The Symbols of Christmas

By Alice Vos

According to Parent's Magazine's Christmas Holiday Book, it was not until the fourth century that Christmas — literally, a Mass held for Christ — was acclaimed a public festival by the Church. Until that time, the church fathers had been reluctant to make Christmas a festival because it so nearly coincided with Saturnalia, a pagan festival of the Roman Empire.

Some of the important traditional symbols of Christmas include holly, evergreen trees, lights on the trees, gifts giving, the Bethlehem star, Christmas wreaths, and mistletoe.

Each of these symbols has had (at least originally) a special meaning for Christians during this time in the church year.

To the early Christians in Northern Europe holly was a symbol of the burning thorn bush of Moses and the flaming love of God that filled Mary's heart. Its prickly points and bright red berries, resembling drops of blood, also reminded the faithful that the Divine Child was born to wear a crown of thorns. With its shiny green leaves and bright red berries, holly is a cheerful Christmas decoration reminding us that even when the earth has turned brown and cold, life can and will go on.

Probably the most commonly remembered symbol since its first use in celebrating Christmas is the evergreen (Christmas) tree. Surprisingly as it may seem, the use of Christmas trees is a fairly recent custom in all countries outside of Germany, and even in Germany it attained its immense popularity as recently as the beginning of the last century. It is completely Christian in origin. Historians have never been able to connect it with ancient German or Asian mythology. Its origin is due to a combination of two medieval religious symbols: the Paradise tree and Christmas light (from Christmas candles and yule logs.)

It is true that people used to put up evergreen trees in their homes at Yule time, both in pre-Christian centuries and later, to reassert themselves that nature's life was not altogether dead under winter's ice and snow, and that spring would come again. The idea of having lights on an evergreen tree began in Germany where a Christmas candle was to be placed on top of a wooden pole decorated with evergreen twigs, or many smaller candles were distributed on the shelves of a wooden structure made in the form of a pyramid. This was adorned with twigs or laurel and draped with glittering tinsel. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries this pyramid was gradually replaced by the Christmas tree. From the early centuries of Christianity it has been a religious practice to represent Christ the Lord by a burning candle, a custom still preserved in the liturgy of the Church.

Christmas is the season for exchanging presents. It is not difficult to understand why people should be filled with good will on the birthday of the Christ Child. "As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it unto me." (Matthew 25:40) We give gifts to each other perhaps because the feeling of not only receiving, but also giving makes us feel good.

At one time in Germany the packages of Christmas gifts were called "Christ bundles," they contained candy, sugar plums, cakes, apples, nuts, dolls, and toys; useful things like clothes, caps, mittens, stockings, shoes and slippers; and things "that belong to teaching, obedience and discipline," such as ABC tables, paper, pencils, (and) books; and the "Christ rod" (a pointed reminder for good behavior).

The "Christmas Pyramid" earlier referred to as being used in Germany was decorated not only with evergreen twigs or laurel and tinsel, but on its top the "star of Bethlehem" was also placed. It was this star that brought the Wise Men from the East to find and worship the Christ Child. Since the star of Bethlehem is one of the chief symbols of Christmas, it not only crowns the Christmas tree but is also used for other Christmas decorations.

According to the 1974 edition of Merit Student Encyclopedia, astronomers have attempted to identify the star that led the Wise Men to Bethlehem. Among the possibilities referred to is the fact that Halley's Comet is known to have been visible over Bethlehem in 11 B.C. Also noted was the fact that the orbits of Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars were in conjunction in 7 or 8 B.C., so that the light from these planets could have seemed to come from a single source when it was viewed on the earth. Whether or not astronomers can identify which star it was that shone over the birth place of our Saviour from sin has little consequence to the meaning of its light to us as Christians.

Bishops did not allow mistletoe to be used in churches after Britain was converted from paganism to Christianity because it had been the main symbol of a pagan religion. Up to this day in time, mistletoe has rarely been used as a decoration for altars. One exception to this occurred at the Cathedral of York in a period before the Reformation when a large bundle of mistletoe was brought into the sanctuary each year at Christmas. In the rite in which the mistletoe was solemnly placed on the altar by the priest, the plant that the Druids had called "all-heal" was used as a symbol of Christ, the Divine Healer of nations.

