

# Twelve Symbols of Christmas

Participatory Reflection by Barbara Marshall and Linda Ferguson

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## Introduction

As we enjoy our traditions and festivities of the Christmas season, we may not always be aware that our customs and symbols have been collected from around the world. When savoring a candy cane, say “danke schon” to the Germans. The confectionary treat was first created in Cologne. As we admire the poinsettias adorning the altar we need to say ‘gracias’ to Mexico where the plant originated. “Merci beaucoup” is the French term for ‘noel’. And ‘cheers’ to the English for the mistletoe!

This evening, Linda and I would like to share some information about the 12 common symbols of Christmas. The symbols help us to focus on the reason for our Christmas celebration: the baby born in a Judean manger more than 2000 years ago. Let’s turn our thoughts and attention to the baby named Jesus, who came to “guide and save us all.”

We will reflect on each Christmas symbol and its meaning. The symbols will then be brought up to the altar by individuals sitting in the pews.

(The Twelve Symbols)

## 12 Symbols of Christmas

Reader 1: An evergreen tree has a very appropriate name. It is ever green – always green. It does not become dormant in the winter as other trees do. The color green represents new life and the needles of the evergreen always point up – heavenward. It symbolizes our everlasting life with Jesus Christ. We should be as the evergreen tree – always full of life, never becoming dormant in our life with Christ as our arms are lifted heavenward. *"The bread of God is the One who comes down from heaven. He gives life to the world"* John 6:33

Reader 2: Ornaments are used to decorate Christmas trees each and every year. People look for the perfect ones to fit on their tree. Our Christmas tree just wouldn't seem complete without our ornaments. Ornaments can symbolize the blessings in our lives. Our lives just wouldn't be complete without God's blessings. Everything that we have is due to God loving us so much that He wants to shower us with His blessings. Just as ornaments are all different shapes and sizes, blessings are all different as well. God picks and chooses each blessing for us so that it will be just right. The next time you decorate your tree, and as you put up each ornament, think of a blessing that God has given you. I think you'll find that you'll run out of ornaments before you can run out of blessings! *"Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God that He has given you."* Deuteronomy 16:17

Reader 3: Lights and candles are used to give light. When a room is full of darkness, it is dark. But, if you light a single match in a dark room, the room is light. There may be more darkness, but the light overpowers it. We are that light. We can be a single light in a world of darkness. We must share our light with the world so that the light increases. *"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house."* Matthew 5:14-15

Reader 4: The bells ring out to guide the lost sheep back into the fold, signifying that all are precious in the eyes of the lord. Jesus is our shepherd and He laid down His life for us so that we may spend eternity with Him in Heaven. He is calling us to follow Him through His Word. Are you going to listen? *"If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in*

*search of the one that went astray?" Matthew 18:12 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." John 10:11*

Reader 1: the Candy Cane symbolizes multiple things. If you hold it upright...it looks like a shepherd's crook. The shepherds were some of the few people who were able to see the Baby Jesus in Bethlehem. If you turn the candy can upside down...it looks like a "J". Jesus starts with the letter "J". The colors of the candy cane are also symbolic. The red represents the blood that Jesus shed for us on the cross and the white represents the purity of Jesus. There are candy canes with three small red stripes running around it. These stripes represent the Trinity – God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Who knew that this delicious simple candy was so profoundly symbolic of our Lord Jesus Christ and His simple birth? *"And she shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."* Matthew 1:21

Reader 2: The star is a heavenly sign of prophecy fulfilled years ago, the shining hope of all mankind. The star led the wise men to find the Baby Jesus. These wise men traveled many miles following a star in the sky. The star was their "guiding light" to the Savior. God was the wise men's travel agent, in sorts, leading them to the greatest destination known to man – the Savior. We now have His Word as our "guiding light" to lead us to be with Him in heaven. Are you going to follow Him? *"And behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy."* Matthew 2:9b-10

