

## Christmas customs

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One of the carols, "Adeste Fideles," or "O Come, All Ye Faithful" is of Latin origin. The British are especially fond of "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen." John Wesley's brother Charles wrote "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing!" in 1739.

Joseph Mohr, the pastor of a church in Austria, wrote the words to "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve, 1818, and the church organist, Franz Gruber, composed the music for the carol on the same evening, so that they could present it at the midnight Mass.

A Boston minister, Phillips Brooks, wrote "O Little Town of Bethlehem" in 1868 after a Christmas visit to Christ's birthplace. Only the Psalms of David were sung in the Anglican Church before 1700. In 1703, Nahum Tate wrote "While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks" and set it to a familiar melody taken from an opera by Handel.

"O Holy Night" ("Cantique de Noel") brought fame to the French composer, Adolphe Adam. "White Christmas" and "Jingle Bells" first appeared as popular songs in the United States.

### Mistletoe

In ancient Gaul and Britain, mistletoe was worshipped by the Druids. During winter celebrations, a Druid priest would climb a tree where mistletoe grew and cut it down with a golden sickle.

Two white oxen were sacrificed as part of the ritual, and the mistletoe was distributed to the people to be hung in their homes. It was a symbol of peace and good fortune, and if enemies should happen to be under such a spray, they dropped their weapons and embraced. This evolved into the custom of sweethearts kissing under the mistletoe.

### Christmas Candles

Probably at no other time are so many candles used in so many homes as at Christmastime. We can look to the Irish for the development of this custom. Candles were placed in their windows for the purpose of lighting the way for the Holy Family. The flickering candle denoted a place where the Holy Family would be welcomed and would not be turned away, as they had been at the inns of Bethlehem.

### Holly & evergreens

The use of holly and evergreens in homes is also said to have come from the Romans. They felt that the greenery kept the evil spirits from their homes. It is written that Christians accepted this custom only because by not trimming their homes, they were conspicuous and were marked as Christians and thus fair game for the gladiators.

### Gift giving

Christian nations associate their gift-giving directly with the birth of Christ and with the wise men who brought The Child gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

### The star

The Star is used everywhere as a Christmas symbol. It represents the Star in the East, which is told of in the Bible, Matthew 2:1-2; "Behold, there came wise men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? We have seen his star in the East and are come to worship him."

### The Yule Log

The custom of burning the Yule log came from the Norse and Anglo-Saxons. They burned a huge oak log once a year to honor Thor, the god of thunder. After the Norse became Christians, they made the yule log an important part of their Christmas ceremonies. The Scandinavians adopted the word Yule to mean Christmas. In Lithuania, the word for Christmas actually means log evening. The yule log became equally important in England. The English considered it good luck to keep an unburned part of the log to light the next year's yule log.

### Christmas Literature

Many families re-read the Biblical account of the first Christmas as part of their annual ceremonies. Others prefer familiar non-ecclesiastical literature. The works of Washington Irving, Clement Moore and Charles Dickens are favorites. The more modern stories of "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer" or "The Littlest Angel" or the significant "The Other Wise Man" are favorites with various families.

### The Date

It seems that scholars do not know the exact date of Christ's birth. In A.D. 354, Pope Liberius of Rome ordered the people to celebrate on Dec. 25. He probably chose this date because the people of Rome already observed it as the Feast of Saturn, celebrating the birthday of the sun. Christians honored Christ, instead of Saturn, as the Light of the World. The Christians of Egypt celebrated Christmas on Jan. 6, and many members of the Eastern Orthodox Church still observe this date.

Many persons today write Xmas instead of Christmas. This form of the name originated in the early Christian Church. In Greek, X is the first letter of Christ's name. It was frequently used as a holy symbol.

### The creche

St. Francis of Assisi is believed to have presented the first Nativity scene, setting it up in a church in Greccio, Italy. He used live cattle and donkeys and life-size images of the Christ Child, Joseph and Mary. Soon, the use of small figurines to represent the Nativity swept the Christian world.

### 'Twas the night before Christmas'

The greatest factor in popularizing Christmas and Santa Claus was the famous poem written by Dr. Clement Moore, a professor at Columbia University, on Christmas Eve, 1822, for his own children. A friend, Harriet Butler, heard about it and asked permission to read it to the children of her father's church.

She also sent it to the editor of the Troy, N.Y. Sentinel: It was published for the first time on Dec. 23, 1823. In 1830, the Sentinel commissioned a wood carver named Myrn King to draw the first picture of Santa to go with their annual poem. From that time on, this poem has been the basis of American Christmas thinking.

## Pastor's Column

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given... and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, the everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Isa. 9:6

Every Christmas there comes to us down through the corridors of time, the news that a Child is born unto us that is the Son of God. Bethlehem is the watershed of history. Two thousand years ago God invaded this world in human form; lived, walked, talked with men. This priceless gift is "Emmanuel."

God with us, in all of life, in trials, temptations, and disappointments. We are not alone. God has thrust into our lives a divine presence so glorious and powerful that no sin can hold us, no fear can destroy us, no unhappiness can possess us.

Happy are we if we can boast that the Son of God has come into our lives. Humble and grateful in ourselves, we are conscious of divine royalty in Him at whose feet we lay our lives. Happy are we when we can boast of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, proud of His righteousness and His love.

Happy are we when we can glory in His church because we belong to a band of Christian disciples whose hearts God has

captured; that by the indwelling Spirit we reflect so much of the likeness of the Son of God. Happy are we because of the priceless value God has placed upon us. What indescribable grandeur for eternity is offered to us, that we should be made the sons of God. Happy are we because the Son of God will soon return, eternally to be God with us; no longer a babe, but King of kings and Lord of lords. What glory is already ours!

Illustrious Christians shine without egotism, and the humble serve without shame. All eternal values are gifts to us from God. Our cup is full. We envy no Christian for the size of his cup that overflows with love in the fellowship of God. Christ has made us alive to beauty and to righteousness beyond our utmost expectation.

We are well born when twice born—that change of nature which purges us from selfishness into a life of love and purity, excelling in eternal life with Christ. Christmas is no burning out like light bulbs on a tree, but a joy in the coming of our Lord that marches on forever.

Lloyd W. Perrin  
Seventh-day Adventist Pastor

I get a little like Scrooge when I hear the statement that "Christmas is for the children." Huh? O yes, Christmas would be empty somewhat without wide eyed smiles and wonder and laughter; with stomachs too small for green beans but become bottomless pits for all kinds of candy canes.

Yes, in a way, Christmas is for children. God saw to that as He came to us as a Baby, probably one of the most helpless creatures in the world, a baby. So Christmas is centered around a child and that makes the whole Twelve Days important for children; for this is a very important child in that smelly stable.

From that dirty stable the light of God again begins to illuminate the world. The Emmanuel is with us; the Advent darkness begins to be driven away with joy and the joy of Advent preparation takes deeper meaning.

So Christmas is for children, 5 year olds, 20 year olds, 50 year olds and 70 year olds. Christmas is not only for the young at heart, but also the young at faith who will allow themselves to bend the knee and bow the head before a King, Our King.

Jesus is born! Let us celebrate that with twelve wonderful days. Mary has brought forth her first born, and we are delivered. We behold His Glory in Bethlehem, The House of Bread. God's promise is fulfilled; It has come true in your life and mine. This Word can be heard and seen by children. God speaks His Word and children recognize it as Truth. We are his children by adoption and grace.

Alleluia. May the blessings and the peace of the Holy Family be yours this season and forevermore.  
Kenneth D. Miller,  
Rector, All Saints' Episcopal Church

Merry Christmas

by Arlene Herzog

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