



TEN SYMBOLS OF CHRISTMAS

LIGHTS. TREES. STARS. BELLS. EVER WONDER WHAT ALL THESE CHRISTMAS SYMBOLS MIGHT MEAN?

By Charlotte Larcabal and Eric B. Murdock

Church Magazines

With all the hype of the holidays, you're sure to see Christmas decorations everywhere. It's a huge part of celebrating Christmas! But have you ever thought about how some of those traditional decorations can help us get in touch with the true spirit of the season? If we look at them in the right way, we can allow them to help us remember Jesus Christ in our Christmas celebrations as Christians have done for centuries.

1

THE STAR

IT'S HARD TO GO ANYWHERE DURING CHRISTMAS WITHOUT SEEING STARS HANGING FROM STREET LAMPS OR SITTING ON TOP OF CHRISTMAS TREES. **THE STAR IS ONE OF THE MOST RECOGNIZABLE SYMBOLS OF THE HOLIDAY. IT REPRESENTS THE STAR THAT APPEARED IN THE SKY WHEN JESUS CHRIST WAS BORN.** FIVE YEARS BEFORE JESUS WAS BORN, SAMUEL THE LAMANITE PROPHESIED OF THE SIGNS OF THE SAVIOR'S BIRTH, INCLUDING THE APPEARANCE OF A BRIGHT NEW STAR (SEE HELAMAN 14:5). THE STAR LED THE WISE MEN TO JESUS (SEE MATTHEW 2:2) AND REMINDS US TO FOLLOW THE LIGHT OF THE SAVIOR JUST AS THE WISE MEN FOLLOWED THE LIGHT OF THE STAR TO FIND HIM.

2

LIGHTS AND CANDLES

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles has taught: "Many of our memorable and enduring Christmas traditions include different kinds of lights—lights on trees, lights in and on our homes, candles on our tables. May the beautiful lights of every holiday season remind us of Him who is the source of all light."¹

Christmas lights can remind us that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. They can also remind us to be lights to others and to help others come unto Christ.

For centuries, candles have brought brightness and warmth to the season. Candles can also represent the light of the star that appeared at the birth of the Savior, and like other lights, remind us that He is the Light of the World. Did you know candles were often used to decorate Christmas trees before electric lights were invented?

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GETTY IMAGES; THE HOLY NIGHT BY CARL BLOCH





4

POINSETTIAS

THE POINSETTIA ORIGINATES FROM MEXICO, AND LIKE THE EVERGREEN TREE, IT IS A PLANT THAT THRIVES DURING THE WINTER AND SYMBOLIZES NEW LIFE. BUT IT DOESN'T STOP THERE! THEIR SHAPE RESEMBLES A STAR, LIKE THE ONE THAT LED THE WISE MEN TO JESUS. **RED POINSETTIAS CAN REMIND US OF THE BLOOD THAT CHRIST SPILLED FOR US. ELDER NEAL A. MAXWELL (1926–2004) OF THE QUORUM OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES TAUGHT, "HAVING BLED AT EVERY PORE, HOW RED [CHRIST'S] RAIMENT MUST HAVE BEEN IN GETHSEMANE, HOW CRIMSON THAT CLOAK!"² WHITE POINSETTIAS CAN SYMBOLIZE HIS PURITY (SEE MORONI 7:48).**

3

TREES

Even before Christ's birth, trees that stayed green all year long carried special meaning for people. **A green, thriving tree in the dead of winter reminded people of hope and new life.** Because of Jesus Christ, we can have everlasting life (see 3 Nephi 5:13), so we can choose to see the evergreen tree as a natural symbol of Him and His gift to us.



6



WREATHS

TRADITIONALLY, WREATHS ARE MADE OF EVERGREENS SUCH AS PINE BRANCHES OR HOLLY. THEIR CIRCULAR SHAPE CAN REPRESENT ETERNITY (SEE D&C 35:1). WREATHS HUNG ON DOORS OR IN WINDOWS ARE LIKE A SYMBOLIC INVITATION FOR THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS TO FILL OUR HOMES WITH THE JOY OF THE SEASON.



5

HOLLY

Because its red berries and prickly green leaves last all year round, holly is used as a Christmas decoration all over the world. **The sharp edges of the holly leaf can remind us of the crown of thorns placed on the Savior's head (see Matthew 27:29).** The red holly berry can remind us of His blood shed for all of us. Christians have long seen these symbols. In fact, in some Scandinavian languages, the word for holly is "Christ-thorn."





7

CANDY CANES

Perhaps a better name for the candy cane is “candy crook.” They can remind us of the staffs carried by the shepherds who visited the baby Jesus. During Christ’s time, a shepherd’s staff often had a crook, or bend, at the top that was used to hook sheep by the neck to gently lead them to food or water or to protect them from harm. **As you enjoy a candy cane, remember that Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd (see John 10:11, 14). If we choose to follow**

Him, He will gently lead us to safety and peace.



8

BELLS

FOR CENTURIES, BELLS HAVE BEEN RUNG TO ANNOUNCE THE ARRIVAL OF THE CHRISTMAS SEASON. THEY CAN SYMBOLIZE THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE BIRTH OF CHRIST WHEN ANGELS IN HEAVEN PRAISED GOD AND DECLARED, “GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN” (LUKE 2:14).

NOTES

1. David A. Bednar, “[The Light and the Life of the World](#),” 2015 First Presidency Christmas devotional, [broadcasts.lds.org](#).
2. Neal A. Maxwell, [Apr. 1987 general conference](#).

9

STOCKINGS

If you think about it, it's a bit strange for someone to put goodies in your old sock. But like many Christmas traditions, the tradition of Christmas stockings comes from an old legend. A long time ago (so the story goes), a poor man had three daughters and couldn't afford to give them a dowry (money or goods given to the groom's family by the bride's family). In those days, it was very hard for a woman to get married without a dowry. A Christian bishop named Nicholas heard about the problem and wanted to help, but the man refused to accept money. One night, Nicholas threw three balls made of pure gold in through the open window of the man's house. Each one landed in a stocking hung by the fire to dry. The next morning, each daughter found a gold ball in her stocking. With this bounty, they were all able to get married.

Stockings can remind us of the importance of service. The greatest example of service is Jesus Christ. He always "went about doing good" (Acts 10:38). Take some time to think about the Savior's selfless acts of service. How can you give Christlike service and show kindness to others?



10



GIFTS

CHRISTMAS IS THE SEASON OF GIVING.

Remember the Wise Men who came to see Jesus? They "presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Matthew 2:11), but the greatest gift of all came from our Heavenly Father: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). As you open your brightly wrapped presents on Christmas morning, remember that the Savior is the true gift of Christmas. **NE**