

CHRISTMAS AROUND THE WORLD



The Christmas story about the birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated by all Christians around the world. Part of the traditional Christmas story is the visit by the Wise men or Kings who brought gifts to baby Jesus. Many countries have taken this part of the Christmas story and have enlarged upon it by giving gifts and sending holiday greetings to family and friends. Sometimes the Christmas tree and Santa seem more important but almost all the traditions of Christmas around the world do stress the sharing of love.

In **Canada and United States** the Nativity Scenes are displayed, Advent Candles are used, Christmas trees are decorated and stockings are hung on the fireplace for Santa Claus to fill with gifts. Cards and gifts are exchanged with friends and relatives.

Christmas in **Bethlehem**, the birthplace of Jesus is celebrated by over 12 million Christians. The festivities in Bethlehem begin with prayers and songs nine days before Christmas Day. On Christmas Eve, the Patriarch of **Jerusalem** makes a traditional procession through Bethlehem and the faithful gather in Manger Square and the Church of Nativity at midnight to celebrate the birth of Jesus. For centuries, Bethlehem residents have been joined by pilgrims from around the world.

In **England** the use of the fir Christmas tree was made popular during the reign of Queen Victoria and to this day they decorate the trees with apples and other pretty decorations. Another popular English tradition is Boxing Day celebrated by giving small gifts of coins, foods and sweet to everyone who comes to call including the servants. The tradition of hanging stocking by the chimney began in England and they wait to open their gifts until later in the day.

In **Argentina** the weather is warm at Christmas. Preparations for Christmas begin very early in December. Many people in Argentina are Catholic and so also celebrate Advent, the period of four weeks of preparation for the birth of the Christ child. The Nativity scene or 'pesebre' is also an important Christmas decoration in Argentina.

In **Australia** Christmas comes in the middle of the summer holidays so it is warm but they still decorate their doors with a wreath. They also have Christmas carol services on Christmas Eve. Because it is warmer the holiday meal might be a BBQ!

In **Ghana in South Africa**, Christmas has always been a joyous religious festival that last for many days. Family and friends visit especially for Christmas Eve dinner. The families decorate their mango or guava tree with colourful paper decorations. After the Christmas Eve services there are joyous processions through the streets with everyone wearing brightly coloured clothes singing the holidays hymns and sharing gifts.

In **India** houses are decorated with strings of mango leaves. Lights are placed on the window sills and walls and a star is hung outside. A sweet holiday treat is made called thali and it is brought to neighbors and friends.

The Christians in **China** light their homes with beautiful paper lanterns. Santa is called Dun Che Lao Ren. The children hang stockings just as we do.

In **Italy**, the main exchange of gift doesn't occur until January 6th; the day traditionally believed that the Wise Men reached the baby Jesus. The nativity scene may have first been set up by Saint Francis of Assisi. This first one was set up in a cave outside of a village and the villagers were so impressed by the display that now many of the communities compete for the best nativity.

Mexico calls Christmas Navidad. They celebrate Christmas for nine days with Las Pasdas. It is a time where people dress as Mary and Joseph, traveling from house to house asking if Mary may stay the night. Family and friends then come in to have a party with lots of food, song and Piñatas for the children. On the ninth night of the celebrations they go to church and celebrate the birth of Baby Jesus.

In **Poland** from Christmas day until New Year's Day the streets are lined with stalls called, Joeselki, and each one is brightly decorated with a scene from the Christmas story. To remind them that Mary and Joseph were looking for shelter the Polish families add an extra place setting at their table during this time of the year to welcome all.

Christmas in **Lebanon** is celebrated with great fanfare, decorating houses and shops with poinsettias. A Lebanese tradition involves people sowing seeds of chickpeas, beans, wheat grains or lentils in cotton wool two weeks before Christmas day. The plants are well taken care of and when the big day arrives, the shoots are placed under the Christmas tree to mark the birth of Jesus Christ.

In **Syria** Christmas is celebrated on New Year's Day when the camels that carried the Wise Men are expected by the children to bring their gifts. Similar to other places in the Middle East, Syrian Christians ring in Christmas with hymns sung together. The youngest members of the household read aloud stories of old to the family.

