

### Mistletoe Distinct As Yule Decoration

Mistletoe, that distinctive Christmas green so common in many parts of America, is usually thought of as merely good holiday decoration or as a creator of open season on ladies fair for otherwise bashful swains.

Mistletoe did not always hold this position in our lives. The Druids called it "all-heal," and thought it held many miraculous virtues. The Scandinavians dedicated it to their goddess of love, Friga. Probably this goddess of love is responsible for the custom of kissing under the mistletoe.



The power to heal, to protect against sickness, to perform magic deeds—all these and more are the qualities ascribed to this plant in legends, traditions and even in ancient histories and literature.

Mistletoe is a parasite, which infests branches of various trees of both hardwood and conifers, but mainly on hardwoods. One species is found exclusively, however, on conifers.

Among the Celts and others mistletoe which grew from the oak was considered to have peculiar magical virtues not possessed by that from any other trees. Some even considered it so rare as to be only cut with a gold knife.

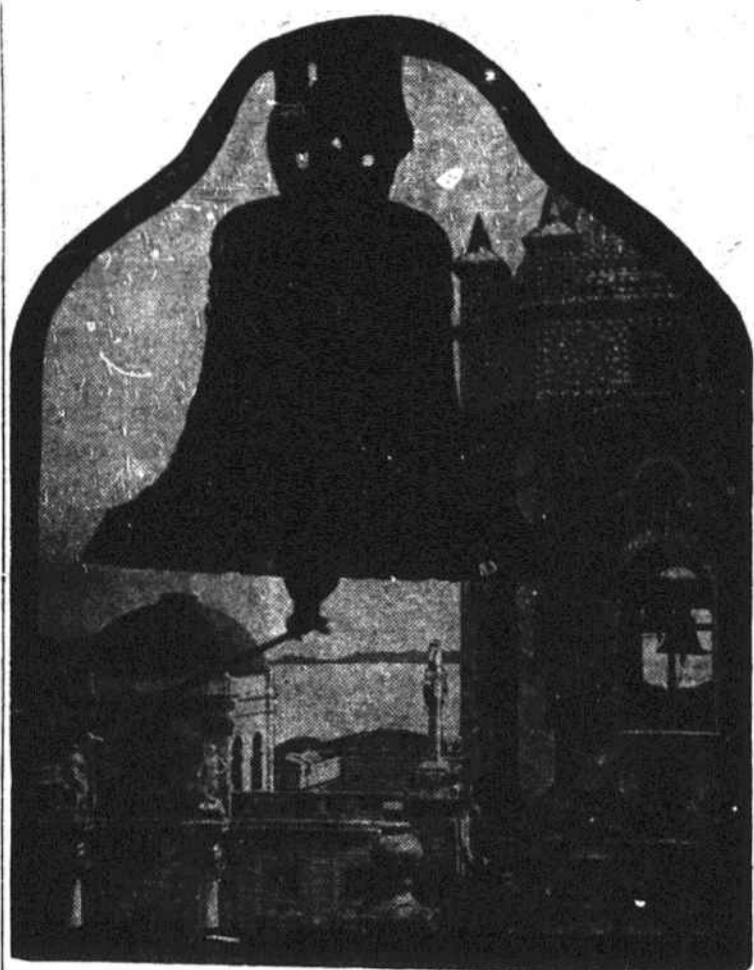
Another old tradition is that the mistletoe supplied the wood for the holy cross, as previous to that time it was a forest tree but after the crucifixion was condemned to exist only as a dwarf parasite.

Mistletoe was taken over into the Christian tradition in due course and dedicated to the Christ Child. An old rhyme reads:

The mistletoe bough  
At our Christmas board  
Shall hang to the honor  
Of Christ our Lord.

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**CHRISTMAS IN MIDDLE AMERICA . . .** While the Christmas customs vary in the ten Middle America republics, bells play an important part in every country. This bell in church tower at Panama City plays a big part in their holiday celebration.

### Christmas Minus a Santa Claus

Do you believe in Santa Claus? The children of Middle America never heard of ole Saint Nick, even though their holiday celebration compares happily and merrily to our own.

Picnics and outdoor excursions are traditional events of the day, for Christmas comes in mid-summer weather there. Weeks before the holiday, families in El Salvador, Mexico and Panama prepare tiny clay or wooden figures for the creche which most homes display during the universal holiday. In Guatemala, Costa Rica and Cuba, images of the Virgin are carried through the streets.

Christmas celebrations and customs vary in the ten republics which comprise Middle America—Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama, Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

Fireworks climax the festival in most of these republics and marimba bands play in bunting-bedecked parks while whole families trek from farm to village, visiting relatives or joining in the public merrymaking.

Mexican families string their patios with colored lanterns and hang the pinata, a large clay jar shaped like a bird or animal and filled with fruits, nuts and candies purchased at the picturesque Christmas stalls in the markets. The children are blindfolded and armed with long sticks. They reach for the pinata until one child breaks the jar and the sweets tumble out to be shared by all.

Despite the various forms of observing the Christmas holidays Middle America is united in its celebration of peace with its bright hope for inter-American interdependence.

### Edible Manger In Ukraine Rituals

In the Ukraine an elaborate Christmas Eve supper breaks a 99-day fast during which no meat has been eaten. Twelve courses are served, one for each of the twelve Apostles: buckwheat and mushroom soup, pancakes in flax, prunes, fish, bread, and nuts are included in the menu.

An additional course of honey and porridge is also served: called Koutia, the dish represents the holy crib: the porridge represents the straw—as in the manger—and the Holy Infant is symbolized by honey and fruit: the honey is also considered symbolic of the spirit and blood of the Saviour.

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