



Christmas

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Christmas is a Christian holiday that celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. For millions of Christians throughout the world, it is the happiest and the busiest time of the year. No one knows the exact date of Christ's birth, but most Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25. The word Christmas comes from Christes masse, an early English phrase that means Mass of Christ.



Christmas symbols

The History of Christmas Trees

- The evergreen (вечнозеленая) fir tree (ель) has traditionally been used to celebrate winter festivals (pagan (языческие) and Christian) for thousands of years. Pagans used branches (ветви) of it to decorate their homes during the winter solstice (солнцестояние), as it made them think of the spring to come. Christians use it as a sign of everlasting (вечный) life with God.
- Nobody is really sure when Fir trees were first used as Christmas trees. It probably began about 1000 years ago in Northern Europe.
- The first documented use of a tree at Christmas and New Year celebrations is argued (спорить) between the cities of Tallinn in Estonia and Riga in Latvia! Both (оба) claim (утверждать) that they had the first trees; Tallinn in 1441 and Riga in 1510. Both trees were put up by the 'Brotherhood (братство) of Blackheads' which was an association of local unmarried merchants (торговец, купец), ship owners, and foreigners in Livonia (what is now Estonia and Latvia).

Christmas symbols

The Mistletoe (Омела)

The custom of kissing under the mistletoe may have come from the Scandinavians who associated the plant with their goddess of love, Frigga. They believed that those who kissed under the mistletoe will experience happiness and good luck.



