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## Feast of Dedication

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Hanukkah, or the Jewish Feast of Dedication, begins at sundown today. It continues for the next eight days.

More than just a lighting of candles, this dedication is a remembrance of the marvelous power of God to light the way and reward the faithful. The historic events leading to the establishment of Hanukkah are recounted in the Apocryphal book of First Maccabees. (The Apocrypha consists of books that were included in Greek translations of the Bible, but not in original Hebrew texts. Protestant scholars separated these books from the Old Testament in the 1500s.)

First Maccabees tells the story of King Antiochus Epiphanes, who, on returning from his conquest of Egypt, pillaged the Temple at Jerusalem, taking all the gold and silver, including the golden altar. Two years later, Jerusalem was destroyed at Antiochus' command, and a decree issued, stating that the remaining Jews were to "abandon their own laws and religion." And "the penalty for disobedience was death" (see I Mac. 1:41-50). Facing domination and despotism, many Jews abandoned their religious practice and adopted the ceremonies and rituals of their adversaries.

Only a faithful few held fast to the law of God. What courage is required when death is pronounced as the penalty for living one's religious convictions and practice! With no hope of human help, one's devotion to God must be based on a perception of the divine truth that transcends religious traditions. The essence of devotion derives from a deep love of God. This love was evident in the lives of a priest, Mattathias, and his five sons. Refusing obedience to intolerable decrees, they led a rebellion. As he enjoined his sons, "No one who trusts in heaven shall ever lack strength....

draw your courage and strength from the law, for by it you will win great glory" (I Mac. 2:61, 64).

Relying on the power of God rather than on the strength of numbers, his son Judas Maccabaeus eventually drove the enemy from Jerusalem. His first priority was to restore the Temple. The altar was rebuilt. The interior was restored. And the Temple was rededicated to the worship of the one true God, precisely five years to the day that Antiochus had plundered it.

At the rekindling of the Temple's lamp stand, only enough holy oil was found to burn the lamp for one day. Yet the light lasted for eight days. What a symbol of divine approval for the faithful few who had fought to honor God! The lighting of the menorah daily for eight days is a reminder of this marvel and of God's divine power.

I love to consider the spiritual lessons to be learned from total devotion, moral courage, and a conviction in the supremacy of God. God is truly One and is universal. No one is excluded from His creation or blessing. Neither can God's power be divided or shared with idols or material symbols of power and influence. The First Commandment underlies this singleness of thought and practice: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). And it is reinforced with the second command, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ...: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them" (Ex. 20:4, 5). Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of this newspaper, called the First Commandment her "favorite text," and preached a firm allegiance to the allness and oneness of God.

To me the spiritual significance of the holy oil is that it represents consecration, prayer, and heavenly inspiration (see "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures," by Eddy, pg. 592). The resultant light is derived from divine power. It continues, despite unfavorable circumstances.

While the first Feast of Dedication took place over 2000 years ago, the lessons in devotion, courage, and strength are just as applicable this day. One winter, my husband and I were trying to rescue a dog that had fallen through the ice on a pond. We had been using a rowboat to break the ice for over 30 minutes, trying to reach it. We were exhausted, as was the dog, and we still had a distance to go. Defeat seemed imminent.

I prayed to God. In a moment of inspiration - and of rebellion against death and defeat - I felt a total conviction in God's strength. It revived us all, and we were able to rescue the dog.

Standing firmly for the supremacy of the one God, we are blessed.