The custom of hanging laurel wreaths on the outside of doors as a friendly greeting to our fellow men comes from an old Roman practice. The wreath was their symbol of victory, glory, joy, and celebration. The Christmas wreath seems to have been introduced to the United States by immigrants from England and Ireland, and generally became part of the American Christmas scene.

To find out more information about these Christmas symbols and others, see the Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs by Francis X. Weiser in Concordia's Buenger Memorial Library.
Holiday Memories

By Kim Grage

In Dickens' "A Christmas Carol" the Ghost of Christmas Past revealed special Christmastimes for Scrooge, and just like Scrooge, someone else has their own personal story of Christmas that kind of stands out in their mind.

People like remembering the good times of Christmas, when they were younger, and telling them just as much. Here are the remembrances from a few Concordia students:

• Lisa Krentz: The Christmas when we went to my Grandparents and I got a Little Lisa doll. She was supposed to pee when you fed her water, but she never did. I liked going to my Grandma's because she cooked so good.
• Linda Sommers: Taking scat rides in the snow with my pony.
• Corrin Johnson: A week before Christmas in 8th grade, our dog was killed. Mom and Dad said we'd never get another dog, but for Christmas we got a little puppy, and we named her Kandi. It was a very happy day.
• Paul Hagen: After Christmas we used to take people's thrown-out trees and drag them behind our car, and leave them in people's yards.
• Carolyn Grohn: Last Christmas was my favorite because it was my first Finnish Christmas. We ate a five course meal, which is traditionally Finnish. I was sick for three days after that.
• Julie Pechous: Spending Christmas in the snow with my family in Florida ten years ago. We camped by the ocean. It was very special because it wasn't a lot of gifts; it had more of a spiritual meaning.
• Brenda Thompson: Getting to know my brother who is 22 years older because he kept Christ as the center of his life.
• Keith Grimm: That I keep Christ as the center of my life.
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Dear Santa,

I need help! I am a Freshman at Concordia College. Just yesterday I learned where the bookstore was. (And I thought Dayton's prices were bad!) I thought GPAs were like ERGs — the lower, the better. The registrar just informed me differently. Someone stole my pants in Fundamentals of Art, and American Government course requirements were changed (no study guide). Santa, what is a competency report? And how come we can't see our own Themes? And it's none of Dr. Koib's business why I want to know. Does sanity come in pill form? If so, please give me one large prescription.

Your fellow inmate, Norm

Dear Santa,

Bet you get caught up in the hustle and bustle of Christmas more than anyone else. Just remember it's nice to know that when things get tough you can rest in God's open and loving arms and know that He gave us the greatest gift of all, His son, Jesus. God's richest blessings to you Santa. Karen, Amy, and Laura

Love, Thelma

P.S. Do you have dorm hours?

Dear Santa,

Can we talk about life as a senior? Somehow, fulfilling my lower level requirements just doesn't seem important anymore. For that matter, fulfilling my upper level requirements doesn't seem so important either. In fact, I'm beginning to wonder if there's life beyond the Midway. I'm worried Santa. I look forward to going to ARA for the social life it offers. Speaking of ARA, could you maybe send Dan Kleber a cookbook with selections permitted; cheating is not. (This test was made available by an unknown source.)

So you think you know all there is to know about the Christmas Story, huh? Take this test and see if you really know concerning the Christmas Story, f. who knows e. Joseph walked, Mary traveled to Bethlehem? a. camel d. both a and c 5. Joseph and Mary were married when Jesus was born. (True/False) b. Mary and Joseph c. three kings d. barn 6. Mary was a virgin when she delivered Jesus. (True/False) c. a "multitude" f. none of the above d. none of the above 7. What "sign" did the angels tell the shepherds to look for? a. "This way to baby Jesus" d. a house with a Christmas tree b. A star over Bethlehem e. a baby in a stable c. A baby that doesn't cry f. "My Sweet Lord" e. "Glory to the Newborn King" f. none of the above 8. Jesus was delivered in a: a. stable b. manger c. cave d. barn b. 9. A "manger" is: a. stable for domestic animals b. wooden hay storage bin c. feeding trough d. barn e. unknown

