

9. **Christmas cards...** are a modern addition to Christmas. They started in England in the early 19th century but were only for people who could afford them. The 1st American Christmas card dates back to about 1850. By 1890, most people could afford them.

10. **Advent...** a period covering the 4 Sundays prior to Christmas. This season is completely Christian...it's a time when we contemplate Christ's 'advent' or 1st coming to Earth, to search our own heart, to repent & re-dedicate ourselves to Him and then to contemplate His 2nd advent (2nd coming to Earth).

A. Advent wreaths date from the 4th century, when Christmas began to be celebrated officially. The wreaths 3 outer candles are lit on the 1st 3 Sundays of December (to symbolize our hearts yearning for His coming), the large central candle is lit on the Sunday before Christmas (to symbolize the 'incarnation' of God in man...God Himself being put into a human form - 100% God, yet 100% man). The colored candle is lit on Christmas to celebrate the physical 2nd coming of Jesus Christ to Earth. Sometimes, blue, purple & white ribbons with a vine of thorns are woven into the advent wreath as threads to remind us of Christ's sufferings, our repentance & God's victory over sin through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

11. **Candy canes...**

A. Candy canes have long been associated with Christmas. While there are several legends about its origin, the facts are that in the 1920's, a candymaker named Bob McCormack made canes as special treats for family & friends, but the confections were difficult to mass produce. In the 1950's, Bob's brother-in-law Gregory Keller (a Catholic priest) invented a machine to step up the process. Other members of Bob's family came up with new packaging so the candy canes wouldn't break in transit and Bob's candies (www.bobscandies.com) became the world's leading candy cane producer.

B. The most popular candy cane legend says that a faithful Indiana candymaker made them as a way to glorify Christ.

1. He wanted his candy to be a hard candy to remind people that Jesus is 'the Rock of all ages'.

2. He shaped it in a 'J' for Jesus....or upside down as a shepherd's rod to represent the Good Shepherd - Jesus.

3. He made it white to symbolize the purity of Christ.

4. He added a large red stripe to symbolize the blood of Christ shed for us & 3 smaller red stripes to symbolize the stripes He bore from His scourgings and by which we are healed (Isaiah 53)....or the 3 smaller stripes represent the Trinity....the smaller stripes could also represent our small sacrifices compared to His sacrificing His life (the large red one).

Sometimes a green stripe is added as a reminder that Jesus is a gift from God.

5. Peppermint (a flavor similar to hyssop) represents that Christ was offered up for us at the cross.

The message of salvation was thus, incorporated into this sweet concoction by this faithful candymaker who 'longed to glorify God' with his job.

12. **Hanging stockings...** comes from an old English legend. Father Christmas once dropped some gold coins while coming down the chimney. The coins would have fallen through the ash grates

and been lost if they hadn't landed in a stocking that had been hung out to dry. Since that time, children have continued to hang out stockings in hopes of finding them filled with gifts.

13. Gift giving....very common in pre-christian (pagan) celebrations. While some people say that gift-giving can be traced to the 'wise men', this is very tenuous at best...
 - A. The 'wise men' gave their gifts to Christ but did not exchange gifts with each other.
 - B. The gifts were given to Christ because He was royalty, not just because it was His birthday. He was a king and eastern people never approached a king without gifts. The 'wise men' were just following an ancient eastern custom of presenting gifts to a king (or the birth of a prince) when coming into his presence.
 - C. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with gift-giving at Christmas or that we shouldn't do it.
14. 12 Days of Christmas....see below.
15. Santa Claus.....
 - A. History of....Nicholas was born sometime between 255 & 280 A.D. And died between 345-352 A.D. He lived in Patara, Lycinia (modern Turkey). He was born to a wealthy christian couple. When he was a teen-ager, an epidemic killed his parents. He went to live with his uncle, who was a Father Superior of a monastery. To join the monastery, he was required to dispose of his worldly wealth. To do this, he put some gold in a small bag and secretly gave it to a dowry-less daughter. He tossed it thru a window where it fell in their stockings. The next night, he brought gold for the 2nd dowry-less daughter in the same way. He did the same thing the 3rd night but was caught. Nicholas then went on to study for the priesthood. And ultimately became the Bishop of Myra. Years later, the Russians adopted him as their patron saint and pictured him with a stately red cape with a white beard. Does any of this sound familiar yet? In Dutch, St.Nicholas comes out 'Sinter Klass'...which is where our Santa Claus has evolved from.....
 - B. In other cultures, its been Father Christmas(Christ Himself) who gives gifts the night before Christmas. The Pennsylvania Germans (also called the Pennsylvania Deutsch or Dutch) call the Christmas eve gift-giver, Chriskindlein which is where we get Kris Kringle from.
 - C. The American folk-figure of Santa Claus was gradually transformed through a series of articles and poems from an austere Bishop to a jolly old man.
 - D. One thing is very clear....Nicholas loved the Bible and suffered for Christ under the persecution of the Roman emperor Diocletian (284-305 A.D.). He was imprisoned for his faith in Jesus Christ. He may even have been present at the Council of Nicea, standing for the trinity in opposition to the Arians. He died a peaceful death on December 6th.
16. Some people are more interested in teaching their children about the Easter Bunny and Santa Claus than in teaching them about the real meaning of Easter & Christmas. Evaluating these and other Christmas traditions is essential if we wish to worship God 'in spirit and in truth'. We must deliberate about our Christmas traditions....we must prayerfully and carefully sift through the folk elements and keep those which we are most comfortable with. Some considerations should be...
 - A. Are they honoring to God?...Phil 4:8 & 1Cor 10:31
 - B. Do they encourage our faith in God & Jesus Christ?...1Thess 5:11

