

Christmas Over the Centuries

by Molly Kummerle

Christmas has changed drastically in the last few decades. It has lost some of its spirituality, and now revolves around consumption. If this is considered difference, the holiday has evolved tremendously since it first began as a Pagan celebration.

Most ancient cultures believed that winter marked the end of the Sun god's rule, and it was then that light subsided to evil powers, letting darkness take over and kill things. In mid December, however, they began to see hope for life again, and held festivals to help along the renewal process. The Romans held the "Birthday of the Sun" on December 25th. This feast day honored the god of agriculture, Saturn, and took place after a week of celebration. They decorated their houses with evergreens, which symbolize everlasting sunlight, and exchanged gifts with their friends. The Scandinavians had a similar festival called the "Yule." Centuries after Christ was born, Pagan festivals like these were still popular.

Since no one knew when His birthday was, church leaders adopted December 25th as Christ's birthday. In about the fourth century AD, the church began to hope that the pagan traditions would be forgotten, and it

would be celebrated primarily as Christ's birthday. When officials could not stop the public from celebrating the pagan customs, however, the church "Christianized" some of them, censoring their worst features.

The main hero behind Christmas was an early Christian bishop from Turkey named Saint Nicholas. He was known for his love of children and his generosity, and he used all of his money to give gifts to children and the poor. Since he gave the gifts in secret, whenever anyone got a surprise present they would say it was from St. Nick. Because of his selfless generosity, both Russia and Greece donned him as their patron saint. The Dutch children receive presents on December 6, which was dedicated his birthday as a feast day. In Europe, St. Nicholas is pictured as a bearded saint riding a white horse and carrying a basket of gifts for the nice children and a bundle of birch sticks for the naughty ones.

In 1809, Washington Irving described Santa Claus as a jolly, chubby fellow flying through the air in a sleigh drawn by reindeer. In 1822, a professor of Theological Seminary, Dr. Clement C. Moore, wrote a poem called, "A visit from St. Nicholas," and read it to his children. A guest in his house was so impressed with the poem, that he had it published in the New York Sentinel,

the Troy. In 1863, a cartoonist in the Harper's illustrated Weekly, represented Santa Claus in the way we see him today.

St. Nicholas' generosity; illustrated in the first Christmas two thousand years ago.

*And there were in the same country
Shepherds abiding in the field,
Keeping watch over their flock by night.
And, lo, the Angel of the Lord
came upon them.*

*And the glory of the Lord
shone round about them;*

And they were afraid.

And the Angel said unto them, "Fear not!

*For, behold, I bring you good tidings
of great joy,*

Which shall be to all People.

*For unto you is born this day
in the city of David*

a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you:

Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes,

Lying in a manger."

And suddenly there was with the Angel

A multitude of the heavenly host

Praising God, and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest,

And on earth peace,

Good will towards men."

-Luke 2:8-14

Holidays Celebrated Around the World

by Kristen Grice

In 1966, M. Ron Karenga, a professor of Pan-African studies and a black cultural leagues developed the holiday. The holiday celebrates traditional African practices with African-American aspirations and ideas. It is a festival that honors the harvest of the crops. The holiday is Kwanzaa it means "first fruits." It lasts from December 26 to

January 1. This celebration centers around Nguzo Saba, the seven principles of black culture. The principles are umoja (unity), kujichagulia (self determination), ujima (collective work and responsibility), ujamaa (cooperative economics), nia (purpose), kuumba (creativity), and imani (faith). At night, families light one of the seven candles to remember the principles. They exchange gifts, and at the end of the holiday, come together as a community to have a feast, karamu. The feast has traditional African food, ceremonies to honor ancestors, assessments of the old year, commitments for the new year, performances, music and dancing.

by Julie Suh, guest writer

In the Republic of Korea, New Year's, known as Suh1-Nahl, is celebrated during January 1 through January 3. New Year's doubles as a collective national birthday, as Koreans of all ages gain a lunar year on the premiere day. During this three day period, people visit relatives to wish blessings for the oncoming year. Family members don traditional Korean garbs called *hank-bok* and bow to elders in exchange for a few tokens of advice and bus money. Festivities include flying kites, playing with yoot sticks, spinning tops over frozen ice, and eating dduk soup. Especially magical to impressionable young minds is the traditional swings activity, on which people sway on twenty-five feet long swings from tree branches.

The New Year's is rung in by striking the Emile Bell under the Buhn Hwang Sah Temple in Seoul at midnight three times. Legends tell of the sacrifice of a newborn in the metallurgy of the bell; when donations were being collected to build the bell over a hundred years ago, a poor mother had nothing to give but her child. Supposedly, the child was thrown into the molten crucible from which the bell was to be smelt. To this day, scholars study the peculiar acoustics of the bell that sound like "Emee"* when it rings.

Modern day New Year's observations in South Korea have gone the ways of the western world, as people fuss over resolutions and cry into bowls of makguhle. Still sacred to this mere Korean-American girl are memories of playing papers, scissors, rocks with cousins and watching anxious elders squander away their new year's money on hwa-toe games (a bit like poker). Auld lang syne, auld lang syne.

*Emee is an informal hangul word for "mother."

Holiday Sites on the Internet

<http://www.yahoo.com/promotions/he96>

A bunch of nifty Christmas links.

<http://www.christmas96.com/>

Holiday photography

<http://holiday.ritech.com/christmas/recipe.html>

A lot of yummy Christmas dessert recipes.

http://www.yahoo.com/Society_and_Culture/Holidays/Christmas/

The most comprehensive Christmas-related links.

<http://www.stg.brown.edu/~penelope/>

A really cool advent calendar.

<http://www.christmas.com/>

The ULTIMATE Christmas site, including everything from a countdown to Christmas carols, and you can send e-mail to Santa!

<http://www.santas-workshop.com/>

All you wanted to know about santa.

<http://www.iluvyou.com/christmas/form.htm>

Send someone a Personalized Christmas card for free via e-mail

<http://www.familygames.com/quiz/>

A Christmas quiz with lots of interesting facts about Christmas.

<http://www.saknet.com/funngames/games/tree/>

Decorate your own 3-D Christmas tree!

<http://www.maui.net/~mccule/xmas.htm>

Other interesting Christmas like celebrations

<http://www.neosoft.com.nikki/>

What what do you do with all those old AOL disks? Make presents out of them!

<http://www.abacus.net/xmasmall.html>

Shop for Christmas presents at the Christmas mall!

<http://members.aol.com/churchweb/christmas/index.html>

A very Christian Christmas

<http://www.mainst.net/elftoby/index.html>

The Elf who saved Christmas

The Clarion staff would like to wish everyone happy Holidays and safe travel where ever they may be.