



The History of the Christmas Tree

The exact origin of the Christmas tree seems to be under much debate, but it is relatively safe to say that this symbol evolved from a Pagan tradition. It is felt that because during the winter when the days became shorter many feared the sun would eventually disappear forever. The deciduous trees, bushes and crops died or hibernated for the winter, but the evergreen tree remained green. The Pagans felt that these trees had magical powers that enabled them to withstand the rigors of winter.

Not having evergreen trees, the ancient Egyptians considered the palm tree to symbolize resurrection. When the winter solstice arrived, they brought green date palm leaves into their homes.

The Romans celebrated the winter solstice with a fest in honor of the god of agriculture, Saturnus. They decorated their houses with greens and placed 12 lights on their tree in honor of the Sun god and exchanged gifts. They gave coins for prosperity, pastries for happiness and lamps to light one's journey through life.

Centuries ago in Great Britain, woods priests called Druids used evergreens during mysterious winter solstice rituals. They used holly and mistletoe as symbols of eternal life, and placed evergreen branches over doors to keep away evil spirits.

Later in the Middle Ages, Germans and Scandinavians placed evergreen trees inside their homes or just outside their doors to show their hope in the forthcoming spring.

There is one Christian legend that about 1,000 years ago in Germany when St. Boniface was converting the German people to Christianity, it is said that he came across a group of Pagans that were worshipping an oak tree which was once considered sacred to the Pagans. St. Boniface cut down the oak tree, it miraculously split into four pieces, revealing an evergreen tree growing from the center of the oak stump. This symbolized the death of Paganism and the establishment of Christianity.

In the 7th century a monk from Devonshire went to Germany to teach the Word of God. He used the triangular shape of the Fir Tree to describe the Holy Trinity. The converted people began to then revere the Fir Tree as God's Tree and by the 12th Century were hanging them upside down from the ceilings at Christmastime as a symbol of Christianity.

Another legend is that Martin Luther began the decorating of trees to celebrate Christmas. In the year 1500, one crisp Christmas Eve, Martin was walking through snow-covered woods and was struck by the beauty of a group of small evergreens. Their branches dusted with snow shimmered in the moonlight. When he returned home, he set up a little fir tree indoors so he could share the story with his children. He decorated it with candles, which he lighted to simulate the reflections of the starlit heaven – the heaven that looked down over Bethlehem on the first Christmas Eve.

Christmas markets were set up in German towns around this time and at these markets, bakers would make shaped gingerbreads and wax ornaments and people would buy them as souvenirs and take home and place on their Christmas Trees.

The trend to have the decorated trees into the English homes was credited to have been in the 17th century when German born Prince Albert, who was the husband of Queen Victoria brought the first Christmas tree to Windsor Castle. This tree was decorated with hand blown glass ornaments and Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and her children were illustrated in the London News standing around their Christmas Tree, so this immediately became fashionable in Britain.

The tradition of having Christmas Trees is said to have crossed the Atlantic with the Hessian soldiers during the Revolutionary War.

The Christmas Tree market was born in 1851 when a Catskill farmer hauled two ox sleds of evergreens into New York city and sold them all. By 1900, one in five American families had a Christmas Tree and 20 years later the custom was nearly universal. Christmas tree farms sprang up during the depression as nurserymen couldn't sell their evergreens for landscaping, so they cut them for Christmas trees.

President Franklin Pierce (1804-1869) arranged to have the first Christmas Tree in the White House during the mid-1850's. President Calvin Coolidge (1885-1933) started the National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony on the White House Lawn in 1923.



Merry 
 *Christmas*