

Secondary School №27
Balacovo, Saratov Region

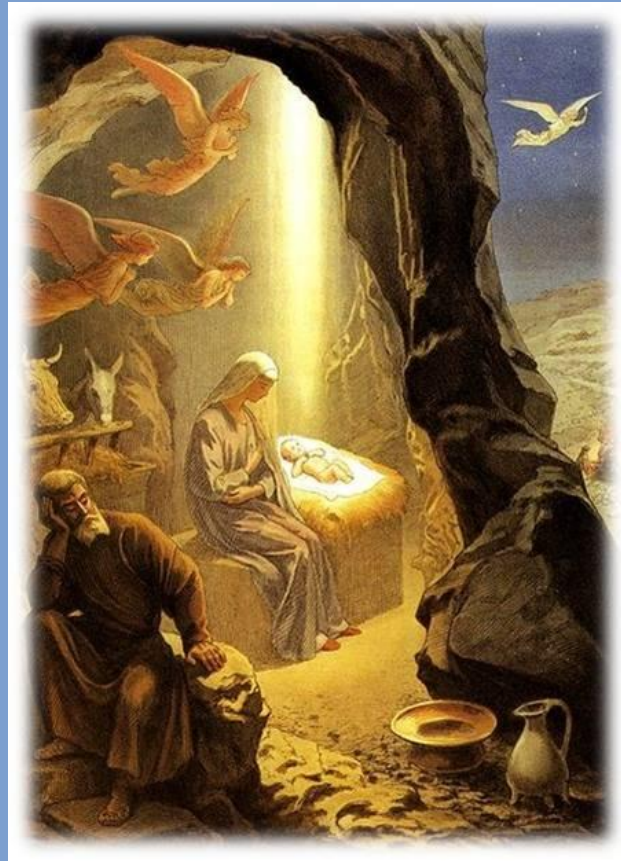
Project

Christmas



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Christmas is the most popular and colorful holiday celebrated by Christians all over the world; The word Christmas comes from "Christ's Mass", the Mass said in the Roman Catholic church to honour the birth of Jesus Christ.



It is generally held on December 25th, but the Russian and other Eastern Orthodox churches (they follow the Julian calendar) celebrate Christmas on January 7th.

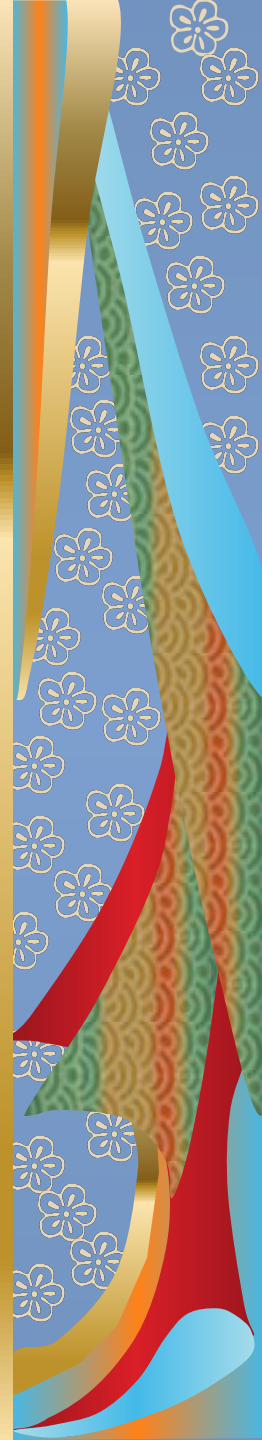


History

Although Christmas is celebrated on December 25th, the actual date of Christ's birth is not known. The earliest Christians did not even set aside a special day for observing the Nativity, or Christ's birth. For more than three centuries Christ's Mass was a movable feast.