- C. Do they feed the desires of the 'flesh'(commercialism)?...Gal 5:19-21 & 1John 2:16
- D. Do they draw us away from worshipping God or do they 'dilute' our faith emphasis?
- E. Does the way we celebrate really say that 'Jesus is the reason for the season'?

In doing this assessment, we may find that there are some traditions that we keep and some that we don't keep. Certainly the message and meaning of Christmas is untainted by Saturnalia/Yuletide traditions. We can have christmas trees without feeling like we're pagans celebrating Saturnalia....but if we're just going thru the motions, maybe its time to examine 'the reason for the season' a little more carefully.

17. **Some things to do to 'celebrate' christmas....**

- A. Gather your family together on Christmas Eve and read the christmas story from Matt and/or Luke or a good book that accurately records it. Emphasize Jesus' humble entry into this world.
- B. Have a brief devotion on Christmas morning. Before opening gifts, pray together and thank God for His gift to us - eternal life in Jesus Christ, the greatest gift of all. Thank Him for His lesser gifts throughout the year - things that we so often take for granted. Pray for specific people that this Christmas, they may see the real reason for the season.
- C. Experience the truth of which Christ spoke - Acts 20:35...it is more blessed to give than to receive.
 - 1. Think & pray about the christmas cards that you send to people. Make sure that you are sending the right message in them. Pray that they will have an effect on them.
 - 2. Throughout December or some longer time, start putting away some money. or match what your child puts away. On Christmas Eve, pray and then buy some needy family some groceries or gifts and deliver them anonymously by ringing the doorbell and running away before they answer. Put a card inside explaining what you're doing without revealing your names. Or contribute time &/or money to a First Church of the Nazarene ministry
 - 3. Do something like #2 above but for a missionary family or thru a missionary organization to a needy family. Many organizations have Christmas kits that they will send for you for a contribution.
 - 4. Watch TV Christmas specials that glorify God. For the children (and adults), the "Charlie Brown Christmas Special" is excellent.
 - 5. Visit nursing homes or a hospital and share Christmas with those who have no one else. Maybe just a visit and a card or a small plate of cookies that all of you have made will be a great blessing to them.

ACCORDING TO LEGEND, the 12 Days of Christmas contains the gospel....you decide:

from 1558 to 1829, Roman Catholics in England were not able to practice their faith openly, so they had to find other ways to pass on their beliefs. Singing was one way to do it. The 12 Days of Christmas is an allegory...each item in the song represents something of religious significance. Again, you decide. Although I'm very skeptical, I'm presenting it here as an interesting item only. The only problem with this legend is that Protestants would agree with all of these except the "7 swans a swimming" and then only if you take it to mean the 7 sacraments of the Roman Catholic church. If you take it to mean the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit, how does this really preserve the Roman Catholic faith? For a good article on this, go to

www.snopes.com/holidays/christmas/12days.asp.

In the long run, if this "legend" helps you to worship God better when you sing it, that's a good thing.

On the 1st day of Christmas, my true love gave to me...

The 'true love' represents God and the 'me' who receives these presents is a Christian...

The 'partridge in a pear tree' is Jesus Christ who died on a tree as a gift from God...

The 'two turtle doves' were the Old & New Testaments - another gift from God...

The 'three French hens' were faith, hope & love - the three gifts of the holy Spirit that abide (1Cor 13)...

The 'four calling birds' were the four gospels which sing the song of salvation through Jesus Christ...

The 'five golden rings' were the 1st 5 books of the Bible, the Pentateuch or the books of Moses...

The 'six geese a laying' were the 6 days of creation...

The 'seven swans a swimming' were the 7 gifts of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:6-8) or the 7 sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church...actually there are more than 7 Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The 'eight maids a milking' were the 8 Be-Attitudes (Matt 5:3-10)....

The 'nine ladies dancing' were the 9 fruits of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22,23)

The 'ten lords a leaping' were the 10 commandments(Exodus 20:1-17)....

The 'eleven pipers piping' were the 11 faithful disciples or apostles...

The 'twelve drummers drumming' were the 12 points of the Apostle's Creed.