

## Out With The Old And In With The New: New Year In September

Written by Winta Woldeyesus

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People celebrate holidays according to their norms, culture and beliefs, and New Year is no exception. In Eritrea people celebrate the New Year twice. Despite the fact that the society uses the Gregorian calendar, the Eritrean people also celebrate, the Geez New Year which begins on September 1 and falls on the 11th of September of the Gregorian calendar.

The celebration of this New Year goes back to the early settlers in the area; though Israelis are believed to be the first ones that introduced September as the first month of the year. In the Old Testament, it is believed that the new season after the great floods begun with the month of September. It is also the beginning of a sunny weather in which crops are gathered and harvested; the flowers blossom after heavy rains, chilly weather and hard work of summer. As a result, this new beginning is celebrated with great joy, especially in the rural area of the country, as a season of happiness and reunions where most of the pastoralists that left their hometown to feed their livestock return at the beginning of this month.

Though the mode of celebration differs, majority follow the same rituals in celebrating this event. Few weeks before the actual day, youth of a certain area will gather dried twigs to prepare torches for this special event. Most of the time, this is done by the males in the family. And the females in the family will go to the streams and wash in the early mornings for almost a week where they spend the entire time singing and dancing.

On the eve of the New Year the males in the family will put wild plants on their heads and light their torches, while the females plait their hairs in various styles and put a tiara of the spring flowers on their heads. In the evening, mothers of the family will prepare porridge for their families and once dinner is over, the entire family gathers in a near by elder's house to light torches. Later the elder of the family will take one of the torches and circle the house and say prayer, blessing both the family and the livestock. After this is done, the rest of the family will cross over the fire three times, reciting the same prayers.

And when the bells of the church start ringing, every one will go to the church carrying a torch on hand. In the church, reports of the society's activities of the year will be announced to the congregation and after a prayer for a new start, the youth particularly, the males circle the church three times with their lit torches and after that the people will gather at the center to sing and dance till dawn.

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