Mothers' Union Meeting - November 5th 2025, Washingborough with Heighington

Christmas is filled with symbols, many of which have lost their Christian symbolism in a secular world. Here I hope you will find the Christian meaning of many of our Christmas symbols.

Let us pray, Lord, the symbolism of Christmas is replete with many secular symbols, all of which point to You. You are the Beginning and the End, the Word made flesh, God in a manger. Help me, Lord, to imitate Your lowliness so that I can serve You well. Amen.

HOLLY: Holly is an extremely hardy shrub that can be grown in most places, making it one of the few plants that can withstand temperatures from 110 degrees F to – 40 degrees F. Holly plants are noted for their attractive red berries and glossy, sharp-toothed green leaves which remain on the plant year round.
The holly bush represents immortality, a trait that God has given to each human being. We are all destined to live forever, either with the Lord or separated from Him.
The sharp-toothed edge of the holly leaf reminds Christians of the crown of thorns with which the soldiers mocked Our Lord during His Passion.
As a Christmas symbol, the red holly berry represents Christ's blood, shed for all people including those who reject Him.

IVY At Christmas, ivy represents eternal life and fidelity due to its evergreen nature and persistent clinginess. It was also a symbol of womanhood and was used in winter solstice and Christmas celebrations to ward off evil spirits and bring peace into the home.

Symbolic meanings of ivy

- Eternal life: Ivy stays green through the winter, symbolizing life continuing through the cold season.
- Fidelity and loyalty: Its tenacious, clinging nature makes it a symbol of faithfulness and loyalty. Ancient priests gave ivy wreaths to newlyweds to symbolize a strong and lasting bond.
- Womanhood: In some folklore, ivy is considered the "female" plant, while prickly holly is the "male" plant. When combined, they are said to bring peace between a husband and wife.
- Protection: Historically, it was used in decorations to ward off evil spirits and illness.

Historical traditions

- Pagan and ancient Roman traditions: Ivy was associated with the god Dionysus (Bacchus in Roman myth) and was used in celebrations like the winter festival of Saturnalia.

- Medieval and early Christian traditions: It was brought indoors with other evergreens to bring life into the home during winter. Early Christians also saw it as a symbol of prosperity and charity.
- Christmas carol: The famous carol, "The Holly and the Ivy," highlights the two plants' deep roots in holiday folklore. In one interpretation, the ivy represents the Virgin Mary, while the holly represents the crown of thorns.

MISTLETOE: Mistletoe is an aerial parasite that has no roots of its own. It lives off the tree to which it attaches itself and, without that tree, it would die. Mistletoe is a Christmas symbol of our love which derives from and exists only because God loves us. God, Who is Love, created us in love and caused us to be able to love.

FRUIT: People give fruit baskets as gifts. At the turn of the last century, good children would receive their only orange of the year as a Christmas gift. As a Christmas symbol, fruit recalls the twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit. These Fruits result from the activity of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in our lives. The twelve Fruits of the Holy Spirit are: Charity (Love), Joy, Peace, Patience, Benignity (Kindness), Goodness, Long-Suffering (Patiently Bearing Suffering over a Long Period of Time), Mildness, Faith, Modesty, Continency (Purity), Chastity. And of course fruit is in our **Christmas puddings** and **Mince Pies** with all the message of goodness that brings.

EVERGREENS: In cool climates, many plants are deciduous. That is, they lose their leaves in the fall, remain dead-looking all winter, and begin to sprout new growth in the spring. Evergreens are, broadly speaking, any type of plant that retains its green leaves or needles all year round. As Christian Christmas symbols, evergreens symbolize perseverance and resiliency to adversity. They remind us of Jesus' words, "The ones who persevere to the end shall be saved." Our faith must remain vibrant in all spiritual, economic, political, and social environments.

WREATH: Wreaths combine several Christmas symbols including holly, fruit, mistletoe, evergreens, tinsel, and so on, all of which retain their symbolism on the wreath. The word wreath comes from an old English word, meaning to writhe or twist. Greens twisted into a circle made "crowns" for kings, military leaders, and athletes. Because wreaths, due to their circular shape, symbolize eternity, the circle of life, and endless hope, they began to be used at Christmas and hung. Because a wreath has neither beginning nor end, but is a continuous circle, it symbolized God Himself.

