HANUKKAH IN 600 WORDS
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Hanukah is a holiday that lasts 8 days (and nights) and happens every year in late November or December, this year it starts on Sunday night. Jewish holidays always start in the nighttime when the sun goes down.

Hanukah is a happy holiday, and we light a Hanukah menorah (called a chanukiah) every night of the holiday. Other activities popular during Hanukah are eating foods made with oil (especially doughnuts and potato pancakes known as latkes) and playing dreidel.

But what is this holiday all about? Why do Jewish people celebrate it?

First Hanukkah is **NOT** the Jewish Christmas, even though the holidays happen around the same time of year they are totally different holidays about totally different things.

Long ago, before even our grandparents' grandparents' grandparents were alive, the land of Israel was ruled by a wicked king named Antiochus.

Back then the Jewish people prayed at the ancient Temple in the city of Jerusalem. This Temple was the holiest of holy places, the center of Jewish life.

But King Antiochus wanted all the people of his land to live the way he lived and to pray the way he prayed, according to his customs – and this meant that he did not want the Jewish people to dress differently or pray differently or eat differently.

King Antiochus, outlawed the Jewish religion and made it against the law for the people to pray in their holy Temple. In fact, and he turned the holy Temple into a place that became very unholy, making a real mess by setting up idols and altars to other gods inside.

Antiochus and his soldiers made the Jews feel sad and angry. A Jewish man named Judah Maccabee said, "We must stop Antiochus! So that we can pray the way we always have in our holy temple."

At first, Judah's followers, called the Maccabees, were afraid. "Judah," they said, "Antiochus has so many soldiers. His soldiers carry such big weapons and he uses huge elephants to fight his battles! How can we Jews, who don't have weapons, fight against him?" Judah said, "If we think very hard and plan very carefully, we will be able to defeat him." It took a long time, but at last the Maccabees chased Antiochus and his men out of Israel.

The Maccabees successfully took back the Temple from King Antiochus, but they were really sad when they discovered that the King had not taken care of their holy space. They got to work cleaning and purifying it, and they removed all the foreign idols and altars the king had set up inside.

When the Maccabees were cleaning the Temple, they found only enough oil to light the menorah (lamp) for one day – but miraculously, that small amount of oil lasted for eight days, which is exactly how long it took to get new oil.

They cleaned every inch of the Temple, and then, on the 25th day of the Jewish month of Kislev, which is this Sunday in our calendar, the Maccabees held a special ceremony, lit the menorah and rededicated the Temple and made it holy again.

The word “Hanukkah” means “dedication,” and it comes from the moment when the Temple was triumphantly returned to the Jewish people. That’s why the holiday is called Hanukkah – the holiday of dedication.

The Jewish people prayed and thanked God for these miracles. Every year during Hanukkah, Jews light menorahs for eight days to remember the miracles that happened long ago; and to share the message that everyone should be free to practice their religion the way they want, where they want.