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Why We Have Christmas Trees

By Sherry Sorrell

Most people can't imagine Christmas without a Christmas tree; a tradition practiced by people of all religions and none throughout the world. Where did it begin? How did it come to be a worldwide December ritual?

Long before Christianity began, plants that were evergreen had a special meaning for many ancient people. During Winter's short days and long nights, evergreens reminded them that the sun would come again bringing Spring and nature's bounty. Romans, Egyptians, Celts and Vikings all had Winter celebrations when they brought greenery into their homes to hang by doors and windows. Just as we do today, they brought in holly and ivy and mistletoe, plus fir, spruce and pine boughs to make into wreaths and garland.

One origin story of the Christmas tree we know today is from the 16th century German tale of preacher Martin Luther. Walking home one night practicing his sermon, he was inspired by starlight shining through the branches of evergreen trees. He was so moved that he cut down a tree and took it home to his wife and children, adding candles to the branches so they could understand his experience. He taught that the pyramid shape of the tree represented the Trinity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with the candles representing Christ as the light of the world.



The custom of Christmas trees grew mainly in Europe until the 1840s when Queen Victoria's German husband, Prince Albert brought his family tradition to Windsor Castle. Just a few years later, in the 1850's, the Christmas tree tradition began its sweep across America. The first Christmas tree lot was in New York City in 1851. Shortly, Woolworth's department store was selling glass ornaments imported from Germany, and Thomas Edison's electric lights on a string began replacing candles.

Perhaps the most popular Christmas tree is at Rockefeller Center. It is usually a Norway Spruce 70 - 100 feet tall, topped with a 550-lb Swarovski crystal star and lit with 30,000 energy-efficient solar powered LEDs.

Of the 25-30 million real trees sold in the US each year, the most popular ones in East Texas are Fraser Fir, Douglas Fir, Scotch Pine, Noble Fir and White Pine. How do you tell them apart? One easy way is to look at the needles. If the twig has two, three or five needles coming out of the same spot, it is a pine. Scotch pine has two needles in one spot and White pine has five. If the needles attach to the twig individually, it is either spruce or fir. Next, pull off a needle and roll it between your fingers. If it is flat and does not roll, it is a fir. If the needle has four sides so you can easily roll it between your fingers, it is a spruce.

Whether your tree is real or artificial, you put it up Thanksgiving weekend or Christmas Eve, you are just one of billions of earthlings that loves a beautifully decorated Christmas tree.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com, or visit txmg.org/hendersonmg.