

Christmas Lights Are Old Tradition

Have you ever wondered, as you trim the Christmas tree or place candles in your windows, why lights are such an important part of our celebration of Christmas?

According to Jim Rutherford, director of information for Carolina Power and Light Company, many of our Christmas traditions involving lights are as old as recorded history itself, while others are relatively recent.

While the tree has long been a Yuletide symbol, early Christmas trees bore no lights. In fact, thousands of years before the birth of Christ, the evergreen was revered as a symbol of long life and immortality. German tribesmen brought fir trees into their homes to please the god-like spirits they thought inhabited the trees. When these pagans were converted to Christianity, they transferred

their feelings for the evergreen to their new religion.

The first person believed to decorate a tree for Christmas was Martin Luther around 1530. Walking home one night shortly before Christmas, Luther was awed by the beauty of the stars twinkling among the trees. He went home and placed candles on the limbs of a small fir so that his children might share his experience. The custom grew and spread through Northern Europe and then America.

The custom of trimming trees with light has also been traced as far back as the Roman celebration of the feast of Saturn, when trees were decorated and candles added to represent the months or seasons of the sun.

That some of our Christmas traditions are apparently rooted in pre-Christian customs, once caused the banishment of

Christmas celebration altogether. When Oliver Cromwell and his Puritan followers came to power in England in 1644 they frowned on the celebration of Christmas--with its merry making and burning of the Yule log--as a carryover from sun-worshipping rites of ancient Britain. Christmas was therefore banned, said Cromwell, as "immoral sunworship."

But lights have been a part of the Christmas celebration since that first Christmas when Jesus was born in a stable. On that night, candles burned in the Holy Land in celebration of Chanukah, the Jewish Festival of Light.

The lights of Christmas have provided us with many charming legends and customs. According to a manuscript written by an unknown monk in the kingdom

of Sicily, even the trees joined the pilgrimage to the stable to honor the Newborn King. But while the fruit trees had gifts to offer, the fir had nothing and stood humbly in the rear. An angel noted its plight and asked the stars to descend and rest in the limbs of the tree.

At so beautiful a sight, the Christ Child smiled and blessed the humble fir. To this day, says the legend, the fir tree remains green the year around.

The burning of candles in the window at Christmas time is attributed to Ireland, during the era of Irish suppression by the British. At this time, priests were forced to conceal their identities and conduct religious services in homes at night.

Thus a family hoping that Christmas Mass would be said under their roof would place a lighted candles in the window as a welcome to priests in the area.

When English soldiers inquired about the candles, they were told that should Mary and Joseph came that way during the night looking for shelter, the candle would be their invitation to enter. The custom was permitted as merely "superstition."

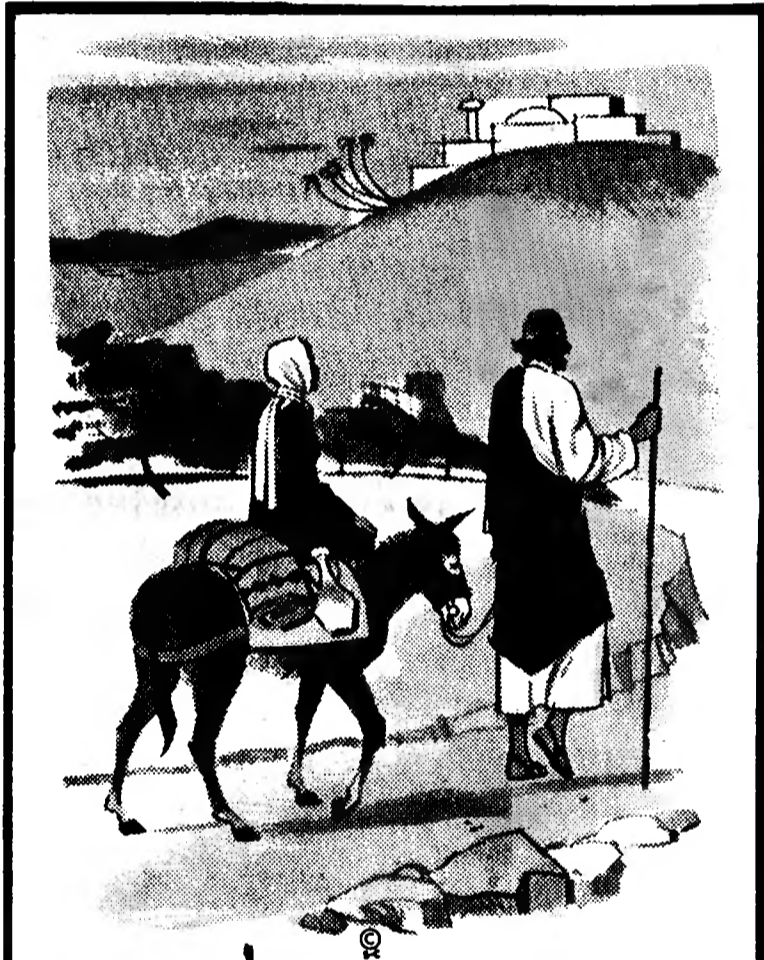
Another legend holds that candles in the window are to

light the way for Christ, who reappears at Christmas. Since he conceals his true identity, anyone who comes to the door is supposed to be invited in.

The idea and tradition of the Christmas tree spread rapidly through our young country, although there is a story of a pastor in Cleveland, Ohio, who tried to trim a tree around 1851, but ran into opposition from some people who considered it a pagan practice.

In 1856, Franklin Pierce became the first president to decorate a tree in the White House. The first lighting of the National Community Christmas Tree at the White House took place in 1923 when Calvin Coolidge was president.

A few years later, in 1929, another tree lighting tradition was begun in Wilmington, North Carolina. Each year city parks and recreation personnel decorate a stately live oak with more than 5,000 multi-colored lights. The tree, which botanists say is 400 years old, is 75 feet tall and has a limb spread of 110 feet. It is estimated that 250,000 people--many from other states--annually come to see what has become famous as the "World's Largest Living Christmas Tree."



**Christmas
Blessings to All**

We pray that the joy
and peace which was
given to the world at
His Birth will abide
in your heart forever.

**New Bern Coca-Cola
Bottling Works, Inc.**

**Peace on Earth,
Good will
to men**

**GENERAL WHOLESALE
BUILDING SUPPLY CO.**