

# Merry Christmas Everywhere



**CHRISTMAS LIGHTS . . .** Madrid, New Mexico brightens the night with its Christmas festival. This scene is repeated many times over in communities across the nation as the holiday season approaches.

From Tokyo to West Berlin, from Buenos Aires to Copenhagen—and even in the cities of Russia and the satellite countries — the glow of the Christmas spirit spreads around the world, for Christmas is truly a universal holiday.

The legends and traditions gathered about it are many, and customs can, and do, vary from country to country. All nations, through their folk-lore, have made their special contributions to the traditional ways of celebrating the birthday of Christ.

When the customs of one country are compared with another, it's sometimes hard to believe that the same holiday is being commemorated!

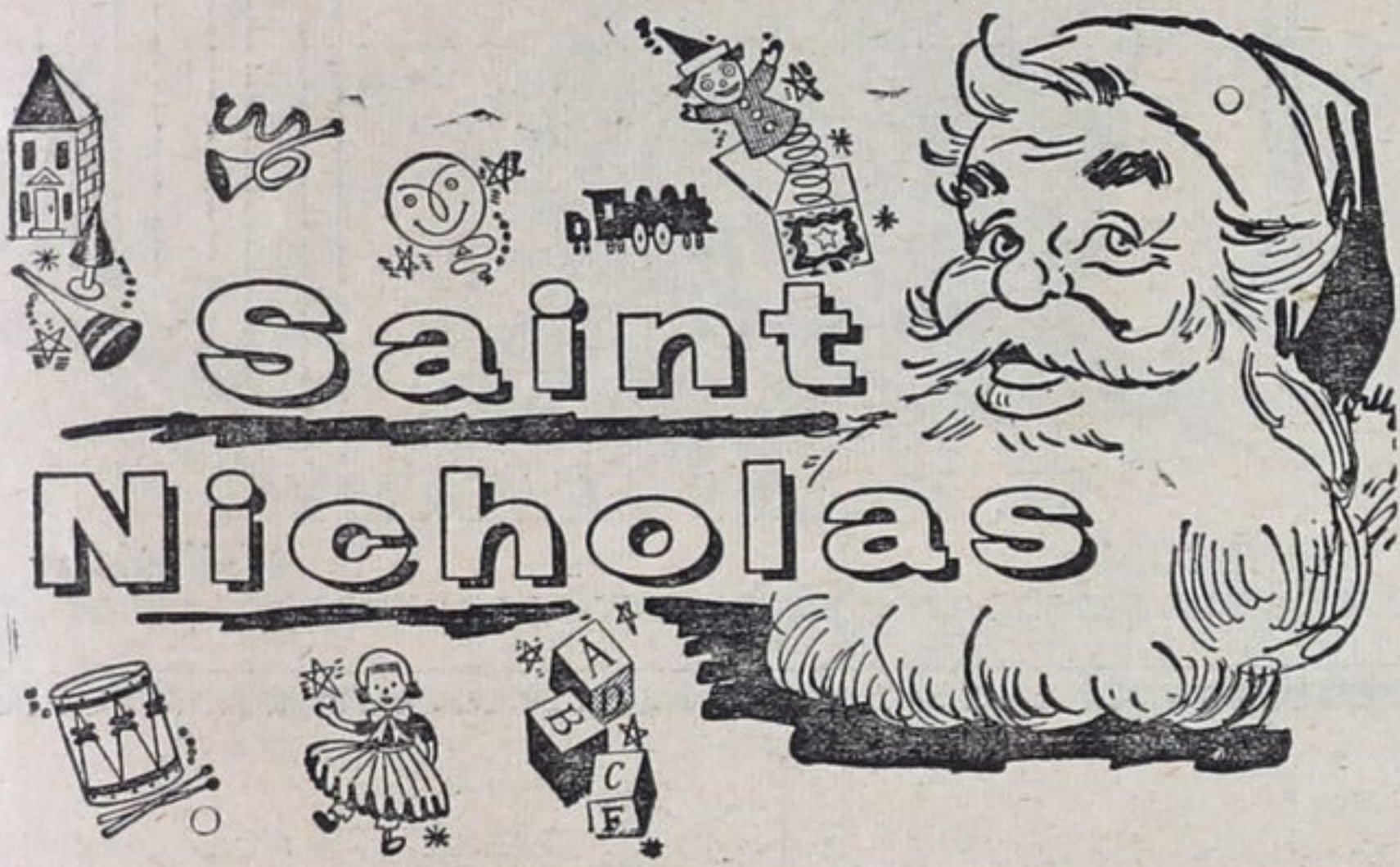
Along with the different ways of observing Christmas, there are, of course, different ways of extending greetings, according to the language of the country. To give just a few examples, in Sweden it's "God Jul," in French "Joyeux Noel" and in German "Froliche Weihnachten." In Russian, it's "S Rozhdestvon Khristovym."

