

A detailed illustration of a winter night scene. In the center is a cozy log cabin with a snow-covered roof and a chimney emitting a wisp of smoke. The cabin's windows are lit from within. To the left, a snowman stands in the snow. In the foreground, two gnomes are pulling a sled loaded with evergreen branches across the snow. The background features snow-laden evergreen trees under a dark blue night sky with a crescent moon and stars.

# Holiday Wishes

*May all of your wishes come true,  
during this most magical time of the year*

Wishing everyone the very best of  
the Christmas season, and hoping  
to see you in the New Year!  
From the Management and Staff of

The Lethbridge **Shopper**

## The Christmas Star



The stars that appear in the sky today are the same ones that were there two thousand years ago. Was there a nova at the time of Jesus' birth? The exact time of His birth is not known, but astronomers cannot place a new star appearance anywhere near the possible time. Could it have been a shooting star? Again, the astronomers say it was not likely. A meteor lasts only a few seconds or minutes at best. The wise men followed the star for weeks looking for Jesus. We can rule out comets as well. They can be seen by the naked eye for a week or months. But modern astronomers know which comets were close enough to earth hundreds and thousands of years ago and

there was no comet visible to humans around the time of Christ's birth.

Some star gazers suggest that if we move the birth of Jesus to the springtime of 6 B.C., we can attribute the star to the time the planets Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn were close together in the heavens. They formed a triangle in the group of stars known as Pisces.

The wise men, themselves, were astrologers and studied the stars and planets and knew, according to Jewish rabbis, of the triangle and that it had appeared before the birth of Moses. Perhaps they interpreted it as a sign of a great event in the land of the Jewish people. This may have been the star of Bethlehem. Pisces became the special constellation of the Hebrew people.

Still, many people prefer to believe that the strange star did appear, and that it was simply a

miracle and throughout the world today, the Christian holiday has usually begun with the appearance of the first star of Christmas Eve.

The Festival of the Star is held in Poland. Right after the Christmas Eve meal, the village priest, acts as the "Star Man" and tests the children's knowledge of religion. In Alaska, boys and girls carry a star shaped figure from house to house and sing carols in hopes of receiving treats. In Hungary a star-shaped pattern is carved in a half of an apple and is supposed to bring good luck.

In general, the Christmas star symbolizes high hopes and high ideals - hope for good fortune, hope for reaching above oneself. For all human beings, regardless of religion, stars have special meaning for all share the heavens, no matter what barriers keep them apart on earth.

Source: *Christmas.com*

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## The Real Saint Nicholas

Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of just about everything. He is the national saint of Russia and Greece and churches named after him number in the thousands - more than 400 in Great Britain alone. He is the patron saint of judges, murderers, pawnbrokers, thieves, merchants, paupers, scholars, sailors, bakers, travelers, maidens and poor children. He is known as the friend and protector of all those in trouble.

Saint Nicholas was born in the Middle East about 350 miles northwest of Bethlehem in the fourth century. He grew up to become the bishop of Myra (now Kale), his hometown, Lycia, near the coast of what is now Turkey. Legends tell of his love for children, his kindness and the miracles he

brought about.

Perhaps the most famous story of all tells how he helped three unfortunate young sisters who all had suitors but had no dowries because their father, a poor nobleman, could not raise the money. So they could not marry.

Now the bishop Nicholas was a shy man and did not like to give money directly, so he thought of a way to give it anonymously. When the first daughter was ready to marry, the good bishop tossed a bag of gold into the house at night. Later, when the second daughter prepared to marry, she too received a mysterious bag of gold. When the third daughter prepared to marry, the poor nobleman was determined to find out who had been so

generous. So he kept watch and saw the bishop drop another bag of gold into the house. It has been said that Saint Nicholas climbed on the roof and dropped the third bag of gold down the chimney where it landed in a stocking hung to dry, giving us a reason to hang up Christmas stockings today. When the father saw what had happened, Nicholas begged him to keep the secret, but, of course, the news got out. From then on, whenever anyone received an unexpected gift, they thanked Nicholas.

Six hundred years later, the Russian Emperor Vladimir visited Constantinople and heard all the wonderful stories about Bishop Nicholas and decided to make him the patron saint of Russia. The



stories even spread to the Laplands - to the people of the reindeer sleds.

The three bags of gold Nicholas gave the sisters made him the focus of merchants in northern Italy. Statutes and pictures had shown

him holding the three bags and when taken as the patron saint of the merchants, the bags became gold balls, representing money lenders and today, pawnbrokers. The anniversary of

Nicholas' death, December 6th, either 345 A.D. or 352 A.D., is so close to Christmas that, in many countries, the two merged. But in Germany and the Netherlands, the two remain separate. Source: *Christmas.com*.



