

# Did you know...

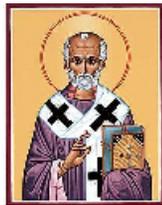
## Candy Canes

The candy cane began as a religious symbol. There are several tales, but the most prominent one tells of a candy maker who wanted something that would be a symbol of witness for the birth, ministry and death of Jesus. The pure white candy is said to represent the purity of Jesus' birth and the sinless nature of the Savior. It is made hard to remind us of the love and solid foundation God provides for us. If held with the curved end down, it looks like the letter "J" for Jesus. Held with the curve at the top, we are reminded of the shepherd's crook used to gather in the sheep. The red stripes on the candy remind us of the scourging Jesus received and the blood He shed for us.



## St. Nicholas

The real Santa Claus is called St. Nicholas. He was born into a wealthy family in Turkey in 325 and orphaned at an early age. He had always read his Bible, and decided he could best serve others by using his inheritance to help the poor in the area. One day, he heard about a farmer who was so poor he was unable to feed his family. Rather than starve, he decided to take his three daughters into town to sell them. Nicholas heard about the poor man's plight, and the night before he was to make the journey to sell his daughters, Nicholas visited the farmer's house. All was dark, so Nicholas quietly slipped three bags of money through the window and crept away without saying a word to anyone. The farmer awoke the next morning to discover that he would not have to sell his daughters after all. Because he was known as a kind and generous man, it didn't take long for people in the region to associate Nicholas with the gift left for the farmer, and many attempted to mimic his quiet generosity. Over time, Nicholas entered the priesthood, and eventually became a bishop. He continued to practice remarkable acts of kindness, setting a fine example for others, often reminding them that the gift was in the giving rather than in the receiving. Today, young people all over the world wake up on December 6th, St. Nicholas' feast day, to discover that their shoes have been filled with prayers, religious medals, candies and other treats while they were asleep.



## The Creche

In the year 1223, Francis of Assisi was preparing to celebrate Christmas. He desperately wanted all the people in the region to share in the joy of the birth of Jesus, and thought perhaps an increased understanding of the event might be possible if people could see what the scene at the manger in Bethlehem really might have looked like. He sent a message to a nearby friend and nobleman, asking him to prepare the scene. When the faithful arrived for Mass that night, they discovered a natural cave and a manger inside that was filled with hay. Even a small baby was said to have been seen in the manger there on that night, and many wonderful things were reported to have happened after that evening. The re-enactment of the birth of the Christ child became a popular event and continues to help tell the story even today.

## Advent Wreaths

Advent wreaths are beautiful and fragrant reminders of the coming of Christ. We put them in our homes, laden with greenery and light, symbolizing 4000 years of waiting. The circular wreath, like God, has no beginning and no end. Green boughs indicate hope, just as the green of spring reminds us of new life. There are traditionally five candles used for the wreath; three are purple to represent the royalty of Jesus, one is pink to represent joy, and one is a large white candle, called the Christ candle, to stand in the middle of the wreath. One purple candle is lit for the first Sunday of the Advent season. A second one is lit for the second Sunday of the season, and the third Sunday brings the lighting of the pink candle. The light continues to build when the final purple candle is lit the fourth week, and when Christmas finally arrives, the Christ candle can be lit...telling us the waiting is over!



*The Latin word 'adventus' means a coming.*

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