CHRISTMAS TREE: In the early 700's, Saint Boniface, who converted the German people to Christianity, demolished the Oak of Thor, the mighty sacred tree worshipped by the Saxons. From its roots grew a fir tree which Boniface took as a sign of the Christian faith. About the year 1500, inspired by a snow covered fir tree, a small tree was brought indoors and decorated with candles in honor of Christ's birth. By the 18th century, the custom of decorating a Christmas tree was well established in France, Germany, and Austria.
Thus, the Christmas tree represents the original Tree of Paradise, the burning bush which spoke to Moses, the branch of Jesse from which Jesus was born, the life-giving tree of the cross of Christ,

and the tree which St. John the Apostle saw in the Book of Revelations whose leaves have medicine for the people and which yields fruit each month for the healing of the nations. Because it is green year-round, the evergreen tree represents hope. Its needles and its narrow crest point upward, turning our thoughts to heaven.
Because the tree is cut down and then erected again, it is a symbol of Christ's resurrection. The evergreen tree represents eternal life, a reflection of Jesus Christ's promise of everlasting life for believers.
Lights and ornaments can symbolize Christ as the light of the world, the joy of salvation, and the blessings of life.

TINSEL: Tinsel are the thin, metallic strands that are used in Christmas decorations. A legend tells of a poor, faithful family who wished to decorate a Christmas tree in honor of the Christ Child but who had no money for decorations. In the night, spiders came and spun webs across the tree. Then the Christ Child, honoring the family's faith, turned the threads into silver.

CANDLES AND CHRISTMAS LIGHTS: Candles and Christmas lights represent Christ, the Light of the World. Candles and Christmas lights also remind us that we are to be light to others, to show them the way to Christ.

GIFTS: For many people, gifts define Christmas. They focus on the giving and receiving of gifts instead of on our greatest Gift Jesus Who gave Himself to us at Christmas. The wise men who brought their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh to honor the infant King in Bethlehem's manger have inspired the concept of gift giving at Christmas. God also gives us the gifts of the Holy Spirit which help us to follow God's direction in our lives. The seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit are Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Knowledge, Piety, Fortitude, and Fear of the Lord (Awe of God's Greatness and Power). Gifts: Gifts placed under the tree honor the gifts brought by the wise men to the baby Jesus. They also remind people of the greatest gift, Jesus himself, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

SANTA CLAUS: Santa Claus is an alteration of Saint Nicholas, fourth Bishop of Myra (located in modern Turkey) whose feast day is December 6. Saint Nicholas was known for taking to heart Jesus' words about almsgiving being very generous to the poor, but most often anonymously. The most famous story concerns three young women whose destitute father was going to force them into prostitution in order to survive. To prevent this heinous crime, Nicholas, on three different nights, anonymously went to their father's house and threw a bag of gold though an open window. The bishop's mitre and fur trimmed red winter garments were corrupted into Santa's outfit, while Saint Nicholas's generosity was transferred to the "jolly old man" who delivers gifts anonymously on Christmas Eve. We know this modern visual of Santa Claus as the jolly red clad little man is based on the Coca Cola Advert.

STOCKING: The tradition of placing gifts into Christmas stockings come from another tradition regarding Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra. In this tradition, the three women who needed dowries in order to be kept from a life of prostitution had hung their stockings by the fireplace to dry. When

the saint came by to help them, the money that he threw into their house fortuitously landed in the stockings.

CRACKERS

- **The Loud Bang/Surprise:** The unexpected noise is compared to the sudden appearance and announcement of the angels to the shepherds, bringing the surprising "Good News" of Jesus' birth to ordinary people.
- **The Joke/Riddle:** The often poor jokes or riddles are linked to the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, which made little sense until Jesus' birth fulfilled them, providing the "answer" to the riddle of God's plan.
- **The Paper Crown/Hat**: This symbolizes Jesus as the King of Kings, though he came humbly as a baby in a manger, not an earthly ruler with a traditional crown. Wearing the hat reminds people that God wants us to make Jesus the King of our own lives.
- **The Small Gift:** The token gift represents God's ultimate gift to humanity: his son, Jesus Christ, who came to earth for the salvation of all people. It also harks back to the valuable gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh brought by the Wise Men

STARS: Represents the Star of Bethlehem that led the wise men to Jesus's birthplace. It is often placed at the top of the tree.