Christmas symbols

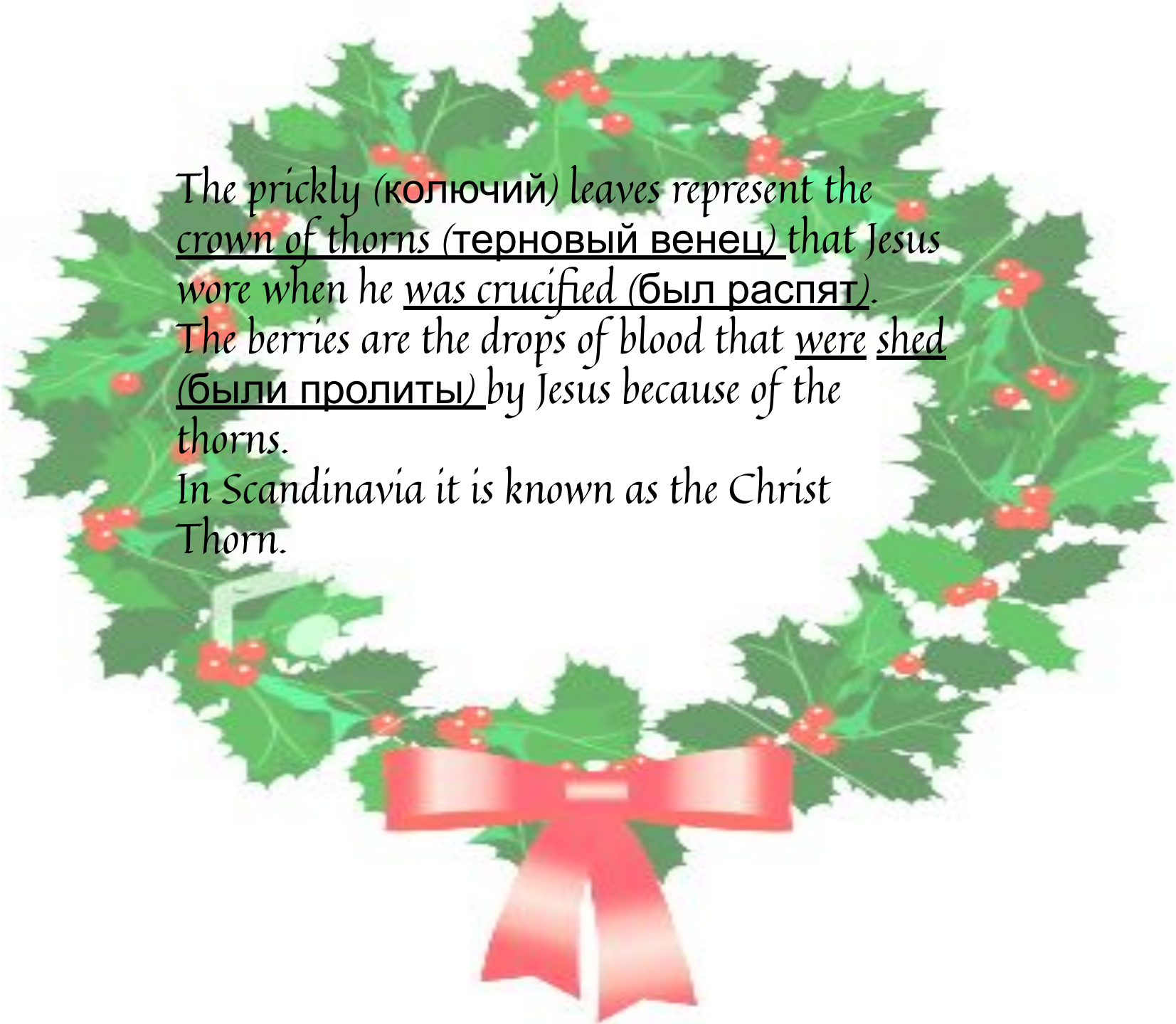
Poinsettia

The poinsettia is native to Mexico.

The poinsettia became a symbol of Christmas based on an old Mexican legend of a poor Mexican girl called Pepita.

She had no present to give to baby Jesus as the Christmas Eve Service. She picked up (собрала) some weeds (травы, сорняк) and made them into a bouquet and placed it at the bottom of the nativity scene (место рождения). The bouquet of weeds suddenly burst into (расцвётать) bright red flowers. All who saw them believed that it was a miracle (чудо). The flowers became known as the "Flowers of the Holy Night (Святая ночь)". The red colored leaves symbolize the blood (кровь) of Jesus Christ and the white leaves his purity (непорочность).





The prickly (колючий) leaves represent the crown of thorns (терновый венец) that Jesus wore when he was crucified (был распят).

The berries are the drops of blood that were shed (были пролиты) by Jesus because of the thorns.

In Scandinavia it is known as the Christ Thorn.