10. Which animals does the Bible say were present at Jesus' birth? a. cows, sheep, goats b. cows, sheep and goats only c. miscellaneous barnyard animals d. lions, tigers, elephants 11. Who saw the "star in the east"? a. shepherds b. Mary and Joseph c. three kings d. both a and c e. none of the above 12. How many angels spoke to the shepherds? a. one b. three c. a "multitude" d. none of the above 13. What "sign" did the angels tell the shepherds to look for? a. "This way to baby Jesus" d. a house with a Christmas tree b. A star over Bethlehem e. a baby in a stable c. A baby that doesn't cry f. "My Sweet Lord" e. "Glory to the Newborn King" f. none of the above

A Traditional Christmas

By Luke

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to be delivered. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Your fellow inmate, Norm
SPORTS

Women Cagers Return
Top Three Scorers

By Jim Bender

This year’s women’s basketball team has nothing but high expectations for this season. “There is a lot of new talent — some really talented new freshmen,” says team member Chris Alsbury. That is quite a statement when one considers the talent of past teams.

There is a great tradition in Concordia Women’s Basketball. In its sixteen year program, never have they experienced the losing season. They have accomplish four consecutive conference championships and have placed in the top four in the NCCLA national playoffs three times. Three years ago they were National Champions of the NCCLA. Last year they were 20-8 overall, and 11-1 in a conference-championship year.

This new talent is coming to a team that has a winning tradition, and to a team that is returning its top three scorers and top rebounder. Deb Harmes was a finalist in the Miss Basketball honors of Minnesota in 1982. Harms, as well as Jolene Bammert, were NCCLA All-American selections in 1984 and 1985. They also were All-District NAIA players. Harmes and Alsbury are considered by coach Jack Surridge to be the best guard tandem in the state. He reminds us that “not too many teams have had guards that have started since they were freshman.”

The addition of talent to the already established talent brings high hopes. Most players on this team were All-Conference players in high school. Of the new talent, freshman Shell Clausen was All-State in Iowa, freshman Joelle Puckett was an All-Lutheran High School selection, junior transfer Tracy Anderson was All-State in Idaho, and Patty Hennessy, also a junior transfer, was one of Mankato’s top scorers.

The merging of the new talent with the established talent has turned this team into a quick and fast team that will use its bench strength to sustain a full court defense. The full court pressing offense is a definite strength of the team. The aggressive full court defense is used for two reasons. They are an exceptionally quick team and that style of play lends itself to their quickness. The style also lends itself well to covering up the team’s greatest liability — its shortness. “This is the shortest team I have ever had and that dictates that we must make our opponents play the whole ninety feet of court . . . and make them work for every basket,” says Coach Surridge. Concordia’s defensive pressure and aggressive speed will bring results boosts Alsbury. The talent and fast style of play will make for exciting viewing. But the schedule also will add some challenge and excitement.

The schedule this team faces is challenging. They will play five state schools this year which is virtually unheard of for a small, private school. But Coach Surridge believes they are ready for the challenge. “We know what it takes to win — what kind of sacrifices need to be made.”

CSP Wrestling ’85

By Debbie Krause

The wrestling team has good talent this year. They work well together as a team even though wrestling is an individual sport. They work well together because they are all very knowledgeable in the sport. The coach this year is Coach Benson and he feels the team is young and very enthusiastic. He also says they are very competitive. The team this year consists of Dave Langewisch (190), Don Deans (118), Tom Puffe (126), Pete LeBoriosa (158), Gordy Nyenhuis (167), Pat Ulmer (177), and John Gadow (167).

The captain for this years wrestling team is Dave Langewisch. Coach Benson says Dave has been a tremendous help, almost an assistant coach; this in part because he is a veteran to the team. Dave has also helped to motivate the wrestlers.

The first meet was on December 6. It was a home meet against Carleton and Northwestern. It went very well. We tied against Northwestern and would have won if we hadn’t had to forfeit the missing weight classes. We lost to Carleton, but in this case also we would have won...