



Messenger Project Newsletter

The Messenger

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A NONPROFIT CORPORATION PROMOTING THE BIBLE THROUGH THE ARTS

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Messenger Notes

Lionel and Joie De Leon performed *God My Savior (Habakkuk 3:16-19)* on Thanksgiving Day at **Fellowship Christian Reformed Church** in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

It appears that recording of the basic tracks for **Messenger Project's** next CD will begin in January, 2007. Lionel De Leon plans to record rhythm guitar tracks with **Raymond Genovese** on drums and **Bart Broadnax** on bass.

Christmas Symbols

The **ANGEL** placed at the top of the tree was first started in Germany in the late 17th century. Originally, the tree topper was a little figure of the baby Jesus.

BELLS were first used to summon church-goers by Bishop Paulinus of Nola, Campania, in 431 A.D. Pagans had used bells to summon demons, cast spells and communicate with the dead. Early Christians used bells to cast out evil spirits and chase away storms. Bells are used to announce the coming of Christ's birth. Horses, chariots and sleds are outfitted with bells to create a merry sound.

Ancient Rome lit **CANDLES** to ward off evil and to convince the sun to shine again. In Victorian times, candles were placed in windows during the Christmas season as a sign to those passing by that shelter and warmth could be found within.

One story of the **CANDY CANE** is that it was created in the late 1800s by a candy maker in Indiana who wanted to express the meaning of Christmas. The white peppermint represents the purity and sinless nature of Jesus. The three small red stripes represent the Trinity and Jesus' inflicted wounds. The bold red stripe represents Jesus' redeeming blood. The shape represents a shepherd's crook and the letter "J" for Jesus.

The first **CHRISTMAS CARDS** were sent by Sir Henry Cole, a London publisher and innovator, in 1843.

Tradition says that **FRANKINCENSE** was given to the baby Jesus by Balthasar (a black king from Ethiopia), fulfilling Isaiah 60:6. Frankincense was the purest incense and gave off white smoke, a symbol of prayers. It also symbolizes sacrifice, Jesus' divinity and the name of God.

GIFT GIVING began with the pagan holiday of Saturnalia on December 17th as a winter feast of merrymaking and gift exchanging. Gifts are also a symbol of Baby Jesus, the greatest gift of all.

HOLLY began as the sacred plant for Saturn in Roman custom and was used at the Saturnalia festival to honor him. Originally, Christians included holly in the celebration of the birth of Jesus to avoid persecution. Eventually holly lost its pagan association and became a symbol of Christmas.

In the early 17th century, Germans began bringing trees indoors and decorating them with candles. The first **CHRISTMAS LIGHTS** were set up in the home of a friend of Thomas Edison in 1882. It had 80 bulbs and cost a small fortune. When Christmas lights were first commercially produced, they cost an average American weekly wage.

MISTLETOE means "all heal" in the Celtic language and was thought to be sacred by ancient Druids, who used it in their sacrifices to the gods. The 18th century English credited the mistletoe with a magical appeal called a kissing ball. A young woman standing under one could not refuse to be kissed, and a kiss could bring deep romance or lasting friendship. If a woman remained unknissed, she would not marry the next year.

Legend says that **MYRRH** was brought to the baby Jesus by Caspar of Tarsus, one of the Magi. Myrrh was used for embalming and anointing the dead. It represents the suffering savior, the passion of the crucifixion and Jesus' human nature.

The **NATIVITY SCENE** was first popularized by St. Francis of Assisi, who set up a simple

manger scene at the little town of Greccio, Italy in 1224.

The **POINSETTIA** was first brought to America over 100 years ago by America's first ambassador to Mexico, Dr. Joel Poinsett (along with the Poinsettia Christmas tale).

SANTA CLAUS is derived from a 4th century bishop in Turkey (St. Nicholas) who was famous for acts of kindness, especially to children. He became popular in Holland and was called "Sinter Klaas," which Americans turned into "Santa Claus" around 1870.

The **STOCKING** tradition came from a Christmas story of St. Nicholas. In the 1880's, a father of three young maidens couldn't afford a dowry for his daughters to be married. St. Nicholas heard of the misfortune and secretly threw a bag of coins down the chimney. It is said that the gold coins landed in the girl's stockings that were hanging in the chimney to dry.

Legend says that the **CHRISTMAS TREE** tradition was begun by Martin Luther in Germany. Luther was returning home one wintry night and saw the stars twinkling in the sky through the tree branches. Amazed at the sight, he tried to recreate it for his family by bringing a tree indoors and decorating it with candles.

The **WREATH** combines two symbols of everlasting life, the evergreen tree and the circle.

XMAS comes from an abbreviation of *Xristos*, the Greek word for Christ. During the 16th century, Europeans began using Xmas as a shorthand form of Christmas.

The **YULE LOG** custom was noted in France and Italy as far back as the 1200s AD. Its origin can be traced to a mid-winter pagan festival called Yule that was celebrated in Nordic countries well before 1000 BC.

Tradition says that Jesus' birth has been celebrated since 98 AD. In 350 AD, Bishop Julius I of Rome chose **DECEMBER 25th** as the observance day for Christmas.

We wish you a Merry Christmas and a Blessed New Year in Christ!