



# JOY TO THE WORLD

Christmas has become a time of love and giving, transcending religion and beliefs

The festive season brings people together regardless of their beliefs. 'Christmas is the festival of the human heart, when the universe conspires to raise the vibratory level of consciousness on earth to one of peace and love toward ourselves and one another. When heavenly forces inspire us to shift our focus away from fear and towards joy and healing,' says Sonia Choquette, author of *Your Heart's Desire*. We experience this when taking part in the joys of the season – choosing gifts for loved ones, decorating the tree, being with family, lighting candles. So where did all those traditions start?

## THE SPECIAL DATE

Pagans in the northern hemisphere celebrated the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year, on December 22, for centuries before the coming of Christ.

For them it was symbolic of the rebirth promised by the lengthening of the days. Called Yule, it was the time of the great feast, when the last winter stores would be used, knowing the sun was on its way back to bring new life.

On December 25 the ancient Egyptians celebrated the birth of the son of the goddess Isis, the Arabs the birth of the moon, and Romans the festival of Saturnalia, for Saturn, god of the harvest. Feasting, partying and gift giving were common to all of them.

It was a special day in many cultures and religions long before the existence of Christ. Then in 350AD, Pope Julius I declared that Christ's birth would be celebrated on December 25, to make it as painless as possible for Romans to convert to Christianity.



The first Australian Christmas service was celebrated on December 25, 1788, at Sydney Cove by Reverend Johnson for Governor Phillip.

## GIFT STOCKINGS

Saint Nick dropped gold coins down the chimney of the house of three poor girls who had no money. The coins landed in stockings which they had set by the fire to dry. Parents would fill their children's stockings with oranges for health throughout winter.

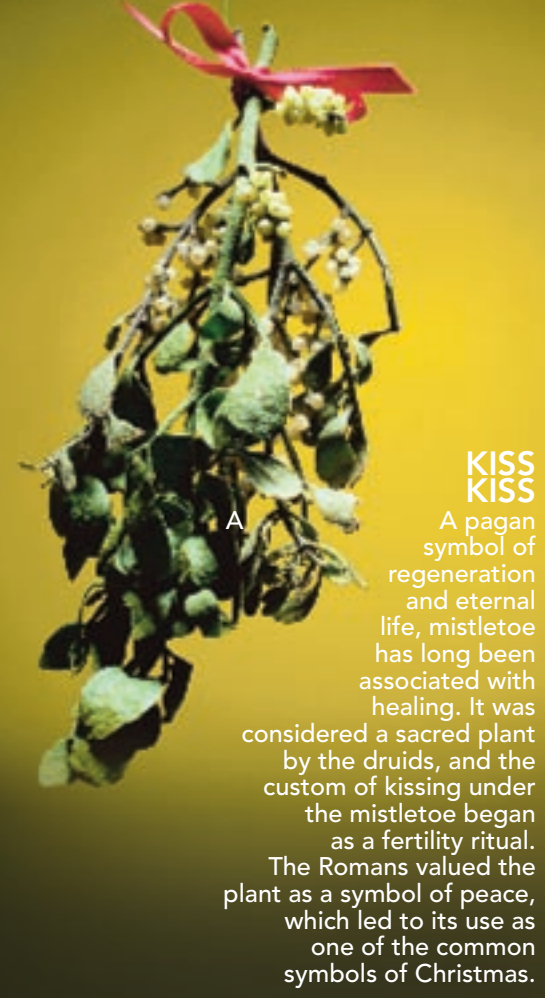
## SANTA CLAUS

The Scandinavian god Odin was said to ride through the winter sky with elves, rewarding men with gifts.



Later the bishop of Myra (now Demre in Turkey) was added to the myth. Born in 280AD, he was generous to the poor and loved children. After his death he became Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of maidens, sailors and infants. In the 1300s in France he began giving gifts, wearing red and white bishop robes.

The modern description comes from an 1822 poem, *The Night Before Christmas*, by Clement C. Moore. Cartoonist Thomas Nast illustrated it between 1863 and 1886. But today's jolly image of Santa was created by Coca-Cola for an ad campaign in the 1930s.



## KISS KISS

A pagan symbol of regeneration and eternal life, mistletoe has long been associated with healing. It was considered a sacred plant by the druids, and the custom of kissing under the mistletoe began as a fertility ritual. The Romans valued the plant as a symbol of peace, which led to its use as one of the common symbols of Christmas.

## CHRISTMAS CARDS

In Australia, mail volume exceeds 50 million items every day in December – almost triple that of other months.

## NATIVITY SCENES

Motifs from the story of Christ's birth were common early in the church's history, but Francis of Assisi developed the nativity play around 1200, persuading Italian peasants to play Mary, Joseph and the others to understand the story.

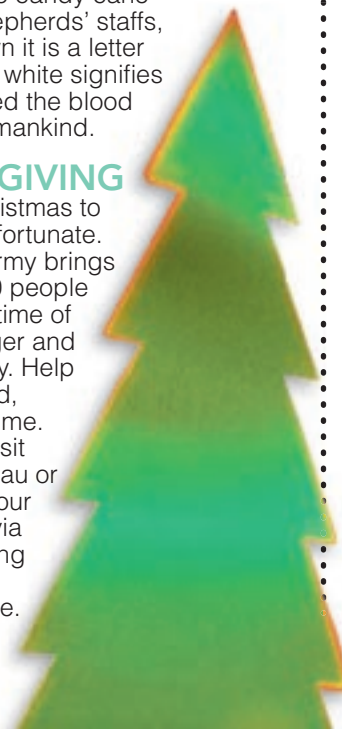
Later that century artisans in Naples sculpted the iconic figures for churches, and the scene first appeared in people's homes there around that time.

## CANDY CANES

The shape of the candy cane is that of the shepherds' staffs, and upside down it is a letter J for Jesus. The white signifies purity and the red the blood Jesus shed for mankind.

## SPIRIT OF GIVING

Dig deep at Christmas to help those less fortunate. The Salvation Army brings hope to 300,000 people at Christmas, a time of loneliness, hunger and despair for many. Help by donating food, money, toys or time. Call 13 32 30, visit [www.salvos.org.au](http://www.salvos.org.au) or drop things at your local Salvos or via the Kmart Wishing Tree Appeal or Coles Food Drive.



## CANDLES

In Victorian times, candles were placed in the windows of homes to let the poor know there was shelter available for them there.