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## Santa Around the World!



Santa is indeed a very popular figure around the world. To Christians in the African Republic of Ghana, Father Christmas comes from the jungle. In Hawaii he comes by boat. On the Nerang River in Australia he rides water skis, wears a white beard and red bathing trunks. In Brazil Grandpapa Indian, Vovo Indo, brings gifts. In China, Santa Claus is called Dun Che Lao Ren, which means Christmas Old Man. He brings presents to good children. Being a culturally diverse and worldly fellow, Santa has many interpretations:

"Ghosts of the field" cleared the way for Saint Nicholas in parts of the Alps. Behind them came a man wearing a goat's head, and a masked demon with a birch switch.

In Germany's Berchtesgaden district, twelve young men dressed in straw and wearing animal masks danced along after Saint Nicholas, ringing cowbells. After gifts were given as each home, the masked men drove the young people out and beat them, or pretended to do so. This was symbolic punishment for having misbehaved. It had also been a part of a pagan ritual that was thought to ensure crops the following year.

The German Saint Nicholas also comes with a helper. He has different names in different parts of Germany: Knecht Ruprecht or Krampus in southern German; Pelzebock in the northwestern part of the country; and Hans Muff in the Rhineland. Like Black Peter, he carries a sack on his back and a rod in his

hand. The helper was a frightening being given to ogre-like growls, quite the opposite of Saint Nicholas' shining goodness.

Swedish children wait eagerly for Jultomten, a gnome whose sleigh is drawn by the Julbocker, the goats of the Thor, the god of thunder. He dresses in red and carries a bulging sack on his back.

In Denmark the gift bringer, Julemanden, also carries a sack and is drawn by reindeer. Elves called Juul Nisse are said to come from the attic, where they live, to help Julemanden. Children put a saucer of milk or rice pudding out for them in the attic and hope to find it empty in the morning.

In Poland the children's gifts are said to come from the stars and in Hungary angels bring them.

In Syria children's gifts come from the youngest camel on January 6th, which is Three Kings Day. In Spanish speaking countries such as Mexico, Puerto Rico, Argentina, Brazil, the Philippines and Spain, the Three Kings, themselves, give the gifts to the children.

Italian children also receive gifts on Three Kings Day, but the gift bearer is La Befana. La Befana refused to go to Bethlehem with the wise men when they passed her door because she had not finished her sweeping. Now she goes from place to place hoping that some day she will find the Christ Child. Everywhere she goes, she leaves a little gift.

In Russia the same ageless wanderer is called Baboushka. She gave the wise men the wrong directions and on the eve of Three Kings Day she wanders from house to house, peering into the faces of children and leaving gifts. Russia also has Grandfather Frost.

English children wait for Father Christmas, known to their ancestors as Christmas itself. In France gifts are also brought by Father Christmas, Pre Noel, or the Christ Child himself. In Austria and Switzerland the Christkindl bears gifts. In some towns Christkindl is a beautiful girl-angel sent down from heaven to give gifts.

Source: *Christmas.com*

Here's hoping Santa delivers everything on your wish list and more this Christmas!

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# Holly



The Druids believed that holly, with its shiny leaves and red berries stayed green to keep the earth

beautiful when the sacred oak lost its leaves. They wore sprigs of holly in their hair when they went into the forest to watch their priests cut the sacred mistletoe.

Holly was the sacred plant of Saturn and was used at the Roman Saturnalia festival to honor him. Romans gave one another holly wreaths and carried them about decorating images of Saturn with it. Centuries later, in December, while other Romans continued their pagan worship, Christians celebrated the birth of Jesus. To avoid persecution, they decked their homes with Saturnalia holly. As Christian numbers increased and their customs prevailed, holly lost its pagan association and became a symbol of Christmas.

The plant has come to stand for peace and joy, people often settle arguments under a holly tree. Holly is believed to frighten off witches and protect

the home from thunder and lightning. In West England it is said sprigs of holly around a young girl's bed on Christmas Eve are supposed to keep away mischievous little goblins. In Germany, a piece that has been used in church decorations is regarded as a charm against lightning. In England, British farmers put sprigs of holly on their beehives. On the first Christmas, they believed, the bees hummed in honor of the Christ Child. The English also mention the "he holly and the she holly" as being the determining factor in who will rule the household in the following year, the "she holly" having smooth leaves and the "he holly" having prickly ones. Other beliefs included putting a sprig of holly on the bedpost to bring sweet dreams and making a tonic from holly to cure a cough. All of these references give light to "decking the halls with boughs of holly."

