

St. David's Holiday Tea Program 2025

Early December

Valerie Worth

When days
Grow short
And bitter,

The drab
Streets, the
Bleak years,

The bare
Bushes wait ---
Not for

Spring, but
Something sooner,
And better.

Christmas is Coming

Traditional

Christmas is coming,
The geese are getting fat,
Please to put a penny
In the old man's hat

If you haven't got a penny,
A ha-penny will do;
If you haven't got a ha'penny
Then God bless you!

I count the days to Christmas

Sophie Piper

I count the days to Christmas
and I watch the evening sky.
I want to see the angels
as to Bethlehem they fly.

I'm watching for the wise men
and the royal shining star.
Please may I travel with them?
Is the stable very far?

I count the days to Christmas
as we shop and bake and clean.
The lights and tinsel sparkle,
and yet deep inside I dream

that as we tell the story
of Lord Jesus and his birth,
the things of every day will fade
as heaven comes to the earth.

Christmas Night

Traditional

Softly, softly, through the darkness
Snow is falling.
Sharply, sharply, in the meadows
Lambs are calling.

Coldly, coldly, all around me
Winds are blowing.
Brightly, brightly, up above me
Stars are glowing.

It's Christmas Time

Sophie Piper

It's Christmas time,
When angels come
To earth from heaven above.
Take a golden gift box
And fill it full of love.

It's Christmas time!
The angels' song
Is heard upon the ground
Open up the gift box,
Let love shine all around.

All sing: *Hark, the Herald Angels Sing*

Narrator

Welcome to the St. David's Society Holiday Tea. Thank you for joining our celebration of some of the stories and traditions of the holiday season. Some of the festivities are well known, and

some are more obscure. Some are very recognizable. And . . . perhaps . . . some are new and different.

A Traditional Family Christmas

Bill Bliston

It wasn't until that first Christmas with your family
that I realized how we all do it differently,
how every family forges its own traditions, as bright
and distinct as any giant, shining star.

The way you laid out coal sacks instead of stockings;
the recital of a limerick before each present's opening,
Christopher Lee's heavy metal Christmas album
playing quietly in the background; the pre-breakfast snorkel;

the Dance of the Seven Baubles; the festive epaulettes;
lunch with its ptarmigan fritters in milk sauce,
the suet potatoes, and the sweet and sour popcorn;
the replenishing of glasses with red turkey wine.

sprout-rolling the park; the posting of a tinsel stick
through Mr. Jennings' letterbox; and back for an evening
of TV (some classical episodes of Panarama) and games
(Hoist the Pickle, No Elbows Please!, Speculum) then bed.

The next year you came to my family for Christmas.
You told me later that it was weird.

Narrator

That's certainly one holiday story! Most of us may not be quite that novel. But we all have our own stories.

During the texts and music that follows, I invite you to reflect on your stories . . . your traditions . . . your memories . . . And your holidays.

"And she brought forth her firstborn son . . ."

Narrator

There's one of our stories. It describes the birth of a boy named Jesus that many celebrate on December 25th.

The primary source, indeed, the only source, of information regarding that birth - the New Testament Gospels in the Bible - is very coy about any details. It never mentions any date of birth. Or any year of birth, for that matter.

BC:AD

U. A. Fanthorpe

This was the moment when Before
Turned into After, and the future's
Uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing
Happened. Only dull peace
Sprawled boringly over the earth.

This was the moment when even energetic Romans
Could find nothing better to do
Than counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment
When a few farm workers and three
Members of an obscure Persian sect

Walked haphazard by starlight straight
Into the kingdom of heaven.

Narrator

In the absence of hard facts, scholarship places that birth between 8 and 4 BC. Over 2,000 years ago.

But the days around December 25th were considered special long before the birth of Jesus. For at that time, before the Julian Calendar, Dec. 25th was the winter solstice. The shortest day of the year. There had been festivals and rituals to "call back the sun" for thousands of years before the birth of Jesus.

For hundreds of years before Jesus' birth the Roman festival of Saturnalia was celebrated for a week prior to the solstice. Festivities included abundant merrymaking: Much socializing with dancing and lots of food, gift-giving, and, interestingly, a temporary social inversion, when slave-owners served their slaves and senators dressed as plebians.

Sol Invictus - festivities praising the unconquered sun - was celebrated on the solstice and Kalends, a secular New Year festival closed out the old year.

In addition, for nearly 200 years before Jesus' birth, Jews celebrated Chanukah. It was - and remains in our time - a festival of lights celebrated in the weeks prior to the solstice.

No matter who the celebrants were or what the festivities were about, a common theme was turning back darkness with light.

Now Light 1,000 Christmas Lights

Traditional Swedish Carol

Now light one thousand Christmas lights
On dark earth here tonight;
One thousand, thousand also shine
To make the dark sky bright.