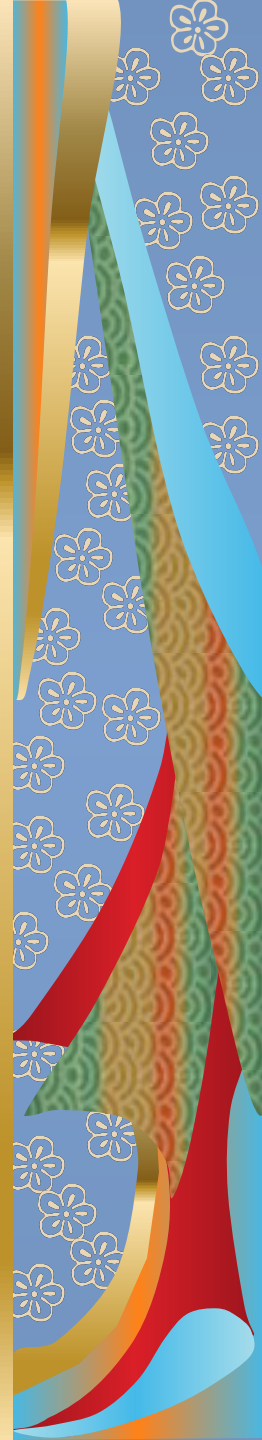


The celebration of Christ's birth on December 25th began in Rome in the 4th century. It replaced v the two pagan celebrations — the festival of rebirth of the sun and die feast of the god Saturn (Saturnalia). That is why it is not surprising that so many Christmas customs go back to pagan times.



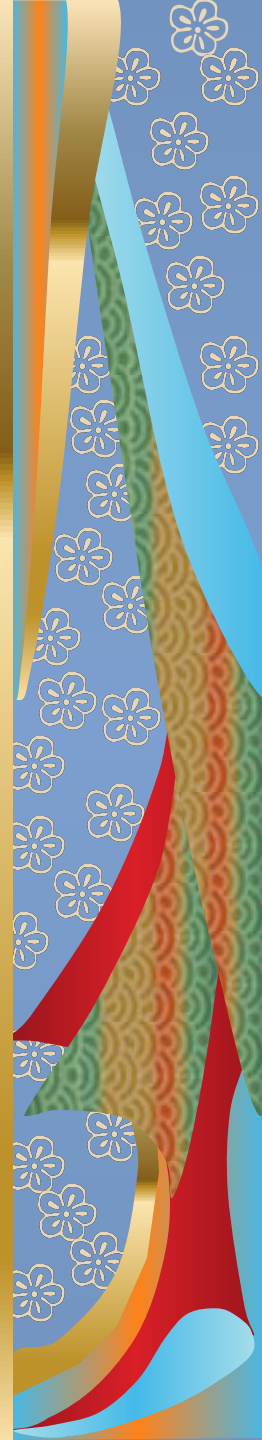


From Rome, the December holiday spread to Christians everywhere. For several centuries Christmas was kept only as a church festival. Gradually, however, it became a public holiday marked by feasting and merrymaking.



Customs and Traditions

There are a lot of traditions connected with Christmas. Some of them go back to pagan times, others are relatively new.

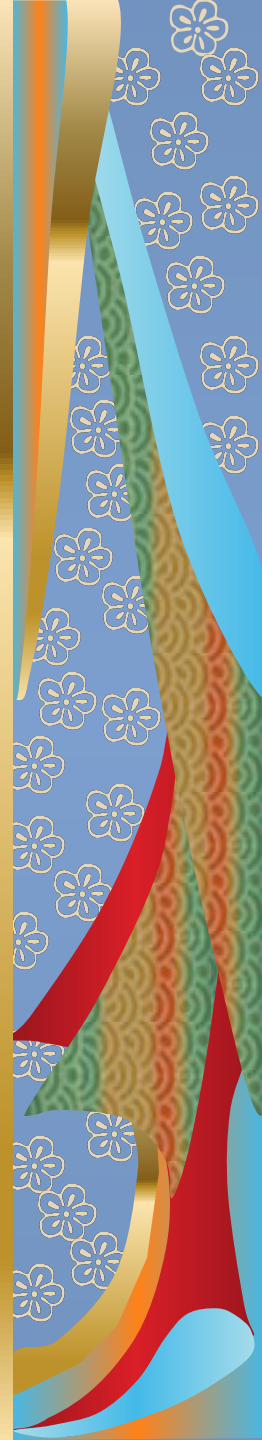


Christmas tree

The Christmas tree that now spreads its lighted and decorated branches every year in so many different countries came originally from Germany. In preChristian times evergreens, plants that remain green all the year round, were worshipped as symbols of eternal life. In medieval Germany an evergreen hung with apples was part of a Christmas play about the Garden of Eden. The first trees had no candles.