ANGEL: Angels are God's messengers. They appear several times in Scripture and continue to protect us today as each person has his or her own guardian angel. The angel Gabriel announced the birth of Christ and also told St. Joseph to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt to escape Herod's plan to kill the Christ Child. Angels appeared to the shepherds when Christ was born, singing and praising God and instructing the shepherds to hurry to Bethlehem to see the newborn King. Angels symbolize God's presence, and remind us of obedience to Him and praise of Him.
Having an Angel or fairy on the tree tradition is probably from the pagan ritual of sacrifice - linked to St Boniface and the christmas tree legend

CANDY CANE: The candy cane is shaped like a shepherd's crook, reminding us that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, came into our world at Christmas. The red stripe symbolizes Christ's sacrifice and the white background His purity. Candy canes have a peppermint flavor, reminiscent of hyssop which had medicinal purposes. The peppermint flavor reminds us that our healing came at the price of Christ's life. The candy cane is meant to be broken and shared, just as Jesus' Body is broken and shared at every Eucharist.

CHRISTMAS BAUBLES

Shape: The sphere represents eternity, wholeness, and the cyclical nature of life, as it has no beginning or end.

Light and joy: Their vibrant and sparkling surfaces are meant to represent the light and joy of the holiday season.

Nostalgia and tradition: They evoke memories of family, childhood, and treasured moments from past holidays.

Personal expression: Hobby-inspired or personalized baubles allow people to reflect their interests and passions, creating talking points for the season. Also reminds us of places and people and tradition.

Color symbolism

- Red: Represents the blood and sacrifice of Christ.
- Green: Symbolizes evergreen trees, renewal, rebirth, and the blessings of nature.
- Gold: Represents divinity, glory, and the gifts of life.
- Blue: Can symbolize peace, tranquility, and the Virgin Mary.
- White/Silver: Represents snow, heavenly glory, and salvation.

SNOWFLAKE In Christian symbolism, a snowflake represents purity, uniqueness, and God's grace and love. Its unique, intricate structure symbolizes the individual creation of every person, while its white, soft blanket can symbolize how God covers sins and makes things new. Snowflakes also represent the concept of strength in unity, as individually fragile snowflakes can collectively have great power.

Uniqueness and individuality

- Each flake is unique: Like each snowflake, every person is made unique by God, as noted in Psalm 139:14, "I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made".
- God knows each individual: Just as snowflakes have different shapes, God knows and calls each person by name, according to Christian sources.

BELLS: Bells were part of the Jewish high priest's garb. Christmas bells not only symbolize the joy of Christmas; they also remind us that Christ is the High Priest. They also ring out the good news Of Jesus birth and call us in to worship.

CHRISTMAS CAROLS: Christmas carols remind us of the angels who announced the birth of Christ by singing, "Glory to God in the highest, and peace to His people on earth!" Song has been a part of worship since the beginning. Miriam composed and sang a hymn of Thanksgiving when God delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians. David sang and danced before the Ark of the Lord when he was accompanying back to Jerusalem after having rescued it from the Philistines. He composed the Psalms, all of which are to be sung. Many of the Psalms mention times when the Jewish people sang, some of which are: bringing in the harvest, going up to the temple, success over one's enemies. Jesus mentioned funeral songs in one of His exhortations. People use song as an expression of highest emotion. How fitting that we sing about the birth of Christ!

XMAS: While Xmas is seen by some as a secular way to "cross Christ out of Christmas," the word actually is an abbreviation for Christmas. Christ was often written as "XP" or "XT" and the Greek letter Chi X stood for Christ in the ancient Greek symbol for Christians.

With love and joy for the Christmas season!
Isabel