

Celebrate Christmas '81 with an eye to past, future

Christmas, as the saying goes, means different things to different people. For some, it's snow covered trees and eggnog; for others, balmy nights and sweet holiday punch.

Anyone who has ever seen a child's eyes light up on Christmas morning knows that Christmas, however it is observed, is a celebration of life. It's a special time to enjoy remembrance of things past and hope for the future.

As we celebrate Christmas, 1981, it is appropriate to remember the legacy of past generations, even as we look forward to the years to come.

The wonderful traditions of the past have not vanished—they have just altered to keep pace with our ever-changing world.

The decorating of homes during the Christmas season goes back many centuries. In 492, Pope Gelaius established Candlemas Day as a time to bless candles in church.

Bayberry candles were especially popular during Christmas, as legend had it that their scent would reach loved ones who were far away.

Candles were placed in the windows of many homes dur-

ing the Christmas season to symbolize the guiding light the Magi used to find their way to the Christ child.

It was also believed that Christ might be walking the night in disguise; therefore, one should light the way and offer hospitality to wayfarers.

The custom of caroling dates back to ancient times; most likely, it grew out of a pagan rite in which worshippers joined hands and danced.

Many plants are traditionally associated with Christmas. Holly, for instance, was believed to bring good luck, and was a symbol of the Virgin Mary.

Mistletoe was held to be a symbol of peace by the ancient Romans, who believed that enemies who met under it would lay aside their arms and

embrace.

In England it was believed that if a young maiden was kissed under it, she would marry during the coming year.

Evergreens were brought into homes during ancient times to ensure the return of vegetation in the spring.

Prince Albert (Queen Victoria's husband) is credited with bringing the tradition of decorating evergreens at Christmastime to England from his native Germany.

The first official recognition of the Christmas tree in America occurred in 1856 when Franklin Pierce, then President of the United States, decorated one in the White House.

Everybody's favorite, Santa Claus, or Saint Nicholas, was a bishop who lived in the fourth century, and who became the patron saint of children and sailors.

Is it simply a coincidence that the old custom of putting out a wet cloak on the hearth on Christmas eve when Santa makes his rounds, is per-

formed in memory of shipwrecked sailors?

St. Nicholas is often depicted as carrying three bags of gold which he tossed on the door step of three sisters who were left dowerless. The expression "in the nick of time" derives from St. Nicholas, who was always there in times of need.

Today we still enjoy many of these age old traditions, even if we don't know their origins. We gather with friends and relatives to celebrate the birth of Christ and the birth of a New Year.

SNACKS FOR SANTA'S VISIT

Getting ready for Santa's visit is a ritual in many homes, and one thing children love to do is to leave out those famous treats for Santa to nibble at during his long night's labors.

This year, before bedtime, put that excitement to work and let the children participate by making a batch of cookies for Santa. It's an excellent way for them to learn the joys of giving.

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