

GIFTS

Salvation is God's gift to us through Jesus Christ. The first Christmas presents were given to baby Jesus by the three Wise Men who traveled a great distance to worship Him. They were real men who lived and died in the first century. They gave three gifts of great worth, as mentioned in Matthew 2, that have come to be very symbolic. One gave Gold, the symbol of royalty. One gave Frankincense, symbol of holiness. One gave Myrrh, symbol of death.



ST. NICHOLAS OR SANTA CLAUS

The tangle of many traditions were blended into our Santa Claus. In the 4th Century, a bishop of Myra, Turkey, earned a reputation as a compassionate church leader who stood against injustice, he became known as the patron saint of children. He would leave small, unidentified presents for needy children and families,



After his death, others celebrated the anniversary of St. Nicholas' death by leaving presents at the homes of the poor. This simple remembrance may have been the origin of the miracles and magic associated with St. Nicholas after his death.

STARS

"Where is the one who was born king of the Jews? We saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." (Matthew 2:2) What a lovely invitation God sent to the wise men, calling them to Bethlehem. The star often finds its way to the top of the Christmas Tree in America. In many countries, the first star sighted on Christmas Eve is the signal for the celebration to begin.



STOCKINGS

Long before Christmas trees were readily available, stockings were hung in anticipation of the arrival of St. Nicholas. English immigrants first brought this endearing custom to America. The stockings hung were well-worn, everyday apparel. For over two centuries the joy of this custom has been recorded and perpetuated by American writers and illustrators.



SYMBOLS OF THE SEASON



ANGELS

Only two angels are identified by name in the Bible, Gabriel and Michael.

The word angel means "messenger of God."

The angels played an important role in the preparation and proclamation of Jesus' birth. Gabriel spoke to both Mary and Joseph, Jesus' earthly parents. He told them to name the baby "Jesus."

Angels proclaimed the birth of Jesus to shepherds on the hills outside Bethlehem, bringing "good news of great joy to all the people."

A multitude of angels sang the first Christmas carol, "Gloria in Excelsis Deo! Glory to God in the Highest!"



CANDLES

The candle is a beautiful part of our holiday. It softens as well as brightens. A flame is the most universal of symbols. It is reflective of Jesus Christ, who in John 8:12 says,

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Due to the danger of candle-lit trees, Thomas Edison Invented the first Christmas tree lights.



CANDY CANES

We all enjoy candy canes at Christmas, but how many of us realize what the design represents?

The shape is symbolic of two things, a shepherd's staff and the form of the letter 'J,' signifying the name of Jesus.

It reminds us that the Lord is our shepherd, tenderly and lovingly caring for us. The white stripe reminds us of the purity of Jesus.

The red stripe reminds us of the blood he shed for us. The sweet taste recalls the sweetest gift ever given, that of eternal life.



CHRISTMAS CAROLS



The first Christmas Carol was sung to shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth. A multitude of angels were praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest!" (Luke 2:13-14) The music of Christmas has a 2000 year heritage and is one of the season's greatest blessings.

Carols are simple songs, festive in tone, most of which were handed down by word of mouth through hundreds of years.

CHRISTMAS TREES



One of the most universal symbols of Christmas is our beautiful, fragrant, evergreen tree.

Evergreen has long been a symbol of eternal life. Candles were placed on the tree's branches to reflect stars and Jesus as the Light of the World.



CRECHE



Until the 13th century, Christmas traditions generally overlooked the humble condition in which Jesus was born. In 1220, St. Francis of Assisi visited Bethlehem, where he was spiritually moved by the simplicity of Christ's birthplace. He was dismayed by the contrast between Christ's place of birth and the churches' lavish celebrations of the time.

St. Francis created a rustic stable for midnight celebration on Christmas Eve in 1223. He staged a scene with live animals, figures of Mary and Joseph, the wise men, shepherds and a creche (often called a manger) holding baby Jesus.

DECEMBER 25

In ancient times, birthdays were celebrated only for Kings and rulers.. As early teachers of Christianity traveled from country to country spreading the story of Jesus, the Christmas observance became known to the world.

Unsure of the exact date of Jesus' birth, many dates began to be observed. Sometime after 360 AD, the church in Rome assigned December 25 as the specific date to observe Christ's birth.