Reader 3: Imagine... you are a lowly shepherd, watching over your sheep. This night seems no different than any other. Then all of a sudden an angel of the Lord in the sky above you...tells you of the Savior's birth. You, a shepherd? Why did God send an angel to tell shepherds? Because the message that God had about the birth of Jesus was for all people! Not just for the right, not just for the Jew...EVERYONE! God chose His #1 messenger to tell the lowest of people (in the world's eyes) of His son's birth! God looks at the heart – not what the world looks at – thank goodness! *"And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, the glory of the Lord shone 'round about them: and they were so afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."* Luke 2:9-11

Reader 4: We see holly as decorations during the Christmas season. But do we really understand what holly stands for? The leaves represent the crowns of thorns that were placed upon Jesus' head as He was being crucified. The berries symbolize the blood He shed for us. He endured criticism, excruciating pain, and embarrassment...all for you and me. The next time you see a decoration with holly on it, remember what was done for you so that He could spend eternity with you. I know that I will. *"And twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head and put a reed in His right hand. And kneeling before Him, they mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"* Matthew 27:29

Reader 1: The wreath has its evergreen branches bent in a circle so that ends touch, having no beginning or end of Jesus' eternal love for us. Just as the wreath looks the same throughout and seems not to change, so He will always be the same. *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever."* Hebrews 13:8

Reader 2 These days, the world has forgotten the reason for Christmas. Most people seem to think that getting presents is the greatest thing about Christmas. Other people seem to think that presents have nothing to do with Christmas. Well, they are both wrong. The wise men came to visit Jesus as a young child and gave him presents. They gave Him gold, frankincense and myrrh. They offered Him gold, as a king, paying Him tribute; frankincense, as God, for they honored God, with the smoke of incense; and myrrh, as a man who should die, for myrrh is used in embalming dead bodies. These men....these wise men...saw the child and knew He was a king, is God, and that he would die for the sins of the world. How can anyone, with the knowledge that we have now, not believe? *"The Wise Men went to the house. There they saw a child with His mother Mary. They bowed down and worshipped Him. They opened their treasures. They gave Him gold, incense, and myrrh."* Matthew 2:11

Reader3: Many people spend hours wrapping all of their presents during Christmas time. They use ribbons, garland, and bows to make sure that their presents are as beautiful as possible. What they don't realize is that the items that they use to complete the outside of the gift have more meaning than the actual gift inside. The bow ties our present with a beautiful ribbon, just as Jesus Christ ties us Christians together in His love. We may not be in the same family, but we are all in the family of God. Jesus is the reason that binds us together. *"And above all these put on love, which binds us together in perfect harmony."* Colossians 3:14

Reader 4: Making cookies is a favorite pastime for most families during the Christmas season. Cookie cutters are used to turn ordinary dough into edible masterpieces. God doesn't use cookie cutters when He creates each one of us. He makes every one of us so special and unique that He would have to break the mold after just one use. He is the potter and we are His clay. He wants to mold us into His masterpieces. We only need to be moldable and willing to follow His lead. *"Behold like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel."* Jeremiah 18:6

Closing (Ask parishioners to close their eyes and listen to the words that Jesus is speaking.)

Prepare your heart for the celebration of My birth. Listen to the voice of John the Baptist: "Prepare the way for the Lord; make straight paths for Him."

Christmas is the time to exult in My miraculous incarnation, when the Word became flesh and dwelt among you. I identified with mankind to the ultimate extent- becoming a Man and taking up residence in your world. Don't let the familiarity of this astonishing miracle dull its effect on you. Recognize that I am the Gift above all gifts, and rejoice in Me.

Clear out clutter and open up your heart by pondering the wonders of My entrance into human history. View these events from the perspective of the shepherds, who were keeping watch over their flocks at night. They witnessed first one angel and then a multitude of them lighting up the sky, proclaiming: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth Peace among

those with whom He is pleased!” Gaze at the glory of my birth, just as the shepherds did, and respond with childlike wonder. Amen

#### Resources:

- Jesus Always by Sara Young, December 24<sup>th</sup> Reflection
- Our Daily Bread December 25, 2017 Reflection
- 12 Symbols of Christmas – part of a play written by Felicia Mollohan, Nov. 12, 2015