

Where Did Christmas Trees Come From?

Test Your Knowledge Of Holiday Traditions

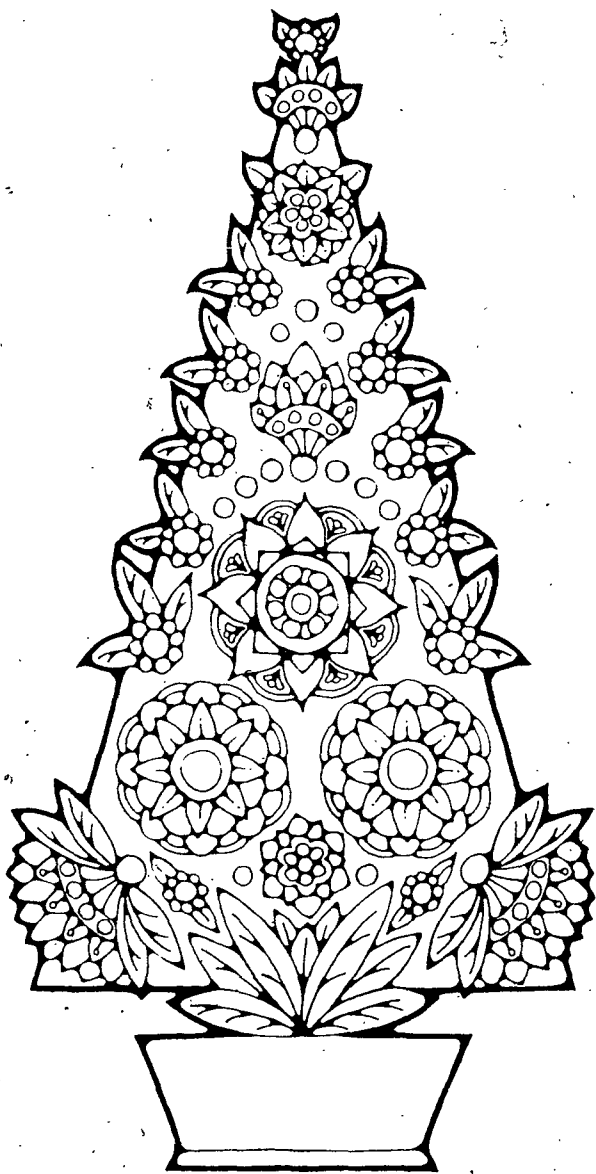
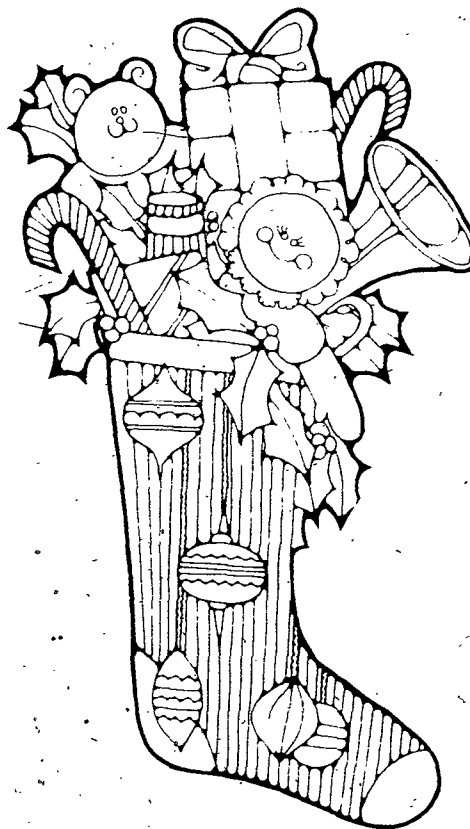
Millions of Americans celebrate Christmas each year, but the history and origins of many of the traditions that have evolved with the holiday have gotten lost in the haze of commercialization. This quiz, prepared in cooperation with the faculty of the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., will test your knowledge of unusual facts about the history of Christmas.

- 1. The custom of having a Christmas tree originated:**
 - a. In America when the first settlers were trying to clear certain areas of land on which to build their homes.
 - b. In Germany, on the left bank of the upper Rhine River.
 - c. With Martin Luther during the Reformation.
- 2. Christ was actually born:**
 - a. On Dec. 25.
 - b. Somewhere around midnight on the night between Dec. 24 and 25, but since nobody knows the precise time of his birth, it was decided to celebrate it on the 25 because there was already another holiday celebrated on the 24.
 - c. Nobody knows for sure when Christ was born.
- 3. The character of Santa Claus as part of the modern celebration of Christmas originated:**

- a. One year in Sweden, when a rotund, bearded, jolly-looking father of three children decided to dress up in a bright red costume in order to enliven his family's festivities.
 - b. With the Feast of St. Nicholas, celebrated in Holland and Scandanavian countries on Dec. 6.
 - c. In the last 100 years, as Christmas became increasingly commercialized, and retail store managers wanted a gimmick to draw more attention to their wares.
- 4. How old were Joseph and Mary when Jesus was born?**
 - a. Historical records prove that Mary was 18 and Joseph was 32.
 - b. There were both about the same age, between 25 and 30 years old.
 - c. Nobody knows for sure.
 - 5. The modern tradition of exchanging gifts at Christmas-time dates back to:**
 - a. The Feast of St. Nicholas, celebrated on Dec. 6.
 - b. When the three kings, Caspar, Melchior and Baltazar came to see the Christ child, bearing gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.
 - c. The pagan custom of exchanging gifts at the end of the year.
 - d. All of the above.
 - 6. Christmas has always been celebrated on Dec. 25.**
 - a. True.
 - b. False.
 - 7. The custom of eating hain with Christmas dinner originated:**
 - a. Because pigs were the source of protein most easily raised under European geographical and climatic conditions.
 - b. Because of the pig's economic significance in previous centuries.
 - c. Both of the above.
 - 8. The earliest record of a feast celebrating the birth of Jesus is:**
 - a. In Rome, the first year immediately following Christ's death.
 - b. In Germany, 98 years after Christ's death.
 - c. In Egypt, early in the third century, where it was celebrated on May 20.
 - 9. Which one of the following saints is not associated with Christmas?**
 - a. St. Cecilia.
 - b. The Holy Innocents.
 - c. St. Ann.
 - 10. What great pagan feast was celebrated around the same time that we celebrate Christmas today?**
 - a. The Dionesian Festival.
 - b. The feast of the winter solstice.
 - c. The feast of the autumnal equinox.

