



Tiny tots dressed as Santas



Singing Christmas carols

Emblems of festivity and joy

Christmas is for joy, for giving and sharing, for laughter, for coming together with family and friends. It is a celebration of love and mirth symbolized by the Nativity, the Santa, the carol, the poinsettia and the evergreens. All that bring home the spirit of love and life which makes Christmas so popular throughout the world.

Symbols of Christmas shared throughout the world are the crib, the star, the tree, Yule Log and Christmas cards. Other symbols of holly, mistletoe, Glastonbury thorn, carols and so forth originate from their specific countries. Santa appeals to children from other religions as well. The Christmas season is ten days from December 25, linked with the Roman festival of the Sun. These symbols signify the different aspects of Christmas and the manner in which this festival is celebrated in different parts of the world.

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Pictures by Saman Sri Wedage and Sudath Nishantha



Two children portraying Mary and Joseph in a Christmas play

CHRISTMAS emblems

Christmas tree

Saint Boniface, an English monk who organized the Christian Church in France and Germany, came upon a group of pagans gathered around a great oak tree about to sacrifice a child to the god Thor. To stop the sacrifice and save the child's life, Boniface felled the tree with one mighty blow of his fist. In its place grew a small fir tree. The saint told the pagan worshippers that the tiny fir was the Tree of Life and stood for the eternal life of Christ.



Santa Claus

Indications are that Santa Claus' life story was simply recycled from Pagan gods. His story is told through an examination of the 3 names given to him in America: St. Nicholas, Kris Kringle and Santa Claus.

During his lifetime, he adored children and often threw gifts anonymously into the windows of their homes. The transformation of Saint Nicholas to Santa Claus happened largely in America - with inspiration from the Dutch. In the early days of Dutch New York, "Sinterklass" became known among the English-speaking as "Santa Claus" (or "Saint Nick"). In 1809 Washington Irving, a member of the New York Historical Society created a tale of a chubby, pipe-smoking little Saint Nicholas who rode a magic horse through the air visiting all houses in New York. He is also said to be patron of unmarried girls, providing dowries so that they can marry.



The Crib

A group of shepherds had gathered their flocks. All of a sudden, they were startled by a bright apparition, hearing an angel announce to them: "Do not be afraid; behold the news I bring you is good news of a great rejoicing for the whole people. This day in the city of David, a Savior has been born for you, no other than the Lord Christ. You will find a child still in swaddling-clothes, lying in a manger."

The city they knew was Bethlehem. They went to those grottoes and saw a man and a woman watching over a baby. Having paid their homage to the young king, and offered some little lambs in token of their devotion, they went back to their flocks, their hearts full of joy. A group of wise men, called Magi, had seen an unknown star moving in the heavens, and set off on their camels. They entered the house and prostrated themselves at the feet of the Child with deep faith. Then opening the treasures they had brought, offered their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Star on top of the tree

The Christmas star, depicting the star of Bethlehem, is traditionally associated with the spirit of the celebration.

The exact time of the Christ's birth is not known, but astronomers cannot place a new star appearance anywhere near the possible time.

Some star gazers suggest that if we move the birth of Jesus to the springtime of 6 B.C., we can attribute the star to the time the planets Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn were close together in the heavens.



Poinsettia

With its beautiful, red, starshape, poinsettia is a favorite flower in the United States. In Central America it is called the "Flame Leaf" or "Flower of the Holy Night". It was brought here over a hundred years ago by Dr. Joel Poinsett, the first US ambassador to Mexico. The legend tells of a girl named Maria and her little brother Pablo who were very poor but always looked forward to the Christmas festival. They loved Christmas but were always saddened because they had no money to buy presents.

One Christmas Eve, on their way to church, Maria and Pablo picked some weeds growing along the roadside and decided to take them as their gift to the Baby Jesus in the manger scene. Of course they were teased by other children when they arrived with their gift, but they said nothing for they knew they had given what they could. Maria and Pablo began placing the green plants around the manger and miraculously, the green top leaves turned into bright red petals, and soon the manger was surrounded by beautiful star-like flowers as we see them today.



Yule Log

'Yule' means 'wheel', a symbol representing the Sun. Before Jesus was born, pagans thought the Sun stood still for 12 days at the end of the year. A log was cut large enough to burn for this time period to burn away last year's evil.



Christmas pudding

Christmas pudding, also known as Plum Pudding, is the dessert traditionally served on Christmas Day, with origins in England. Christmas pudding is a steamed pudding, heavy with dried fruit and nuts, and usually made with suet. It is very dark in appearance - effectively black - as a result of the dark sugars and black treacle in most recipes, and its long cooking time. The mixture can be moistened with the juice of citrus fruits, brandy and other alcohol (some recipes call for dark beers such as mild, stout or porter).

Mistletoe

Kissing under the mistletoe is associated with the Greek festival of Saturnalia and later with primitive marriage rites. One belief was that it had power to bestow fertility. It was also believed that the dung from which the mistletoe was also possessed "life-giving" power. In Scandinavia, mistletoe was considered a plant of peace, under which enemies could declare a truce or warring spouses kiss and make-up.

Later, the eighteenth-century English credited with a certain magical appeal called a kissing ball. At Christmas time a young lady standing under a ball of mistletoe, brightly trimmed with evergreens, ribbons, and ornaments, cannot refuse to be kissed. Such a kiss could mean deep romance or lasting friendship and goodwill.

If the girl remained un-kissed, she cannot expect not to marry the following year.

Breudler

Breudler is made in Dutch Burgher celebrations of Christmas. It is a type of sweetened bread that is consumed on Christmas morning along with cheese. Ingredients are 500 gms dough, 8 large eggs, 100 gms raisins, 120 gms sugar, 125 gms butter, 1/2 ts bicarbonate of soda and 1 ts milk. Place dough in a bowl. Add yolk of eggs and beat well. Add sugar and beat again. Dissolve Sodium Bicarbonate in milk and add this to the mixture. Add half the raisins. Pour into a well-buttered breudler pan. Sprinkle the remaining raisins on top. Leave to rise in a warm place for an hour. Bake in a 150 degree (centigrade) oven for 30-40 minutes. (from Ann-Marie Keller).



Holly tree

The plant with its shiny green prickly leaves and red berry has come to stand for peace and joy, people often settle arguments under a holly tree. Holly is believed to frighten off witches and protect the home from thunder and lightning. In West England it is said sprigs of holly around a young girl's bed on Christmas Eve are supposed to keep away mischievous little goblins. The English also mention the "the holly and the she holly" as being the determining factor in who will rule the household in the following year, the "she holly" having smooth leaves and the "the holly" having prickly ones.



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Reindeer

Reindeer has come to be associated with the Christmas riding the tradition of the Santa Claus. As Santa is believed to be from the far away North, what else than a reindeer drawn sledge can serve as a better carriage?

It is man's most ancient herd animal, the first animals being raised around 15,000 years ago. Up until about 12,000 years ago, reindeer grazed over a vast area of Europe.

