

Facts and Fancies

By Connie Allen

Twelfth Night -- Jan. 6, the day the Wise Men visited the Christ Child. These wise men, called Magi, were a sect of priests among the ancient Medes and Persians. They were celebrated for their enchantments, their learning as astrologers, and for great wisdom. It is from the Magi that we have the word "magic" given to the art of enchantment.

Baboushka -- In Russia an old woman was supposed to have misdirected the Wise Men when they asked the way and refused to shelter the Holy Family when they fled into Egypt. Now she journeys through Russia knocking on doors, holding a candle close to each child's face as he lies sleeping. After slipping a toy under the pillow, she hastens away, still searching for the Babe of Bethlehem, whom she has never found.

The First Christmas Card-- It is reputed that the first Christmas card, as we now think of it, was dispatched in 1845 by W.C. Dobson, one of Queen Victoria's favorite painters. He sent lithograph copies to his friends.

Boxing Day -- In England, Dec. 26 is known as Boxing Day and it is during this time the English exchange gifts. Its origin antedates Christmas, being traced to a Roman custom of giving and receiving presents during the Saturnalia. Saturnus, who taught the arts of agriculture, was dedicated to welcoming the germinating impulse in nature. It was during the reign of this Italian deity that peace, happiness, and innocence abounded and was indeed, the Golden Age of Italy. The Saturnalia was not a day but a season of celebration given up to revelry.

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A Christmas Fantasy

By Agatha Sytek

"Blue light special now flashing in the Decorations Department, where we are featuring for the next five minutes-Christmas tree ornaments at 10% off the regularly marked price."

The intercom blares its bargains as I patiently wait in the "Express Lane" at the local K-mart store. I glance at my watch as perspiration outlines my cinnamon cheeks. I have been waiting in the eight item or less" lane for the past fifteen minutes and I have exactly one minute to drive through seven minutes of traffic to attend by college journalism class. Creeping around my ankles are bursting shopping carts whose operators are hidden behind the packages.

"Ouch," my lower back has been probed. As I turned to detect the source of my pain, I met a pair of devilish, brown eyes partially covered by an oversized, red ski hat. A high-pitched, boyish voice squeaked, "Sorry, lady, it was this dumb Christmas star. My mom wanted it for the top of our tree. I don't know why, it's so ugly," he grunted.

My attention focused on the scruffy lad and my anger as well as my pain began to melt. "Christmas" I thought, "Is that why I'm here?" "Did he say Christmas star?"

I began to examine the star. "Hmmm," I thought to myself, "the boy has a point. It certainly lacks appeal." "The problem," I reasoned, "was that it was just too simple."

Suddenly the star caught a glimmer of light. Its brilliant hue cast a spell on my emotions. The object's simplicity transformed into a quiet magnificence that enthralled me. The activity around me began to fade. My body relaxed while my thoughts were captured in a web called Christmas.

I closed my eyes as a hum of traditional carols enveloped me. Immediately a wild rush

of fragrant pine, warm spices and bright lights invigorated my senses. Visions of lacy snowflakes and fragile icicles sent shivers throughout my body. The beauty of the sights, sounds and smells seemed to be asking me what I thought about them. I responded with a sigh of satisfaction but then tried to form a definition of the season. I identify much of my Christmas with the material traditions it involves. For example, the Christmas tree, ornaments, feasting, exchanging of gifts, caroling and religious observances.

In my early youth the holiday season meant the arrival of Santa Claus, Frosty the snowman and a dull Christmas Eve service. As I advanced into early adulthood, however, my conceptions of Christmas have changed.

I continue to cherish the nostalgia because it is a central part of the celebration. The sentiment, however, is superficial when compared to the spirit of reconciliation the season brings. It mysteriously compels one to release his defenses and extend a hand to a stranger. For a brief 24 hour period every year mankind touches the aspiration of peace. Because man always falls victim to his flaws, the concept of "Peace on Earth" will never completely occur. Peace within oneself, however, is the wise man's answer to earthly peace. It is with that peace that I define Christmas.

A smile was beginning to crease my lips as my thoughts travelled from the peace I hope to obtain to the irritating calling now ringing in my ears.

"Ma'am, Ma'am, do you want this or not?"

"Huh, what," I opened my eyes to the impatient questions of a clerk dressed in a pale, turquoise company jacket.

"Will it be cash or charge?" I murmured, "Cash" and nervously collected the amount from my wallet.

Sensing a pair of strangely

familiar eyes penetrating my back, I turned to discover the same boyish features that led me through my Christmas fantasy. Fighting the emotion that constricted my body, I playfully touched the tip of the boy's nose and grabbed the star.

"Tell your mother that I think the star is beautiful." I handed it to the exasperated clerk and added, "Include this with my purchase." I gave the star to the boy, extended my Christmas greetings and fled into the seven minutes of traffic.



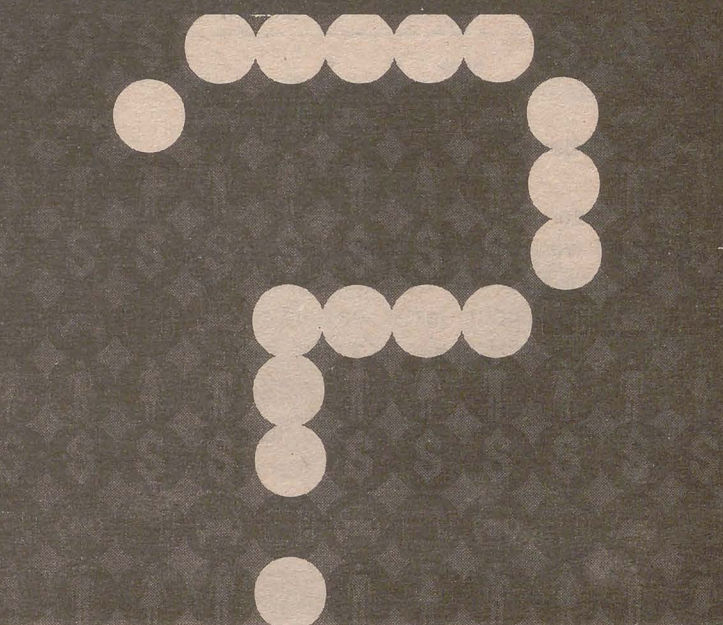
FACTS AND FANCIES

By Connie Allen

Christmas is indeed the celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Holy Babe of Bethlehem, who grew into the Christ. He is the founder and center of a religion which proclaims one of the foremost philosophies of human conduct.

The roots of Christmas observance, however, go deeply into the folklore of the Druids, Scandinavians, Romans, and Egyptians. What we may read of Christmas in ancient days finds its full flower in the past and present customs of our ancestral homes in Europe. There is not a American home that does not color its Christmas with some European observances - gift-giving, trees, greenery, food, games, or ritual.

Christmas is today's name for the Yule, or Jul of the northern Europeans, the Noel of the French, the Nochebuena of the Spanish, and the Weinachten of the Germans. The name given by the Roman Catholic Church is Christ Mass, the feast in honor of the Nativity of Jesus. Sometimes Christmas is written "Xmass" because "X" is the Greek equivalent of "ch" and, therefore, is taken to represent the word "Christ".



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