

The Meaning of Christmas Symbols

Christmas decorations are a wonderful part of this time of year, but did you realize that much of what we adorn our homes, workplaces, and churches with help to tell the Christmas story?

The Star and Candles

The Christmas star symbolizes the star of Bethlehem, which according to the Biblical story, guided the three kings to the baby Jesus. A star is also the heavenly sign of prophecy fulfilled long ago and the shining hope for humanity.

A candle brings light into our spaces. This represents the light that Jesus' birth brought to a broken, sinful world.

The Colours Red and Green

The colour red is used at Christmas to represent the blood of Jesus when he died on the cross. It's reflected in the colour of holly berries often found on wreaths.

Green is another popular colour at Christmastime signifying everlasting light and life. Romans decorated their houses with evergreen branches during the New Year, and the fir tree symbolized life during the winter. Jesus gives us the opportunity of new life.

The Wreath

The wreath is a circular, never-ending symbol of eternal love and rebirth. A wreath with red holly berries alludes to the crown of thorns worn by Christ at his crucifixion. Holly is quite sharp on each point of the leaf.

<https://www.thespruce.com/legends-explaining-the-christmas-symbols-1254302>

The Christmas Tree

By the early Middle Ages, the legend had grown that when Christ was born in the dead of winter, every tree throughout the world miraculously shook off its ice and snow and produced new shoots of green. At the same time, Christian missionaries preaching to Germanic and Slavic peoples were taking a more lenient approach to cultural practices—such as evergreen trees. These missionaries believed that the Incarnation proclaimed Christ's lordship over those natural symbols that had previously been used for the worship of pagan gods. Not only individual human beings, but cultures, symbols, and traditions could be converted.

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/2008/december/why-do-we-have-christmas-trees.html>

Fun Fact

Many early Christmas trees seem to have been hung upside down from the ceiling using chains!

The first person to bring a Christmas tree into a house, in the way we know it today, may have been the 16th century German preacher Martin Luther. A story is told that, one night before Christmas, he was walking through the forest and looked up to the stars shining through the tree branches. It was so beautiful, that he went home and told his children that it reminded him of Jesus, who left the stars of heaven to come to earth at Christmas.

<https://www.whychristmas.com/customs/trees.shtml>