

Candles light the way throughout the ages

Although it has been said there was no candle to light the manger in the stable at Bethlehem, still from early times people have placed tapers in windows to light the way for the Christ Child and welcome Him.

In many countries, anyone coming to the door at Christmastime was invited to enter. For some believed that Christ Himself would appear at a house with a candle, concealing his identity, to learn the extent of their

kindness.

Candles have inspired men throughout the ages, linking their bright glow with the beauty of faith. Research by Hallmark candle expert John Sinjem reveals that candles

were generally used at Christmastime as far back as the 11th Century. Until the 18th Century they were made primarily from tallow or beeswax. The latter was preferred, as an emblem of Mary's purity, for wax is the product of virgin bees. Many persons believed that bees came from heaven, and it not unusual for religious institutions to keep swarms of them. According to an early writer, the wax represented Christ's body; the wick, His soul; and the flame His divine nature.

The religious symbolism of the candle grew through the centuries after early Christians, huddled in the damp chill catacombs of Rome, used lighted candles as a source of comfort.

New candle materials In 1750 a substance from the head of the sperm whale was found to be superior to tallow and beeswax. Later, in 1850, paraffin wax was developed and combined with stearic acid to make candles of the modern type.

Bayberry candles with their delicate scent are especially popular at Christmas, and they are

said to bring good luck to the home. The bayberry candle is uniquely American. Bayberry bushes grew in great abundance in the new world, and after learning to extract the greenish wax from the wild bayberries, the

Pilgrims used it to make candles.

The Irish place lighted candles in their windows on Christmas Eve as a guide and an invitation to all, who like Mary and Joseph, may be seeking shelter.

Greeks have unique religious ceremony to celebrate Christmas

On Christmas Eve, children of Greek families go from house to house singing carols to the accompaniment of tiny clay drums and tinkling steel triangles. They are rewarded with gifts of figs, walnuts, almonds and sometimes money. Afterwards there is a Christmas Eve service, which begins at 4 a.m. and ends shortly before dawn. The family then begins feasting with "Christpsomo," (bread of Christ), a simple cake studded with nuts, and "Kourbiedes," small cakes dusted with powdered sugar.

The Christmas dinner must include "cheridon," roast pig. In rural households, these are fattened for the feast from mid-summer on. If a family cannot afford to buy a pig, usually relatives or neighbours provide one.

There are no Christmas trees and no Christmas presents. St. Basil's Day or New Year's Day is the time for exchanging gifts. St. Basil, "Hagios Vasilias," one of the four fathers of the Orthodox church, is the Santa Claus of Greek

children.

Blessing of the waters Since Greece has always been a maritime nation, it is not surprising that the blessing of the waters is an impressive part of the Christmas celebration. This takes place on Epiphany Day.

At high noon on that day, the Archbishop or highest ranking priest leads a procession from the church to the waterfront. Dressed in magnificent vestments, he holds aloft before him a crucifix of gold or ebony with a silver image of the Saviour. Acolytes and

lesser clergy, also clad in rich vestments, accompany him, chanting as they march. The congregation follows in their wake.

The procession halts at the water's edge. The Priest intones a prayer and then, after tying a scarf around the cross, hurls it into the water. From the shore and from boats, men and boys dive after it. The one who succeeds in bringing it up receives a special blessing from the priest and usually a gift of money from the on-lookers.

The religious sym-



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