Source: *Christmas.com*

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## Ancient Festivals Coinciding with Christmas

Hundreds of years before Christ several other festivals were held in different parts of the world. These celebrations seemed to all occur at some point during the winter solstice, the time at which the earth makes its shortest journey around the sun. Ancient people worshiped the sun and those in the northern hemisphere feared that the sun god had forsaken them as the days grew shorter. They soon felt there would be no light or life left on earth if the god didn't relent and allow the days and light to

return and, of course it did. Around December 22nd we have our shortest days and it was at this time that the people of northern Europe would build great fires and kindle lights to encourage the sun god to re-light his lamp. There was much feasting and rejoicing as the days grew longer for now spring would come and life would flourish.

It was about the same time that the Romans paid homage to Saturn, the god of agriculture, with their Saturnalia festival. This festival was

celebrated for a week to mark a legendary Golden Age when Saturn ruled the world. Men and women with garlands on their heads and carrying lighted candles processed through the streets giving candles and green wreaths as presents. Slaves and masters changed roles and class distinctions were forgotten. The poor feasted as equals and took part in all the frivolity, dancing and games.

In the Jewish month of Kislev, which falls in December, the Feast of

the Dedication (Hanukkah) celebrated the rededication of Solomon's temple after it had been polluted by Antiochus and recovered by the valor of the Maccabees. This festival is sometimes called the Feast of Lights and it is usual to burn great quantities of lamps and candles as emblems of the Light of Truth, rekindled after it had been obscured by heathens. Still celebrated, it marks an early victory in the Jews' struggle to worship one God in their own way.

The Persians lighted

fires at the winter solstice in praise of Mithra, god of light.

The northern barbarians - Britons and Saxons and Norse men - held November feasts called 'Jiuleis' or 'Giuli', from which the Scandinavian 'Jul' and our 'Yule' may come. Cattle were slaughtered when the grasses died out and the carcasses roasted. The yule log, which represented fire, warmth and light against the cold and darkness of winter, was carefully prepared and lit. Its wood was thought to bring luck to

each household. In the Heimskringla, we read that King Hakon the Good "made a law that the festival of Yule should begin at the same time as Christian people held it; and that every man, under penalty, should brew a measure of malt into ale, and therewith keep the Yule holy as long as it lasted". This pagan festival was kept in a pagan way, with gaiety and cheer. It was not a single feast day, but a whole midwinter festival, which may not have been held in all places at the same time. We do know it was tied to Christmas in Germany as early as the ninth century and in Norway about the middle of the tenth century.

December 25th was chosen by the Emperor Aurelian in AD 274 as Dies Natalis Invicti Solis, Birthday of the Unconquered Sun. It was the main festival of the Phrygian god Attis and of Mithras, whose worship was brought to Britain and other countries by the Roman army.

The Egyptians held a winter festival that honored Isis, mother of the sun god Horus.

However these festivals and celebrations were carried out, they hailed the victory of light and life over darkness.

Source: [Christmas.com](http://Christmas.com)

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# Christmas Tree Legends



Many legends exist about the origin of the Christmas tree. One is the story of Saint Boniface, an English monk who organized the Christian Church in France and Germany. One day, as he traveled about, he came upon a group of pagans gathered around a great oak tree about to sacrifice a child to the god Thor. To stop the sacrifice and save the child's life Boniface

felled the tree with one mighty blow of his fist. In its place grew a small fir tree. The saint told the pagan worshipers that the tiny fir was the Tree of Life and represented the eternal life of Christ.

Another legend holds that Martin Luther, a founder of the Protestant faith, was walking through the forest one Christmas Eve. As he walked he was awed by the beauty of millions of stars glimmering through the branches of the evergreen trees. So taken was he by this beautiful sight that he cut a small tree and took it home to his family. To recreate that

same starlight beauty he saw in the wood, he placed candles on all its branches.

Yet another legend tells of a poor woodsman who long ago met a lost and hungry child on Christmas Eve. Though very poor himself, the woodsman gave the child food and shelter for the night. The woodsman woke the next morning to find a beautiful glittering tree outside his door. The hungry child was really the Christ Child in disguise. He created the tree to reward the good man for his charity.

Others feel the origin of the Christmas tree may

be the "Paradise Play." In medieval times most people would not read and plays were used to teach the lessons of the bible all over Europe. The Paradise Play, which showed the creation of man and the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden was performed every year on December 24th. The play was performed in winter creating a slight problem. An apple tree was needed but apple trees do not bare fruit in winter so a substitution was made. Evergreens were hung with apples and used instead.