Oh, once when skies were starry bright,
In a stable cold and bare,
Sweet Mary bore a son that night,
A child both kind and fair.

He came to bring us love and light
To bring us peace on earth,
So let your candles shine tonight
And sing with joy and mirth.

All Sing: *Tôn Garol* (The Old Year is Fading), Welsh

Narrator

During the 2,000 years since the birth of Jesus, Christmas wasn't even celebrated in many times and places. The new Christian faith didn't celebrate births. At least not earthly births.

In many ways, it celebrated earthly death: The date when a saint died. The date when Jesus later died. Those were the dates of the follower's 'heavenly birth' - when believers entered the kingdom of God. As a result, Easter was a major holiday in the faith.

But the mid-winter festivities persisted, in Rome and across Europe. And the politics were changing.

In 313, Roman Emperor Constantine extended toleration to Christians throughout the Empire. And around 350, Dec 25th was designated by Julius I, Bishop of Rome, as the date for the mass celebrating the birth of Christ -- Christ's mass, or Christmas.

Why December 25th? According to some Biblical scholarship, April 17, May 29th and September 15th are all more likely. But all births – even one as inauspicious as this one may have appeared - can be a cause for joy and celebration.
And joy and celebration were everywhere on December 25th.

Almost from the start, the new Christmas holiday seemed to galvanize a well-developed pagan festival tradition. Over the following years, Archbishops from Constantinople to Canterbury warned against the dancing and 'feasting to excess' on the holy day.

In northern Europe, some form of the word 'Yule' occurs in all Germanic languages. It refers to a mid-wintertime that included celebrations to bring back the sun -- like Saturnalia.

As with Saturnalia, festivities included much feasting and drinking, bonfires, and lighting candles. The bright lights included 'yule logs', traditionally lit from the remaining embers of the previous year's yule log, and much greenery, such as holly, ivy and evergreens.

In Wales, the Mari Lwyd tradition dates from this time, if not earlier, during which a decorated horse skull is carried door to door with the reveler's rhymes and songs with residents. Eventually, the Mari Lwyd is invited inside, bringing merriment and good luck to the household.

St. David's Choir Sings Alfred Burt Carols: *Bright, Bright the Holly Berries*, and *Caroling, Caroling*

Deck the Halls Traditional Welsh Carol

Deck the halls with boughs of holly,
'Tis the season to be jolly,
Don we now our gay apparel,
Troll the ancient Yuletide carol.

See the blazing yule before us.
Strike the harp and join the chorus,
Follow me in merry measure,
While I tell of Christmas treasure.

Fast away the old year passes,
Hail the new, ye lads and lasses,
Sing we joyous all together,
Heedless of the wind and weather.

All sing: *Pwy sy'n dwad dros y bryn?* (Who is coming over the hill?)

Narrator

The Venerable Bede claims that, by the 7th century, 'Yule' in the British Isles meant Christmas. In 960, King Haaken of Norway Christianized the holiday and decreed that 'Jul' would be celebrated on December 25th to coincide with Christian festivities.

By the 13th century, the Welsh were celebrating Plygain - a very early morning candle-lit carol services that was celebrated as early as 3:00 AM.

But the partying continued. In 1647, Christmas was banned by the English Parliament, influenced by the Puritan ideology that disapproved of the excesses of the holiday drunkenness and the pagan elements of the celebrations. People still celebrated it, privately and publicly. But it wasn't restored officially until Charles II became king in 1660.

The English personified the holiday with Father Christmas about this time. He was depicted with a white beard and green or blue robes and crowned with holly.

As his popularity grew, Welsh-speaking families used either "Tad y Nadolig" (Father Christmas) or, more formally "Yr Hen Dy Wyth" (The Old Eighth House – according to Welsh folklore, Father Christmas lived in an old house believed to be his workshop.) But the Welsh like to make things their own, so beginning in the 1950s they latched on to "Sion Corn" – a figure from Welsh folklore, and this Welsh term for Father Christmas has now generally replaced the older terms.

New traditions brought Christmas to children. St. Nicholas started delivering small presents to children as early as 1600 in The Netherlands.

Father Christmas became associated with children and with gift-giving in the 1800s. Santa Claus appeared in the US in the 1800, but the jolly, plump bearded figure didn't galvanize public perceptions until a 1930s era Coco-Cola advertisement.

The written word began to speak to children with writings such as: "Yes, Virginia, There is a Santa Claus", " 'Twas the Night Before Christmas", and Mark Twain's "A Letter From Santa Claus" started to appear in the 1800s.

The House is Hushed Unknown

The house is hushed, the fire burns low,
But little eyes watch flakes of snow,
For Santa's near, the tales all say,
To bring the magic on this day.

