

Traditions, new trends and greetings

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- Write a personal note if possible and sign the card, even if it is unprinted.
- Avoid holiday pressures by mailing soon after Thanksgiving Day.
- If there are children in the household, include their names. If a woman is divorced, find out if she has reclaimed her maiden name.
- Send a holiday card to Jewish friends with a neutral message such as "Season's Greetings."

Recycled old Christmas cards to children's hospitals and nursery schools, where the youngsters can use them in collages.

For those who want to add some sparkle, there are Christmas stamps, seals, stickers, sealing wax and other goodies for decorating your missives.

If you want to make your own Christmas cards, check your local bookstore, library or hobby shop for card ideas. One of the best books, "White Christmas" by Masahiro Chatani and Keiko Nakazawa (Kodansha International) offers origami designs.

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS come from decades of joyous celebrations. From stockings to trees, jingle bells to lights, each tradition has its own history.

The Christmas stocking was first referred to in 1809 by Washington Irving in "Knickerbocker History of New York." Christmas trees and stockings rivaled each other for present placement in the 1800s.

Toward the very end of the century, bright red, specially designed Christmas stockings came on the market, as did prefilled stockings filled with jewels, humming tops and Christmas crackers.

The original Christmas trees were imported by Hessian soldiers during the Revolutionary War, but they were little tabletop models, not the floor-to-ceiling versions we see today.

Ornamenting the tree dates back to 1605. The earliest account of a tree decorated with cookies and candies comes from the diary of a traveler who journeyed to Strasburg.

Tree lights might date back to a story found in an old manuscript in a Sicilian monastery: When the Christ Child received gifts, one little fir tree was stuck in the background. Seeing its plight, an angel asked some star to come down and rest on the fir's dark boughs, and when Jesus saw the shining tree, he blessed it.

Some people think the word holly is related to holy, but it comes from the Old English name, hōleg. It has a long symbolic association with Christ.

the white flowers are his purity, the red berries his blood, the leaves his crown of thorns, and the bitter bark his sorrow.

Film has created its own cherished reminders of Christmas past. Among our favorites are Judy Garland singing "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas" in "Meet Me in St. Louis," "White Christmas," Bing Crosby singing "Silent Night" in "Going My Way" and, of course, "Miracle on 34th Street."

PARADES ON WATER and down ski slopes, trees decorated by celebrities and madrigal feasts are just some of the traditions cities evoke to celebrate the holiday.

In Texas, Pancho Claus dons a 10-gallon Stetson. In California, Santa's Ray Bans match his black belt. And in Louisiana, he is known as Papa Noel.

Every community has its own tradition. Among our favorites are:

- **New York City:** The New York City Ballet's performance of the "Nutcracker," the tree in Rockefeller Plaza and the Christmas decorations in Tiffany's and Macy's windows.
- **Sitka, Alaska:** A Russian Orthodox Christmas Eve church choir twirls six-pointed wooden stars adorned with colored papers and bells. Shades of the Volga.

- **Phoenix, Ariz.:** Six thousand tin canaries glow at the Desert Botanical Garden like so many Stars of Bethlehem. Don't miss the 52-foot snoring human Christmas tree at the Civic Plaza.

- **Monterey, Calif.:** Vibrant Mexican decorations, pinatas, candelabras and Nativity scenes adorn 12 adobe homes. One house recreates the Scottish Christmas tradition of author Robert Louis Stevenson, who once lived there.

- **Los Angeles, Calif.:** Santa takes a screen test in the annual Hollywood Christmas parade, accompanied by more than 100 TV and film stars. Picture perfect.

- **Fort Lauderdale, Fla.:** Truck loads of snow deliver Christmas to the palm-fringed resort, as do the 100 luxury yachts decorated with Christmas lights.

- **Wailea, Maui:** St. Nick arrives in a dugout canoe, adorned in a red and white kiva-kiva.

- **Mount Prospect, Ill.:** More than 800 teddy bears take to the street for this annual walk.

- **Boothbay Harbor, Maine:** Strolling plaid-clad pipers and dancers, plus Santa in a tam-o'-shanter, mark this Scottish Christmas walk.

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HOLIDAY FEELINGS



Good friends,
good food,
good times.

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