Source: *Christmas.com*

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# 'T WAS THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

*By Clement Clarke Moore*

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house  
Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;  
The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,  
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;  
The children were nestled all snug in their beds,  
While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;  
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,  
Had just settled down for a long winter's nap,  
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,  
I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.  
Away to the window I flew like a flash,  
Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.  
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow  
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,  
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,  
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,  
With a little old driver, so lively and quick,  
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.  
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,  
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;  
"Now, DASHER! now, DANCER! now, PRANCER and VIXEN!  
On, COMET! on CUPID! on, DONNER and BLITZEN!  
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!  
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,  
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,  
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,  
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.  
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof  
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.  
As I drew in my hand, and was turning around,  
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.  
He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,  
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;  
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,  
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.  
His eyes -- how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!  
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!  
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,  
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;  
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,  
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;  
He had a broad face and a little round belly,  
That shook, when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.  
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,  
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;  
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,  
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;  
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,  
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,  
And laying his finger aside of his nose,  
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;  
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,  
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.  
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,

**HAPPY CHRISTMAS TO ALL,  
AND TO ALL A GOOD-NIGHT!**

The Lethbridge **Shopper**



# Mistletoe

Mistletoe is an aerial parasite that has no roots of its own and lives off the tree that it attaches itself to. Without that tree it would die. Mistletoe was thought to be sacred by ancient Europeans. Druid priests employed it in their sacrifices to the gods while Celtic people felt it possessed miraculous healing powers. In fact, in the Celtic language mistletoe means "all-heal." It not only cured diseases, but could also render poisons harmless, make humans and animals prolific, keep one safe from witchcraft, protect the house from ghosts and even make them speak. With all of this, it was thought to bring good luck to anyone privileged to have it.

Norsemen offer us a beautiful symbolic myth about mistletoe. The story goes that Mistletoe was the sacred plant of Frigga, goddess of love and the mother of Balder, the god of the summer sun. Balder had a dream of death, which greatly alarmed his mother, for should he die, all life on earth would end. In an attempt to keep this from happening, Frigga went at once to air, fire, water, earth, and every animal and plant seeking a promise that no harm would come to her son. Balder now could not be hurt

by anything on earth or under the earth. But Balder had one enemy, Loki, god of evil and he knew of one plant that Frigga had overlooked in her quest to keep her son safe. It grew neither on the earth nor under the earth, but on apple and oak trees. It was lowly mistletoe. So Loki made an arrow tip of the mistletoe, gave to the blind god of winter, Hoder, who shot it, striking Balder dead. The sky paled and all things in earth and heaven wept for the sun god. For three days each element tried to bring Balder back to life. Frigga, the goddess and his mother finally restored him. It is said the tears she shed for her son turned into the pearly white berries on the mistletoe plant and in her joy Frigga kissed everyone who passed beneath the tree on which it grew. The story ends with a decree that who should ever stand under the humble mistletoe, no harm should befall them, only a kiss, a token of love.

What could be more natural than to translate the spirit of this old myth into a Christian way of thinking and accept the mistletoe as the emblem of that Love which conquers Death? Its medicinal properties, whether real or imaginary, make it a just

emblematic of that Tree of Life, the leaves of which are for the healing of the nations thus paralleling it to the Virgin Birth of Christ.

Later, the eighteenth-century English credited mistletoe not with miraculous healing powers, but with a certain magical appeal called a kissing ball. At Christmas time a young lady standing under a ball of mistletoe, brightly trimmed with evergreens, ribbons, and ornaments, cannot refuse to be kissed. Such a kiss could mean deep romance or lasting friendship and goodwill. If the girl remained unknissed, she cannot expect not to marry the following year. Whether we believe it or not, it always makes for fun and frolic at Christmas celebrations.

Source: *Christmas.com*



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# The History Behind a Holiday Bloom



According to Mexican legend, the first poinsettia came from the prayers of a peasant brother and sister. Without money for a gift to give to the church in honor of Jesus, they brought a bouquet of weeds to the altar one year. They placed their green plants around the church's manger scene. Miraculously, the first "Flower of the Holy Night" bloomed in a bright red and green star shape.

The poinsettia plant was cultivated by the Aztecs of Mexico long before the introduction of Christianity to the Western Hemisphere. Poinsettias first became associated with religions

in the 17th century when, because of their brilliant color and holiday bloom, Franciscan priests in Mexico used the flower during nativity processions. Poinsettias were introduced to Americans in 1825 by Joel Robert Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico. Poinsett, a skilled botanist, grew the plants in his greenhouse in Greenville, South Carolina. He then sent them to botanical gardens and fellow horticulturists. The poinsettia eventually reached Robert Buist, a nurseryman, who sold it as *Euphorbia poinsettia* (a German botanist had already given the plant the botanical name, *Euphorbia pulcherima*). Poinsettia, however, remains the accepted name in English-speaking countries.   
*Source: Christmas.com.*

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