

FUMC ESL Advanced and High Intermediate Lesson

Christmas Symbols:



Star: When Jesus was born three wise men (magi) came from Asia to see this new king who had been born. To find him, they followed a star in the sky that guided him to Bethlehem. The tradition that stars mark the birth of important people was common long before Christianity and occurs in many religions.

Red and Green: Red symbolizes blood and death. Green represents new life, just as the green growth of new plants in spring brings us out of a cold, dead winter. These two colors became significant to Christians because Jesus will be executed at a young age because of his beliefs (red), but will live again and bring us all hope of new life (green).



Candy Cane: The red and white striped candy cane is bent in the shape of a shepherd's crook. When Jesus was born an angel appeared to some shepherds who were attending their flocks in the fields. She told them about the birth of Jesus. They left their sheep and went to see this new king of the world.



Mistletoe: Mistletoe is a plant that grows in trees instead of in the ground. It has small white berries. In medieval Europe it was considered a magical plant and was used in healing potions. It is the symbol of immortality. There is an ancient Scandinavian tradition of kissing underneath the mistletoe.



Candles: Candles represent Jesus, the "light of the world". Since the earliest times, man has associated darkness with evil and light with good. So when light comes into the world it brings freedom from evil and hope for a new day.



Bells: Church bells call the faithful to worship on Sunday and holy days. Christmas is one of the holiest days for Christians, so bells are symbols of this day.



Christmas Trees: Evergreen trees which remain green even in the depth of winter remind Christians of the hope of eternal life.



Santa Claus: Santa Claus is an abbreviation for Saint Nicolas. Saint Nicholas was an early Christian saint who performed many miracles. Legend says that a man was going to have to sell his three daughters into slavery because he did not have enough money to keep them. St. Nicholas heard of this and during the night tossed three golden balls (one for each daughter) through the windows of this man's house. The gold allowed the man to keep his daughters. Saint Nicholas was originally portrayed wearing rich bishop's robes with a white fur collar. Gradually, the robe has changed into a bright red robe with fur collar. In medieval days, children hung their socks or stockings on the mantle or the windowsill hoping that Saint Nicholas would bring them gifts. The gifts were most commonly fruits, nuts or sweets. Today we place gifts under the Christmas tree to be opened on Christmas morning. Many Christians do not approve of Santa Claus because they believe it distracts from the religious meaning of the holiday. Many feel that Santa Claus causes Christmas to be a holiday about buying and receiving gifts instead of about Jesus message of hope and love.

Discussion:

If you are Christian, talk about ways you celebrate Christmas in your country. Are there any differences in how your culture celebrates Christmas ?

Many Americans feel Christmas has become too much about gift buying and receiving. We call this obsession with buying things, "materialism". Do you see examples of materialism around Christmas time?