Answers

- 1. b.** In Germany on the left bank of the upper Rhine River. In medieval Germany, religious dramas, called mystery plays, were presented in the town hall. A popular theme was the biblical story of creation. The Christmas tree started out as the Tree of Life in Paradise, but when mystery plays were eventually suppressed, the tree was moved into the private home as a symbol of the coming Savior, and decorated with apples and communion wafers.
- 2. c.** Nobody knows for sure when Christ was born. Western Christians celebrate Christ's birthdate on Dec. 25, and eastern Christians celebrate it on Jan 6. The exact year of Christ's birth is not even known, but it is generally thought to be between 7 and 4 B.C.



- 3. b.** With the feast of St. Nicholas, celebrated in Holland and the Scandanavian countries on Dec. 6. Tradition has it that St. Nicholas gave gifts to the poor, specifically in the form of money to poor girls who would have been prevented from marrying for lack of a dowry.
- 4. c.** Nobody knows for sure. Nonetheless, Mary has often been portrayed as being quite young and Joseph as being considerably older than her.
- 5. d.** All of the above. See the answer to numbers number three for more information about the Feast of St. Nicholas.
- 6. b.** False. Christmas has been celebrated at times in the past on all of these days: Dec. 25, Dec. 26, May 20 and March 28.
- 7. c.** Both of the above.
- 8. c.** In Egypt, early in the third century, according to Father Robert Kress, a theology professor at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.
- 9. a.** St. Cecilia. St. Cecilia is the patron of music. The Holy Innocents were all of the babies killed by Herod's decree after Jesus was born. St. Ann was the mother of Christ's mother, Mary.
- 10. b.** The feast of the winter solstice. This was an ancient celebration of the continuing and renewed strength of the sun, as the days began to grow longer. Some opinion has it that Christians chose to celebrate Christmas in late December in order to compete with the pagan feast.

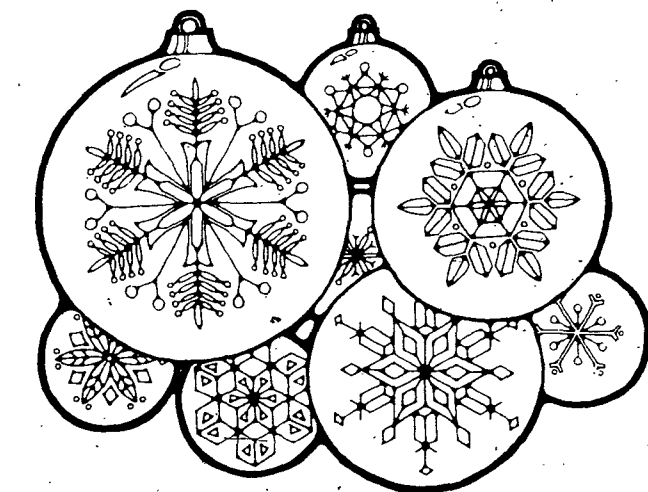
At Your Parish...

St. Leo's

St. Leo's Catholic Church of Hilton will hold its annual Family Christmas Dinner Party at the Hilton Central High School at 4 p.m. on Sunday, Dec. 13. Each family is asked to bring a large dish to pass and place settings for one's family. For entertainment there will be a Christmas sing-a-long and for the children, Santa has agreed to make a special trip.

Sacred Heart

The Rosary Guild of Sacred Heart Cathedral will meet at 7:30 p.m., Monday, Dec. 14, in the church for rosary and benediction. Following the



devotions, a Christmas party will be held in the rectory hall. Persons attending are asked to bring a dozen Christmas

cookies, and a wrapped gift for a migrant child. A feature of the evening will be a hair styling demonstration by Shear Ego Hair Designers.

Holy Cross

Thirty pupils in grades two to six at Holy Cross School are enrolled in a Great Books Program of reading, and discussing great works in literature. The children attend the weekly sessions for a 12-week program. This is the second year the school has provided the program.

St. Anne's, Palmyra

Palmyra — A training session for persons interested in making a two-year commitment as Eucharistic Ministers at St. Anne's Church here will be 7:30 p.m., Thursday, Dec. 17. Further information on the program is available by calling Sister Kathleen McCarthy, 597-9694.



St. John, Greece

Christmas carolling, a choir and organ recital of Christmas music, reflective readings and benediction will mark a program at 4 p.m., Sunday, Dec. 13, at St. John the Evangelist in Greece.

John Hermann will direct the choir in excerpts from Vivaldi's "Gloria," Vaughn Williams' "The First Nowell," and Pergolesi's "Glory to God," among other works. A reception will follow the event.