

All Saints' Day

November 1

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

(Psalms 116:15 ESV)

All Saints' Day is an ancient, historic Christian holiday celebrated on November 1st. Many hear or read the word "saint" and immediately think of a particular Christian who has been recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as a special or superior Christian, and it lays out specific criteria for recognizing individuals down through history as a saint.

However, the biblical understanding of a saint is much broader, simply meaning one who has committed their life to Jesus Christ. In other words, a saint in the Bible is a Christian – nothing more, and nothing less. The Apostle Paul wrote: "2To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: 3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 1:2-3 ESV)

Both the Old Testament words and New Testament words translated as saint have the same root meaning of "set apart, consecrated, holy." In addition, the words "sanctification" and "saint" also have the same root words in the New Testament. In other words, saints are those who have chosen to have faith in Jesus Christ and are therefore set apart (or holy) by God, through the work of His Spirit, to re-present Jesus to the world, to be little Christs or Christians. In the New Testament, the words "saint" and "Christian" are used for the same people, though the word "saint" is actually the much more common term in the Bible.

With this understanding of "saint" in mind, All Saints' Day is a Christian celebration in honor of all the saints from all times and places. The Apostles' Creed uses the phrase, "the communion of saints," to refer to this universal body of all believers and the eternity we will have together to worship our God. It is a time to offer God our thanks and gratitude for the lives and influence of these saints, or Christians, and acknowledge that they have now joined the Church Triumphant for all eternity.

"Biblically, the saints who have passed on before us are alive with Christ. As the apostle Paul wrote, 'For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain' (Philippians 1:21). However, there is no biblical command to pray to saints in heaven or ask them to pray for us. Instead, Christians are commanded to pray to 'Our Father in heaven' (Matthew 6:9). Believers pray in the name of Jesus (John 14:13-14) by the power of the Holy Spirit." (www.compellingtruth.org)

“All Saints’ Day is also called Allhallows (*hallow*, in Old English, means ‘holy’ or ‘sacred’). Halloween is celebrated the day before, or, specifically, the evening before All Saints’ Day. The word Halloween is a derivative of Hallows Eve. The emphasis on spirits, goblins, witches, and other dark images came about from the supposition that the dark forces were especially active just before All Saints’ Day in order to hinder the prayer for the dead that would be offered the next day. [However, the practice of praying for the dead has never been a part of the Protestant Church’s understanding, instead urging Christians to come boldly before the throne of grace to God, knowing that we have a great High Priest, Jesus Christ, who always lives to make intercession for us.] The practice of trick or treating dates back to the Middle Ages when poor people would go door to door begging food in exchange for their prayers for the dead.”
(www.gotquestions.org)

The origins of many aspects of today’s Halloween practices are not completely clear, very likely finding connections going all the way to the time before Christ. Yet, it was a common tactic of early Christians to connect Christian meanings to pagan events, and, over time, see the Christian meaning overtake the pagan one. This likely happened as ancient pagan celebrations and worship of the dead were transformed by Christians into celebrations of Christ and his saints. Strands of pagan celebrations of the dead and Christian celebrations of the saints were soon intertwined, and they remain difficult to fully separate.

The actual origin of the holy day of All Saints evolved through the early centuries of the Church. Persecution of Christians (saints) began with Stephen’s martyrdom (Acts 7:54-60) months after Jesus’ death and resurrection. By the end of the First Century A.D., Christians were increasingly experiencing persecution for their faith, and this continued until Emperor Constantine granted Christianity legal status in 313 A.D. (and Emperor Theodosius declared Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380). So many martyrs had died for their faith in those early centuries that the Church set aside special days to honor them. In 607, Emperor Phocas presented to the pope the Roman Pantheon temple, which had been used to worship Jupiter and the pagan gods. The pope had the statues of the pagan gods removed and consecrated the Pantheon to “all saints” who had died from Roman persecution in the first three hundred years after Christ. In the Eighth Century, Pope Gregory III set the date for the feast of All Saints on November 1st. People prepared for their celebration with a night of vigil on Hallows’ Eve. (www.christianity.com)

Today, Protestant Christians recognize All Saints’ Day as a time to praise God for the “great cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1), who have surrounded us on our journey of faith. Whether from the days of the Old Testament, New Testament, the early years of the Church, later centuries, up to and including the saints of today, All Saints’ Day offers Christians an opportunity to affirm the goodness of God as He has cared for His

saints down through the centuries, for their witness to Christ, often in the midst of persecution, whether they were publicly known or not, and for our connection to and communion with them to honor Christ in all we do.