



The Christmas tree

A

beautifully decorated evergreen tree with coloured lights has become one of the most beloved and well known holiday symbols.

The tradition of a holiday tree has been around since ancient times and has played an important part in winter celebrations for many centuries. Many pagan festivals used trees when honouring their gods and spirits. In Northern Europe the Vikings considered the evergreen a reminder that the darkness and cold of winter would end and the green of spring would return. The Druids of ancient England and France decorated oak trees with fruit and candles to honour their gods of harvests. At the festival Saturnalia the Romans decorated trees with trinkets and candles.

There have also been many legends surrounding the Christmas tree. In one story Saint Boniface, an English monk, came upon a group of pagans who had gathered around an oak tree and were preparing to sacrifice a child. To stop the sacrifice and save the child, the Saint flattened the oak tree with one blow of his fist. A small fir sprang up in its place, which Saint Boniface told the pagans was the Tree of Life and represented the life of Christ.

Another legend tells of Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant religion, walking through the woods late one night. As it was clear, many stars were shining through the branches of the trees giving the impression of twinkling lights. Luther was so inspired by the beauty of the sight that he cut down a small evergreen and brought it home. He recreated the stars by putting candles on the tree's branches.

The use of a Christmas tree indoors appears to have begun in Germany. German Christians would bring trees into their homes to decorate. In some areas evergreen trees were scarce so the families would build a Christmas pyramid, simple wooden structures which they decorated with branches and candles.

The tradition of the Christmas tree eventually spread throughout Europe. The English Royalty help popularize the tree in England by decorating the first Christmas tree at Windsor Castle in 1841. Prince Albert, husband of Queen Victoria, decorated the first English Christmas tree with candles, candies, fruits, and gingerbread.

When the German immigrants went to America they also brought along their Christmas trees. In the 1830's most Americans still considered the Christmas tree an oddity. One of the first public displays of a Christmas tree was set up by German settlers in Pennsylvania. At the time many still considered the tree to be a symbol of pagans and it wasn't until the late 1800's that Americans began accepting the Christmas tree.

Answer true or false. Correct the false statements orally.

The holiday tree is a Christian invention. ()

It was always used in December. ()

The Vikings liked evergreen trees in their festivals. ()

Other kind of trees could be decorated. ()

The Romans celebrated Christmas. ()

Martin Luther was the first person to put candles on a pine tree. ()

The first Christmas trees appeared in Germany. ()

Answer the questions

How long have people used a holiday tree?

When were those trees used?

What does the green symbolize?

How did ancient pagans decorate their trees?

What does the legend tell us about Saint Boniface?

Who was Martin Luther?

Why did he decorate a tree with candles?

Where was the Christmas tree used for the first time?

How did the Christmas tree get to America?