The custom of having a Christmas tree decorated with candles and hung with presents came to Britain with the craze for German things that followed Queen Victoria's marriage to Prince Albert (he was German). In 1841 they had a lighted tree at Windsor Castle. The event was widely reported, naturally. A few years later, nearly every house in Britain had a Christmas tree.





Very soon the Christmas tree spread outwards from the home into the churches and streets. Now all big cities have Christmas trees set up in squares and parks.

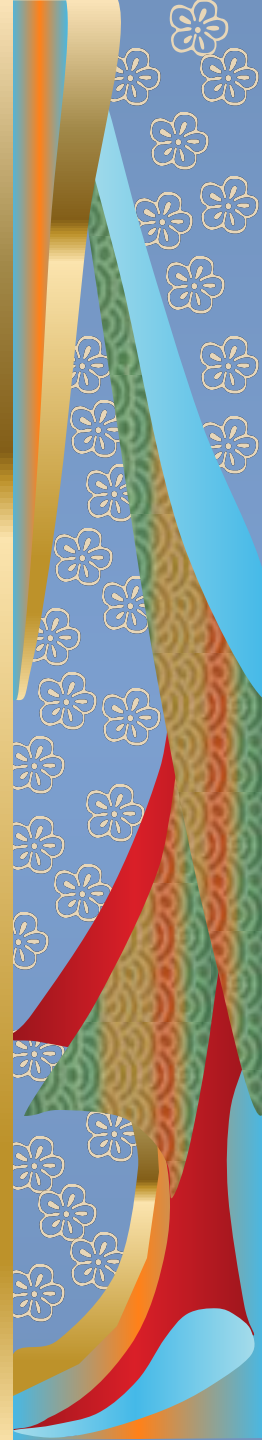


Perhaps the most famous Christmas tree stands every year in Trafalgar Square, close to Nelson's Column. (It is a gift from the people of Norway. The tree is immensely tall and brilliantly decorated. Right at the top is a large shining star. Bright, shining balls of different colours and different sizes cover the tree from top to bottom. No wonder whole families — boys and girls, and grownups too — come to look at it.



Mistletoe

Many people like to decorate their houses with evergreens. Best loved of all, now as in the past, are holly, ivy and mistletoe'. All these plants often decorate churches, with one exception. This is die mistletoe which, by long tradition, is never allowed inside a church at any time. Unlike other evergreens, it has never quite lost its pagan and magical associations.



At Christmas mistletoe with its white berries is put over the door. People believe that it will bring good luck. This green plant allows you to kiss whoever you like under it. A girl who stands under the mistletoe must expect to be kissed and, by custom, has no right to refuse.

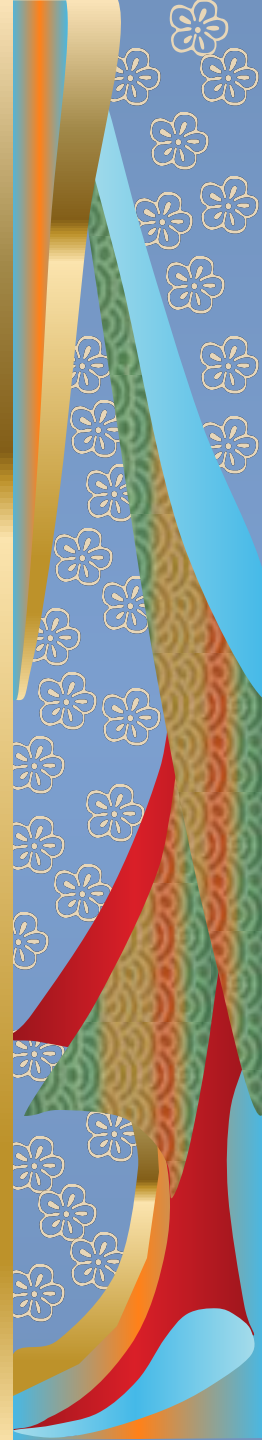




Santa Claus



Santa Claus (or Father Christmas) is an old but never ageing man who lives in the Far North. He has a long white beard and is dressed in red. He is fat and merry. On Christmas Eve he visits every house and leaves presents for children. He enters the house by chimney, unseen and unheard, with a big sack of toys. Children put a long stocking at the end of their bed or by the chimney so that Santa Claus will fill it with toys. He travels on a sleigh pulled by reindeer that can fly.

