has come! You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 3:26-27

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As a new man let all bitterness, wrath and malice be put away.

In the celebration of the Lunar New Year we must put away all malice.

By God's grace we determine to make peace with those who may have brought bitterness into our life.

Christians should display meekness, not malice; loving regard, not lingering resentment.

All these are possible because Christ lives in me.

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Paul says in Galatians 2:20

“it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”.

Christ lives in us so that we may reveal Him.

All our old nature is crucified with Christ.

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Another aspect of the Lunar New Year celebration is human relationship.

First, the relationship within the family is united by the tradition of reunion dinner held on the eve of the New Year.

It was of such importance that in ancient China, some magistrates even allowed their prisoners to return home for the occasion.

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The family is the cornerstone of the Chinese society, and the New Year's Eve reunion dinner is an annual demonstration of the love and respect that binds family members together.

For the head of the family, the gathering provides personal comfort and satisfaction because it is visible proof that his care and concern for his children has not been wasted.

For the younger members of the family the reunion dinner represents an opportunity to show their appreciation of their parents. The saddest thing is that when the son wants to express thankfulness to their parents, they are often no longer living.

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In the Old Testament, the Jews set aside a day each year to thank God for His grace.

The Puritans who landed in America also had a Day of Thanksgiving.

God created everything and gave bountiful grace to man. On this occasion, Christians are to appreciate the material world that God has given us to enjoy.

However, in such a celebration, we are to share with others the Christian basis and values of what the good life really means and to put away what is superstitious and traditional of men in celebration.

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Let us mention only a few traditional practices which have no real basis for the celebration of the Chinese New Year.

During reunion dinners there is sometimes so much food on the table that a family cannot possibly finish eating it all.

According to Chinese custom, one is not supposed to finish all the food, for having leftovers from the reunion meal means the family will continue to enjoy abundance (for example, food and money) in the new year.

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Another traditional practice with superstitious overtones is in the spring-cleaning of the home. While most simply desire to have their home in the nicest possible state for visits by friends, many also believe in a supernatural significance to the act.

The belief advocates that one may clean the house up till midnight on the eve of the Lunar New Year, but must thereafter avoid sweeping the floor for the duration of the celebration.

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Sweeping up to the eve of the New Year helps remove bad luck, but if done during the days of celebration, it would simply sweep away all the good luck the New Year brings.

It is both our hard work (Proverbs 15:19) and the blessing of God that provide us with our daily necessities, not superstitious practices.

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The superstitious belief and practices related to the observance of the Lunar New Year should be avoided.

The concern for, respect, and gratitude towards elders and parents, as well as caring for the weak and poor on festive occasions should be strongly encouraged.

Working adults should re-dedicate their lives to God as stewards of His gifts rather than merely pursuing their own material goals.

Such values should be consciously passed on to the younger generation.