

# Where Christmas Decorations Came From



**Candle:  
The Inn**

LUCIA, the "Queen of Lights," is honored each year in Sweden on Dec. 13. Her appearance is seen as symbolizing the return of light after dark days. In Norway, lighted candles are carried through the barn and into the stable by the farmer who sings and makes the sign of the cross in the hair of the cattle to ensure good fortune and health during the coming year. The candle was a symbol of welcome for Mary and Joseph as they sought shelter in vain. And so the Irish set a lighted candle on the table and leave the door unlatched, thus extending hospitality to travelers on the road. The Danes also light candles to show passing strangers there is food and shelter available. Universally, the candle speaks out to strangers that there is room in the inn.



**The Creche:  
St. Francis**

IN EARLY FRANCE a live infant would be placed on the hay of the creche during the Mass. In Provence, for a century and a half, the tiny clay figures were made by village artisans who labored throughout the year and then sold the "little saints" at great Christmas fairs. The craftsmen made figures resembling residents of their own village -- the knife grinder, washerwoman, gypsy, thief, town crier, etc. The creches of Peru, prime targets for collectors, are unique because Mary is shown attired in rich robes and a feathered hat. Tradition attributes the origin of the creche to St. Francis of Assisi in the year 1223.



**Pinata:  
Mexico,  
Spain**

CHRISTMAS IN MEXICO is spelled with a capital P which stands for posados, pinatas and puestos. The pinata is an earthenware jar cleverly disguised as an animal. It is filled with toys and good things to eat and must be broken to redeem the treasures inside. Blindfolded children armed with sticks have great fun trying to break the pinata which hangs from the branch of a tree. The custom started centuries ago in Spain.




**Wreaths:  
Good Cheer**

WEST SAXON warriors in early England burned ash branches to warm themselves at night. The English began a holiday custom of decking the halls with holly to dispel the gloominess of winter, based in part on the belief the Christ Child was first bathed and dressed by a fire of holly-wood. Ale garlands were hung on inn doors to show that good ale and hospitality were inside for travelers. Germans collected "He" and "She" holly leaves, so named by the presence or absence of prickles on a leaf. Whichever kind was gathered in greatest quantity would determine who would rule the household during the coming year. The Japanese also hang wreaths on doors; but these are made of ropes of twisted straw and signify strong family ties.

**STORY: Emory Daniels  
PICTURES: Fran Evert**

CREDITS: Model with candle is Gale Palawrak, 8. Creche -- at Heeney-Sundquist Funeral Home. Pinata came from El Nibble Nook restaurant. The wreath is on the door of Salem United Church of Christ, Farmington.

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