Whatever the language, the words means, "Merry Christmas"—and that's the key to the variety of Christmas customs. Though the peoples of many lands have unique Yule traditions, each is a way of expressing the spirit of Christmas — a spirit that is the same everywhere, in every place and time.

At Christmas, the thoughts of people around the world turn to the joys of home, of being with family and friends, the merriment of feasting and parties, the pleasures of giving and receiving gifts, the satisfactions of helping others. The affirmation of faith, the renewed promise of life eternal and the hope for "Peace on earth, good will toward all men" bring spiritual rewards in a season of worship and prayer.

All these things find expression in the Christmas customs of many lands. And the customs travel from country to country, so that, on a day when sharing with others is a most important part of the celebration, nations share in the memories and traditions of other nations.

Some of these customs are compiled below by editors of The Book of Knowledge:—



Saint Nicholas, the beloved gift-giver, was born in the semi-tropical city of Patara, Turkey and lived a full and colorful life without traveling very far from home.

It is said that he was marked for holiness from the day of his birth, at which time, according to legend, he stood up in his mother's arms to give thanks to God for being born. Even as an infant, he refused to nurse on Fridays, and he observed this fast day as long as he lived.

The origin of the three golden balls which hang over the modern pawnshop is found in a typical story about Saint Nicholas. Three daughters of a poor nobleman, so poor they had no dowries, were trying to decide which one of the three should sell herself as a slave so the others could marry. Saint Nicholas heard their discussions and tossed a bag of gold through the open window and he repeated the act of generosity until all three girls were suitably married. This was the beginning of legend of Nicholas, the saintly donor of gifts.

Later, as Bishop of Myra, he performed miracles which brought him widespread fame. The Rom-

an Emperor Diocletian threw him into prison; Constantine, the first Christian emperor, released him.

Today, Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of many countries, of children, and of sailors.

Saint Nicholas died in 342, on December 6, and for centuries his fame was restricted to the small area in which he had lived and died. In the 11th century, Italian sailors took his bones from the chapel in Myra and brought them to Bari, Italy. The voyage was an excellent one and since that time sailors have revered Saint Nicholas — and his fame has spread to the far corners of the earth.

### Use Pine Cones

Pine cones are plentiful during the outdoor season and are quite popular for indoor Christmas decorations. Gathering and preparing cones for the holiday season can be fun.

Clean the cones and, when dry, spray them with shellac from an aerosol can. The shellac not only preserves the cones, but also keep them looking bright.

### Yule Ends in Safe Blaze

Christmas can come to an end in a blaze of glory—and a safe one, too. Custom sets a date for the disposal of the tree by burning. It's January 6, the Twelfth Night of Christmas or Epiphany — traditionally the night when the Three Wise Men, or Magi, made their visit to the Christ Child in Bethlehem.

The modern world, reviving the Twelfth Night custom of bonfires for disposing of the tree and other greenery, combines the safety factor with community spirit and fun.

Twelfth Night celebrations are planned in many communities in public parks for neighborhood groups. It's a great night for the kids and their parents.

Children bring the trees to the park, or the town collects them. Twelfth Night everyone gathers around the bonfire of trees and greenery to sing carols.

### Christmas Feast Huge Affair In Olden Days

Possibly one of the greatest Christmas feasts of all time was that sponsored by King Henry VIII in Westminster Hall in 1248. He had tents erected and artificial gardens plotted within the spacious hall of his palace.

Knights came out of the tents to joust in tournaments and fantastically dressed dancers covered from head to foot with gray ribbon streamers emerged from the gardens to entertain the guests.

Cost of the gold cloth used in the celebration amounted to 600 pounds alone.

Preparation for the feasting on such occasions can only be vaguely comprehended by considering that Richard II normally employed 2,000 cooks to prepare food for the 10,000 persons who shared his festive board.



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