Stockings hang, a hopeful row,
While dreams of toys begin to grow,
Of reindeer swift and bells that chime,
A perfect, precious Christmas time.

The tree lights glow, a starry sight,
Casting wonder, pure and bright,
With carols sung and cookies set,
A joy the grown-ups can't forget.

For in their laughter, clear and free,

Is Christmas, wild and full of glee,
A simple faith in what will be,
A child's own Christmas fantasy.

So let the sparkle fill the air,
With happy hearts beyond compare,
For Christmas truly lives and breathes,
In every little child who believes.

Each Christmas I Remember

Clarise Wilson

Each Christmas I remember
The ones of long ago;
I see our mantelpiece adorned
With stockings in a row.

Each Christmas finds me longing
For Christmases now past,
And I am back in childhood
As long as memories last.

All sing: *What Child is This?*

Merry

Bill Bliston

It's a word which only comes out at Christmas.

As for the rest of the year,
It's as if it has been packed away in the attic
with the decorations and the tinsel,
waiting for its own time to shine.

Rarely do we play ... with it.
We do not let it loose for birthdays
or anniversaries; only in error does it intrude
on the happiness of a new year.

But at Christmas, it emerges blinking
into the light, red-cheeked and perky,
in a perfect state of mild inebriation,
writing itself into Christmas cards,
greeting friends on doorsteps,
embracing family before they take off their shoes,
warming strangers on icy pavements.
Merry Christmas, we say. Merry Christmas.

All sing: *Dymunwn Nadolig Llawen* (We Wish You a Merry Christmas)

Snowflakes

Clive Sansom

And did you know
That every flake of snow
That forms so high
In the grey winter sky
And falls so far,
Is a bright six-pointed star?
Each crystal grows
A flower as perfect as a rose
Lace could never make
The patterns of a flake.
No brooch
Of figured silver could approach
Its delicate craftsmanship. And think:
Each pattern is distinct.
Of all the snowflakes floating there –
The million million in the air –
None is the same. Each star
Is newly forged, as faces are,
Shaped to its own design
Like yours and mine.
And yet . . . each one
Melts when its flight is done;
Holds frozen loveliness
A moment, even less;
Suspends itself in time –
And passes like a rhyme.

All sing: *Plu Eira ydym Ni* (We are Snowflakes)

Narrator

Perhaps our midwinter Christmas celebration is like the snowball we form when we start to build a snowman. Like that snowball, our Christmas -- my Christmas, your Christmas -- started small and simple. A bright six-pointed star. Each pattern was distinct.

As Christmas rolled through Europe and elsewhere, it picked up winter customs as it went, incorporating them into Christian celebrations and spreading customs from one region to another.

The snowball changed size, shape and color as it rolled, adding and dropping features over time and distance.

Holding frozen loveliness for a moment.

And passing it on.

Keeping Christmas

Henry Van Dyke

It is a good thing to observe Christmas day. The mere marking of times and seasons, when men agree to stop work and make merry together, is a wise and wholesome custom. It helps one to feel the supremacy of the common life over the individual life. It reminds a man to set his own little watch, now and then, by the great clock of humanity, which runs on sun time. But there is a better thing than the observance of Christmas day, and that is, keeping Christmas.

Are you willing to forget what you have done for other people, and to remember what other people have done for you; to ignore what the world owes you, and to think what you owe the world; to put your rights in the background, and your duties in the middle distance, and your chances to do a little more than your duty in the foreground; to see that your fellow men are just as read as you are, and try to look behind their faces to their hearts, hungry for joy; to own that probably the only good reason for your existence is not what you are going to get out of life, but what you are going to give to life; to close your book of complaints against the management of the universe, and look around you for a place where you can sow a few seeds of happiness – are you willing to do these things even for a day?

Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to stoop down and consider the needs and desires of little children; to remember the weakness and loneliness of people who are growing old; to stop asking how much your friends love you, and ask yourself whether you love them enough; to bear in mind the things that other people have to bear on their hearts; to try to understand what those who live in the same house with you really want, without waiting for them to tell you; to trim your lamp so that it will give more light and less smoke, and to carry it in front so that your shadow will fall behind you; to make a grave for your ugly thoughts, and a garden for your kindly feelings, with the gate open – Are you willing to do these things even for a day?

Then you can keep Christmas.

Are you willing to believe that love is the strongest thing in the world – stronger than hate, stronger than evil, stronger than death – and that the blessed life that began in Bethlehem [two thousand] years ago is the image and brightness of the Eternal Love?

Then you can keep Christmas.

Keeping Christmas

Eleanor Fargeon

How will you your Christmas keep?
Feasting, fasting, or asleep?
Will you laugh or will you pray,
Or will you forget the day?

Be it kept with joy or prayer,
Keep of either some to spare;
Whatsoever brings the day,
Do not keep but give away.