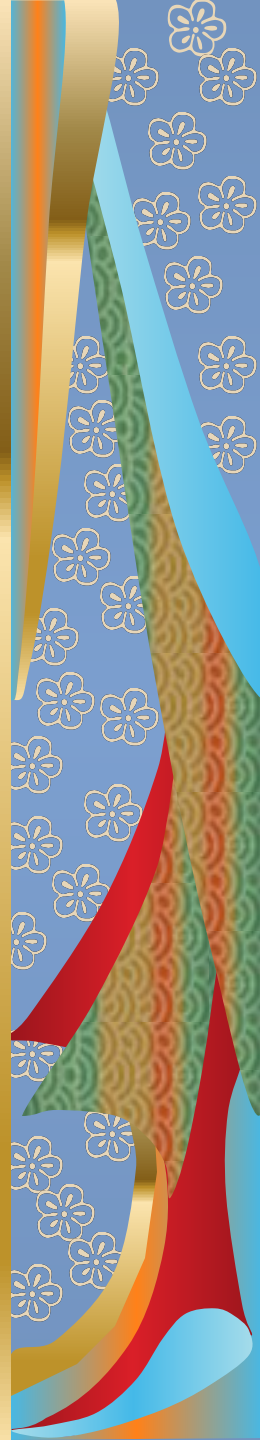


The name Santa Claus comes from the name of a legendary Christian saint — St Nicholas! He was famous for his kindness to children and the poor. One story tells how St Nicholas made a gift to the three girls who could not get married because their father was very poor. The saint threw three bags of gold through their window and one of these bags landed in a stocking that had been hung by the fire to dry. The custom of hanging up stockings on Christmas Eve may have grown out of this tale.



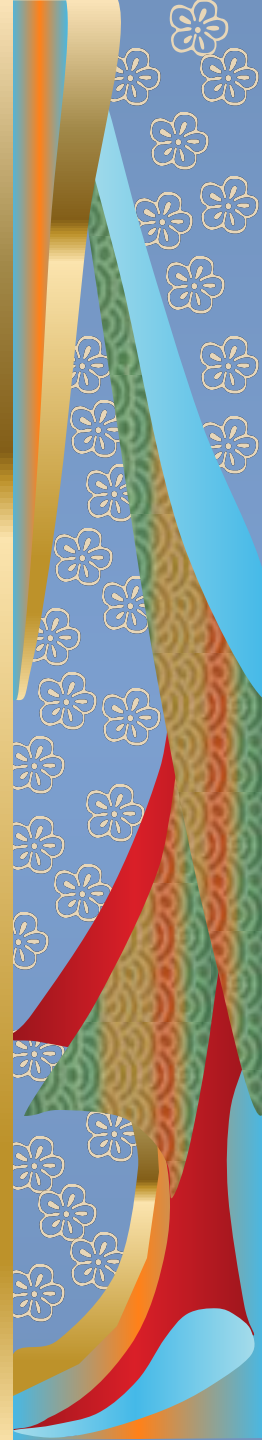
Christmas Gifts

Perhaps the most important part of Christmas celebration is the giving of presents. This tradition goes back again to Roman Saturnalia when people gave each other gifts of various kinds (fruit, pastry or gold).





Little children believe that when they are asleep, Santa Claus will climb down the chimney and put some toys and other little presents into their Christmas stockings. He will also put some toys under the tree. Children sometimes write a letter to Santa Claus telling him what presents they would like for Christmas.

