



My wooden music box nativity was made in Pennsylvania USA.

Christmas traditions

By Carolyn



I Love Christmas!

I love the traditions.
I love the family getting together to have a special lunch.
I love the spirit of giving.
I love the tree and the decorations.
I love the carols and music.
I love the food we have only at Christmas like the pudding.
I love the happiness that Christmas brings.



When we lived in England, I loved trudging through the snow to the service at our village church then afterwards, eating warm mince pies with our neighbours.



Origins of December 25th

We celebrate Christmas on the 25th December. No-one can be sure of why we settled on that date. After all, we have changed calendars twice since the birth of Christ.

Solstices and equinoxes were celebrated by many groups in pre-Christian times as special 'holy' times.

It is likely that early Christians adopted the date as the closest date to the winter solstice in the Roman calendar.

The Church in Rome began celebrating the birth of Christ in 336AD during the reign of Emperor Constantine.

Other Christian religions celebrate Christmas on different dates.

Most Greeks celebrate on December 25th, but some Orthodox groups choose January 7th. The explanation is that is the date on the Julian calendar – we now use the Gregorian calendar.

Whatever the exact date, records, and the Gospels, tell of the birth of the Christ child to Mary, in Bethlehem, around this time.

The shepherds and the wise men came to pay homage to the baby in the manger. This baby was seen as the new Saviour.



Some Christmas traditions

Nativity Scenes



This nativity scene was in a village in France. I love seeing ones in Churches and in people's front gardens.

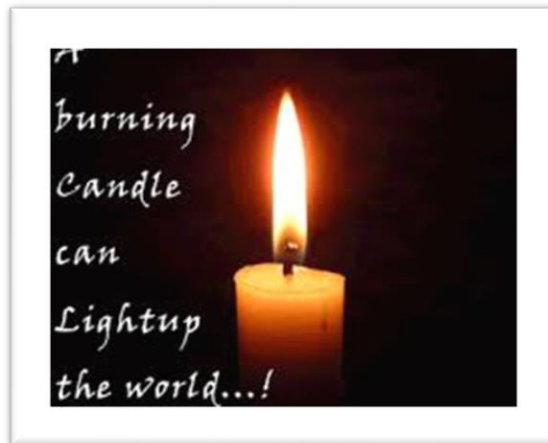
Christmas Cards

Sending wishes on Christmas cards is going out of fashion. What a shame! I love cards, especially ones made by children. This card has the names of each of the family members.



Christkindl or Kris Kringle

Kris Kringle is derived from German for Christ child, sometimes spelled Christkindl. Nowadays, it often means we give a present to the name drawn from a hat. Kris Kringle presents can be good fun.



In England, we visited a Church for a Christkindl service.

The 17th century Church was candlelit. Upon entering, the children were each given five things:

the orange represented the world

the candle was symbolic of giving light in the dark

the red ribbon represented the blood of Christ

salt represented that which is essential for life

fruit and nuts symbolised food

At a point in the service, all the children carried their candles to the altar where they were lit. The 'collection' that evening went to a children's charity

Holly and ivy

Holly symbolises the thorns of the garland Christ wore on the way to his crucifixion.

Ivy represents the need to cling to God for support. Wreaths which we hang on the door began in Roman times and were for special occasions. They often have holly and ivy woven into them.



Traditions in other countries

Sweden

In Sweden, Gavle or the Yule goat, is based on a 19th Century tradition of men dressing as goats to give gifts to their families. The Gavle is burned at the end of the Christmas celebrations.



China



In China, muslin stockings are hung to receive gifts. These are called 'Christmas old men.' Santa is called 'Lan Khoong-Khoong' or Nice old Father. The Christmas tree is decorated with red paper, paper flowers and lanterns to symbolise happiness.

Philippines



In the Philippines, the Festival of Lights symbolises Christ in our lives.

The USA



In the USA, many people like to decorate the outside of their homes, too. We have more of that happening here now.

Food at Christmas



Traditionally, many Australians like to have a hot Christmas dinner - whatever the weather. This often includes a turkey and baked ham with cranberry sauce.



When we were in the USA, we saw cranberries being harvested. When the berries are ripe, the farmers flood the ponds in which the berries grow, then rake them into a pile. A machine scoops them up like a vacuum cleaner.

Seafood anyone?



Certainly, a cold Christmas lunch suits our weather better and is easier for the cook, usually, 'Mum'.

