

The Magic of Christmas: Traditions and Customs

Christmas is a season filled with merrymaking, festivities, customs, and traditions. Children near and far head home from all over the world to visit the family and everyone spends time together decorating the house with candles, greenery, and lights. The women usually cook up a feast to be enjoyed by the whole family, while men sit by the fireplace talking. Spending time with loved ones is what makes this season so enchanting and magical.

Many people think that Christmas is just a day when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. However, exchanging magical Christmas gifts, sending season's greetings, decorating Christmas trees, and hanging up holy night flowers all stem from ancient cultures and practices long before the actual birth of Christ.

The history of Christmas dates back over 5000 years when the "Ancient Midwinter" celebrated the return of the sun after several months of cold and darkness. During the festival, fire was used to symbolize hope and the everlasting cycle of creation was symbolized through lush greeneries.

The 12 days of Christmas, giving gifts, the Yule log and turkey, blazing candles, carnivals, and church processions were traditions observed by the ancient people of Mesopotamia. Colors used during Christmas were associated with religious beliefs and they included white, red, green, blue, gold, and silver. For example, blue represented the skies from where the angels appeared, white stood for virginity or purity, and green symbolized eternal life.

Other additions to the Christmas tradition include when Queen Victoria put up a Christmas tree for her husband, Prince Albert, the introduction of sugar plums from Elizabethan England, stockings from Scotland, and Santa Claus, a once mean-looking man who was transformed into a fat, jolly one by Clement More.

Christmas today is not Christmas without the Carols. These hymns, which were sung thousands of years ago in Europe, were initially pagan songs. They were sung at the Winter Solstice festivals, and the word “carol” meant dancing to something for praise or joy. Early Christians took over these pagan songs and made them into songs specifically for Christmas celebrations.

This year, as you pick that Christmas gift, participate in church festivities, or send that card to a dear friend, remember to take time to reflect on the blessings that family brings, and remember to have a true reason to celebrate life, and all that it brings.