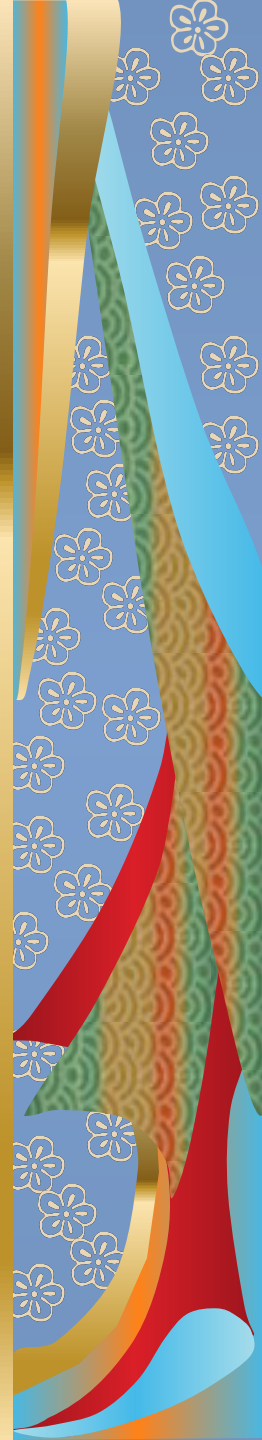


Christmas Carols

It is said that the first carols were sung by the angels who announced the birth of Christ. In French, the word carole once meant a type of dance accompanied by singing. The carol as a Christmas song developed in England during the 14th and 15th centuries.



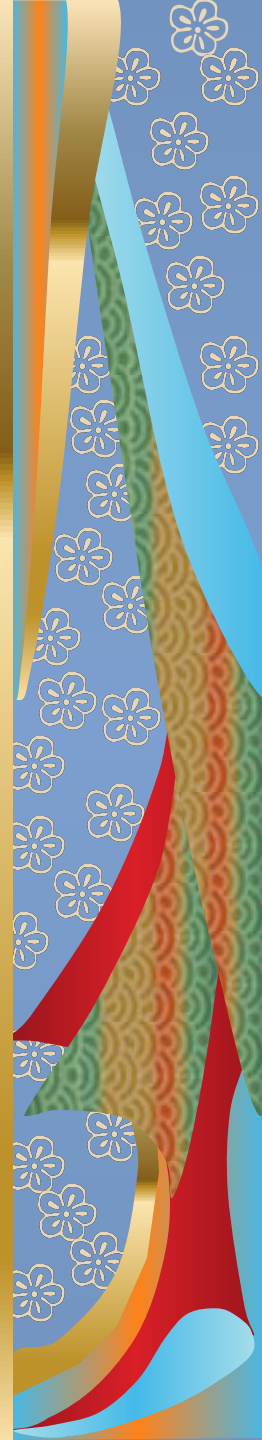
Before Christmas, groups of people sing carols, both indoors and outdoors, in places such as shopping centres, public squares, and railway stations. They usually collect money for charity, for example, homeless people. Sometimes carol singers, especially children, go along the street from house to house, singing in front of each house and asking for money. In the United States carol singers are sometimes invited into people's houses for a drink of cocoa and a biscuit.



Christmas Eve

December 24th, the day before Christmas Day, is called Christmas Eve.

On Christmas Eve everything is hustle and bustle. Offices and public buildings close at one o'clock, but the shops stay open late. The air is filled with the sounds of Christmas songs. Big department stores look like fairylands.



The main railway stations, trains and buses are crowded with people traveling home. They want to be with their families on Christmas Day.

Special church services are held on Christmas Eve, as well as on Christmas Day. The most famous ones are usually broadcast.

In the homes there is an air of great expectation. Children decorate the Christmas tree and prepare their Christmas stockings. At night Santa Claus will fill them with presents. Grown-ups wrap up their gifts and leave them under the tree.



