Hanukkah fresh start for Jews

■ **The Jewish holiday** remembers the people of Judea's fight for independence from Hellenistic rule hundreds of years ago.

BY KARL ANDERSON
Staff Reporter

Unlike Christians, who treat Christmas as one of the most significant religious holidays, Jewish families will celebrate Hanukkah as an important day in its history.

Hanukkah, which literally means "to dedicate," dates back to Alexander the Great and his conquest of the Persian Empire.

Among Jewish holidays, Hanukkah is a minor celebration. Lincoln Rabbi Stanley Rosenbaum said the distinction between major and minor holidays is made by whether the holiday is ordained by God.

All ordained celebrations are considered major by the Jewish community, he said. Hanukkah results from significant historical events and remains a very personal celebration within Jewish families.

Rosenbaum recounted the story surrounding the celebration of Hanukkah:

By 333 or 334 B.C., Alexander the Great had conquered most of the Persian Empire. The people of Judea – the land including the city of Jerusalem – were mostly Jewish and did not want to give up their rights of self-rule.

Alexander made a deal with the people in which Judea would become a vassal state in his empire in exchange for the right to maintain its own rule, which was based on the Torah, the Jewish holy book.

That agreement became a source of con-
flict after Alexander's death, when his empire was divided and Antiochus IV ascended to power.

Antiochus, who vainly declared himself a god, wanted to establish a formal religion and bring Judea under Hellenistic law.

He next attempted to destroy the Jewish religion entirely. Antiochus demanded that the Jewish temple in Jerusalem be opened to the new religion and that statues of the Greek gods be erected within the temple. He also demanded that all Hellenistic people be allowed to worship inside the temple.

The Jews considered this a desecration of their temple and many became upset with the new ruler and his disregard for Jewish autonomy.

Under the leadership of their father, the sons of the Jewish Maccabee family lead a rebellion against Antiochus' army. In the end, by what seemed a miracle, the Maccabees defeated the army and Jewish independence was reestablished.

After the rebellion was over, the temple in Jerusalem was to be cleansed and the altar, which had been desecrated by live sacrifices, had to be rebuilt before the temple could be rededicated. The tradition of Hanukkah originates from this rededication.

Within the temple was a chanukiah, or a candle stand holding eight different candles that spread out in a straight line. This chanukiah, also called a menorah, burned olive oil and was to remain eternally lit within the temple. The process by which the oil was prepared took eight days to complete.

When the temple had been cleansed and made ready for its rededication, only one flask of oil remained to with which to light the chanukiah. The supply would never last for eight days and the menorah would soon
burn out.

Faced with this problem, God provided for the people of Judea, and the oil in the flask lasted for a full eight days, until new oil had been processed. The temple was rededicated and the event is now marked by the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, which is now celebrated by Jewish families in many different ways.

Sanford Kaplan, adjunct professor of geology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said his family celebrates Hanukkah in a traditional manner.

One candle on the chanukiah will be lit each night of the holiday in Kaplan's home, he said. This is to represent the growing strength of the light as the holiday progresses.

His family also will exchange gifts on the first night of Hanukkah, although some families exchange gifts every night of the holiday, he said.

Dreidel, a traditional Jewish game that had its birth during the days of Antiochus, will also be played by Kaplan's family during Hanukkah, he said.

A dreidel is a four-sided top decorated on each side with a different letter. These letters each have a meaning related to the teachings in the Torah.

The game, which is often played for money, is started when a player spins the top. When the spinning stops, the person must expound on the meaning of the
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That's the real miracle."

STANLEY ROSENBAUM
Lincoln rabbi

exposed letter.

The letters, Hey, Gimmel, Nun and Shin, each have a different numerical value and the people playing the game will make wagers based on the value of the letter.

The game was played by early Jews as a way of secretly teaching their children the lessons of the Torah during a time when it was illegal to practice their religion.

Another tradition that Kaplan observes is eating latke potatoes, or potato pancakes. Kaplan said his family will eat these pancakes, which they usually cover with applesauce, frequently during the Hanukkah celebration.

Rosenbaum said Hanukkah commemorates a new beginning for the Jewish community. Jews were faced with new questions and the challenge of how to re-establish themselves following the rebellion against Antiochus, Rosenbaum said. They had to decide what sort of culture they would adopt and what their new beliefs would be.

Hanukkah also recalls the importance of commitment, inner strength, resolve and dedication, Rabbi Rosenbaum said. That such a small number of people could defeat Antiochus' army, which must have been large, seems incredible, he said. It is hard to imagine the dedication with which those few fought to defeat the masses, he said.

"That's the real miracle," Rosenbaum said.

Church services center on Christ

BY TANYA WORTMAN
Staff reporter

With the hustle and bustle of the weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, people sometimes forget the holidays' true religious meanings.

Some Lincoln churches are focusing on simplifying the holiday this year. Other churches are offering their traditional worship activities in splendor.

First Plymouth Congregational Church, 2000 D St., has made booklets available to its members on taking the stress out of the holidays. The Rev. John Smeltzer also had a workshop called "Destressing the Holidays" for the church's members.

The Rev. Kathryn Campell said too many people get caught up in buying gifts, decorating and sending Christmas cards, which makes the holiday just a list of things to do.

First Plymouth is offering five Christmas Eve services, beginning at 3 p.m. with a Christmas pageant. At 5 p.m. the church has a youth service, where youths read, sing and perform in an instrumental ensemble.

At 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. will be the fes-
tival of lessons and chorales, which offers scripture readings followed by anthems sung by the Plymouth Choir or chorales sung by the congregation.

At midnight, the church holds candlelight services and the hand-bell choir plays. The festival of lessons and chorales mass will be broadcast on KOLN-TV Channel 10/11 at midnight.

At St. Mary's Catholic Church, 14th and K streets, the parish is focusing on preparing for Christ and Advent. Sister Mary Schroer, the church's organist, said she liked the midnight Mass because the parish's adult choir performs a 30-minute concert before the Mass begins.

St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church, 320 N. 16th St., has a midnight Mass on Dec. 16 where students are encouraged to brings gifts for either the Lancaster Office of the Mental Retarded or for the elderly at Lancaster Manor.

For those looking for Christmas music, St. Paul United Methodist Church, 1144 M St., is holding the Chancellor Choir Christmas musical Dec. 14. "Shout for Joy!" consists of spirituals and traditional Christmas music.

ON THE COVER

SANDY SUMMERS/DN
ONE-MONTH-OLD ELIZABETH SABATKA begins her first Christmas with a visit to Santa. But from the looks of it, all she'll be asking from Santa this year is another nap.