

Have you ever been made to do something you didn't want to do? In fact, you hated doing it?

How do you think David Beckham would feel if he had to do ballet? Or your head teacher if he or she had to dress up as a banana?

How do you think a Christian would feel if someone said to them at a Christmas nativity service, 'You can't worship Jesus, you've got to pray to the donkey?'

This is a story about when a whole country had to do things they didn't want to, and how they reacted to it.

A long time ago there was a very difficult time for the Jewish people. They were invaded by the Greeks. And the Greeks said, 'You have to be like us. You have to talk like us, eat like us, and do the things we do.'

As you can imagine, the Jews weren't too happy. They were even less happy when the particularly nasty king, Antiochus, said, 'You have to call me God.' And he also said, which would be particularly insulting to the Jews, 'I'm going to take a pig into your lovely temple in Jerusalem, where you worship your God, and I'm going to kill it there. And anyone who disagrees will be in trouble!'

This was the last straw for many of the Jews, and although they were small in number, they went to war against the Greeks, and eventually won. They drove the Greeks out.

But, oh dear, when they got Jerusalem back to themselves, the place was a mess. The Greeks had knocked many buildings down, and put graffiti everywhere, especially in the temple. So the Jews tried to put things right again. And one of the things they tried to put right was this.

The Jews had a lamp with seven candles on it. This was called a menorah, and it used to remind them that God was like a light in their darkness. This lamp needed oil to make it burn, and there was only enough oil for the lamp to burn for one day. It would take eight days to obtain some more oil. What should they do? They decided to light it anyway.

Do you know what happened? The lamp didn't go out after one day, after all. It didn't go out after two days either. It kept on going for eight days, until they had some more oil. It was amazing.

Ever since then, Jewish people have celebrated this miracle. They light candles at a feast called Hanukkah. You may have seen lamps with seven candles in some people's windows. But they don't light just seven candles at Hanukkah, they light another one as well. For the eighth day that the lamp burned.

And then they always have a ninth candle to light the others.

Winter is very dark, but Hanukkah reminds the Jewish people that God is the light when things get difficult, when we have to do things that we don't want to do. But he also wants us to be like the last candle. The one that can light up others.