Christmas Day

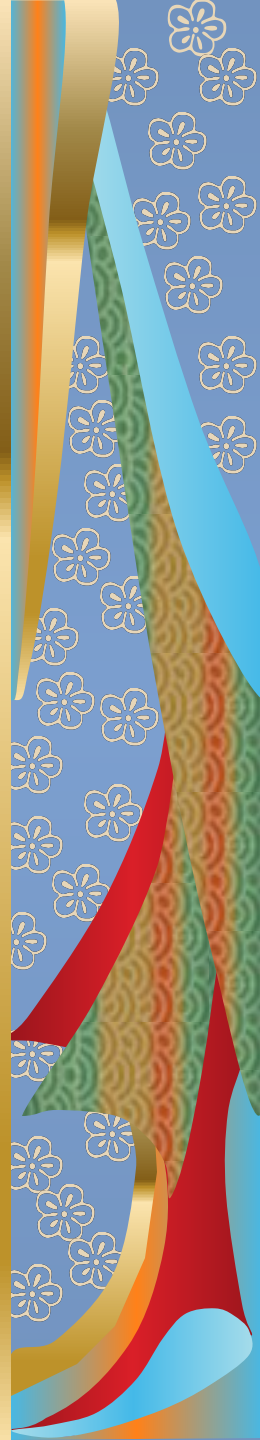
On Christmas morning children open their stockings excitedly to see their presents. They are usually not disappointed.

More people go to church on Christmas Day than at any other time.



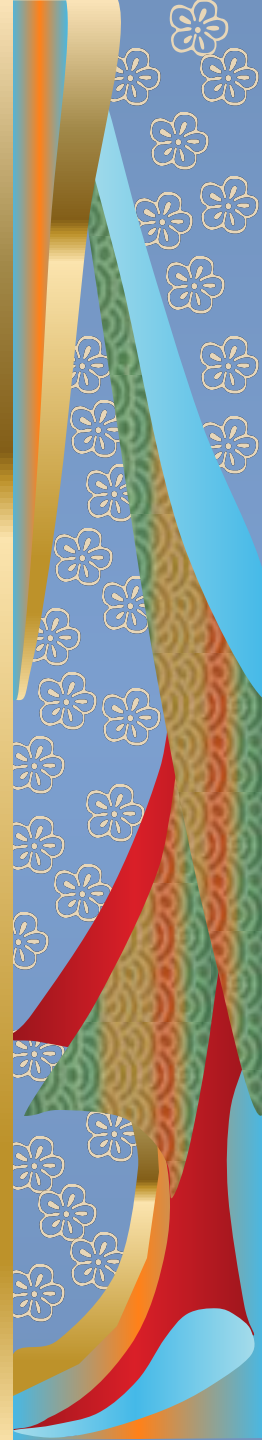


On returning from church — or after a late breakfast — mother disappears into the kitchen to put the turkey in the oven and the pudding on to boil. When she is ready, the great moment comes — the opening of presents. Everyone gets something: the dog - a new collar, the cat - a tin of sardines.



Christmas Day is a family day. Grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins all meet for the big Christmas dinner of turkey and Christmas pudding. At the start of the meal a cracker will probably be pulled.

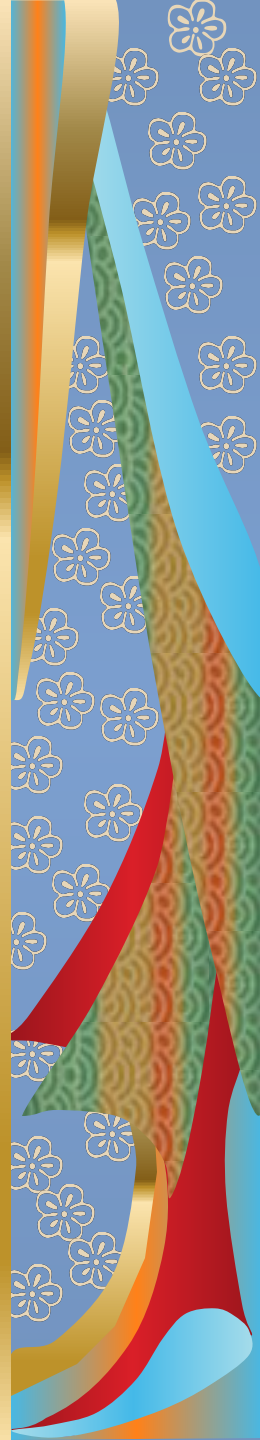
Usually there is a small toy in the middle. Often there is a joke on a piece of paper, too.



OPEN YOUR HEARTS TO
KINDNESS AND CHARITY!



GOD BLESS
YOU!



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