When our extended family gets together, we have a cold buffet and everyone brings meats, seafood and salads. The work is shared and there is something for everybody's taste.

Christmas pudding



Every year I make several Christmas puddings. Here is a photo of me, my daughter Joanna and my granddaughter Eliza, stirring the pudding and making a wish.

Sweet Treats

No Christmas is right for me without mince pies. I love them. So does my husband.



Every year I make a Christmas cake. Originally the cakes were twelfth night cakes and eaten on the 5th January.

I bought this shortbread mould in Scotland. Mostly I make shortbread biscuits in the usual way.

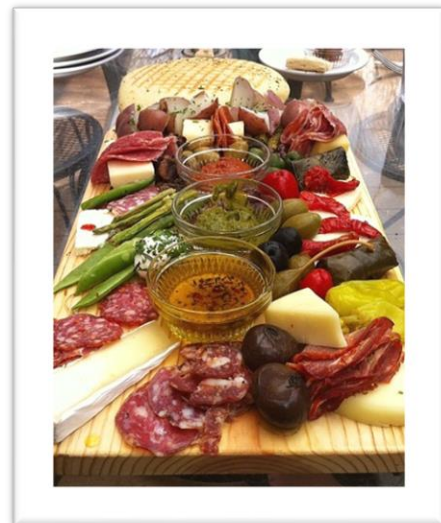


France



This chocolate cake is a French Bûche de Noël. In English we would call it a Yule Log. The mushrooms are made from meringue.

Italy



My daughter-in-law is Italian. For their Christmas dinner, they have an anti-pasti platter, then filled pasta like ravioli for an entrée, roast meat and vegetables then a dessert like Tiramisu. The meal lasts for hours. The traditional cake is Pannetone which is dipped in coffee.

Christmas trees and decorations

The evergreen tree has been used to celebrate winter festivals since before Christian times.

Some of my favourite decorations

I love decorating the tree. My decorations are from my childhood, from my children's childhood and one special one for each of my grandchildren. Mostly my ornaments are red and green. I like tradition!



The snowdome, the stockings, the pinecone Christmas tree, the bells, the raffia angel and the wooden ornaments are from my children's childhood. The tiny wooden angels on the right and the plain bells are from my own childhood. I treasure them.



Candles and bells



I like to have lots of candles and white and dark red Christmas lilies in the house over Christmas.

Candles and bells have long been associated with Christmas.

Candles originally lit churches and Christmas trees.

An Austrian friend always lights candles on their tree before their traditional Christmas Eve dinner.

Bells are used to mark different aspects of church services. We all know a very popular song called 'Jingle Bells'.

Santa, Father Christmas or Saint Nicholas

Turkey

In the 4th century, a rich man living in what is now Turkey, gave presents and money to the poor. He gave so much he was named Saint Nicholas. Saint Nicholas' day is still celebrated on 6th November by some countries, especially in Europe.



The Netherlands



In the Netherlands, children put out their clogs or shoes to receive gifts and sweets from St. Nick on the evening of the 5th November.

They also believe in leaving carrots and hay for St. Nick's horse Sinterklaas.



The USA

Over time, Sinterklaas became Santa Klaus.

Santa was the name adopted by USA as the many Dutch and German people migrated there.



United Kingdom



In the United Kingdom, in the Middle Ages, Old Man Christmas or Father Christmas was more popular. He brought the children gifts on Christmas Eve. Children left carrots for the reindeer and a drink and biscuits for Father Christmas. In France, Father Christmas is called Pere Noel.

Christmas Gifts



The origins of gift giving go back to the three wise men bringing gifts to the Christ child in the manger. Their gifts were gold, frankincense and myrrh. Frankincense is an incense. Myrrh is scented oil. Gifts were also given by richer people to poorer people on Boxing Day.

Christmas crackers

Or bon bons.



Tradition tells how a London sweet maker, called Tom Smith, invented crackers in 1847.

He created them to promote his sweets, or bon bons.

Inspired by the crackling of his fire he inserted a snap. When two people pull the cracker, there is a mild bang.

Inside the cracker is a paper crown, a corny joke and a small trinket.

Originally, Tom Smith included sweets, nuts and a poem.

Carols and songs

On Christmas Eve we sometimes go to a midnight Carol service.

My favourite carol is 'Silent Night.' That is the carol which plays on my wooden nativity music box on the front page.





Merry Christmas

Whatever your traditions are, I wish you a very happy Christmas.