Christmas symbols

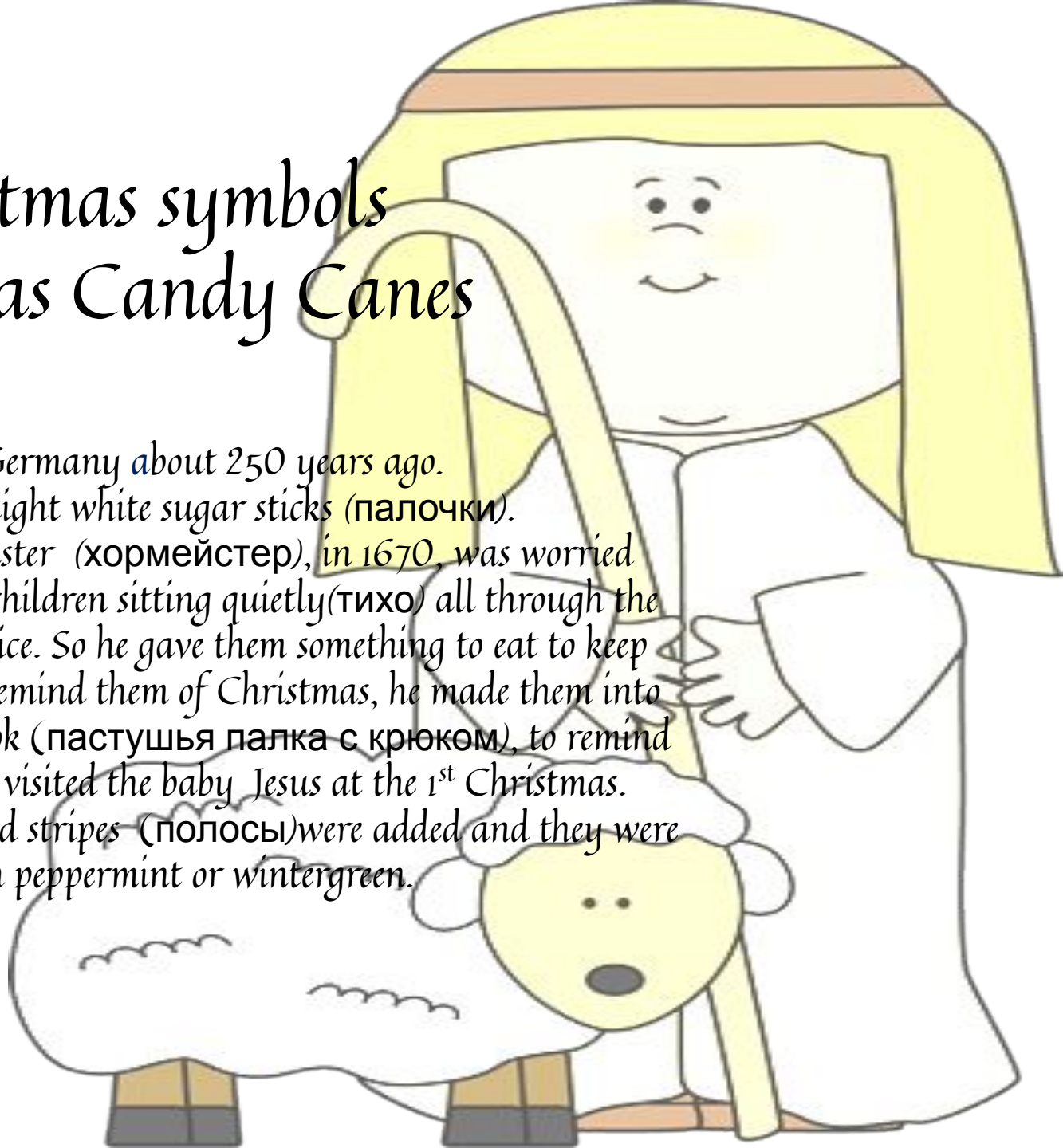
Christmas Candy Canes

originated in Germany about 250 years ago.

They started as straight white sugar sticks (палочки).

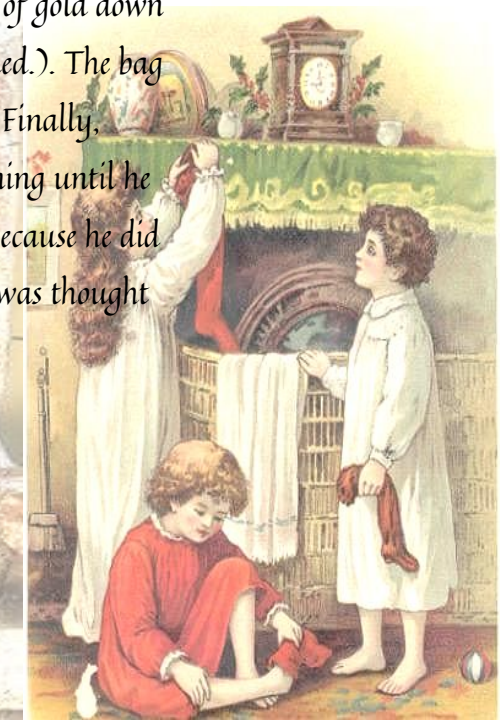
A story says that a choirmaster (хормейстер), in 1670, was worried (был озабочен) about the children sitting quietly (тихо) all through the long Christmas nativity service. So he gave them something to eat to keep them quiet! As he wanted to remind them of Christmas, he made them into a 'J' shape like a shepherds crook (пастушья палка с крюком), to remind them of the shepherds that visited the baby Jesus at the 1st Christmas.

Sometime around 1900 the red stripes (полосы) were added and they were flavored with peppermint or wintergreen.



Christmas symbols

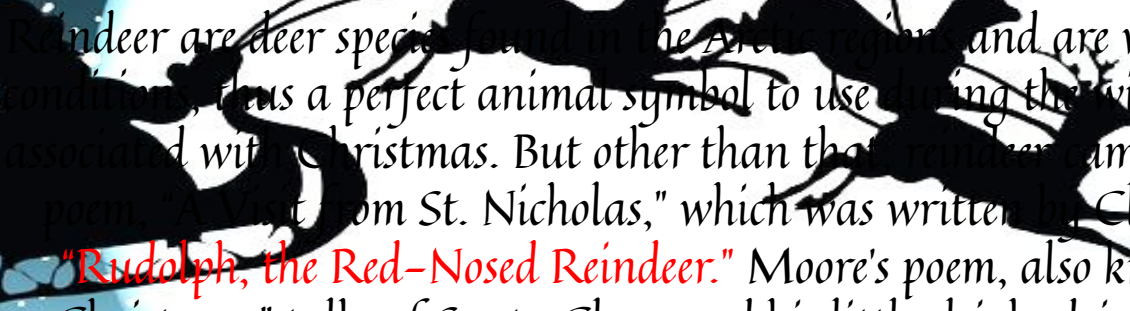
St. Nicholas, Santa Claus & Father Christmas



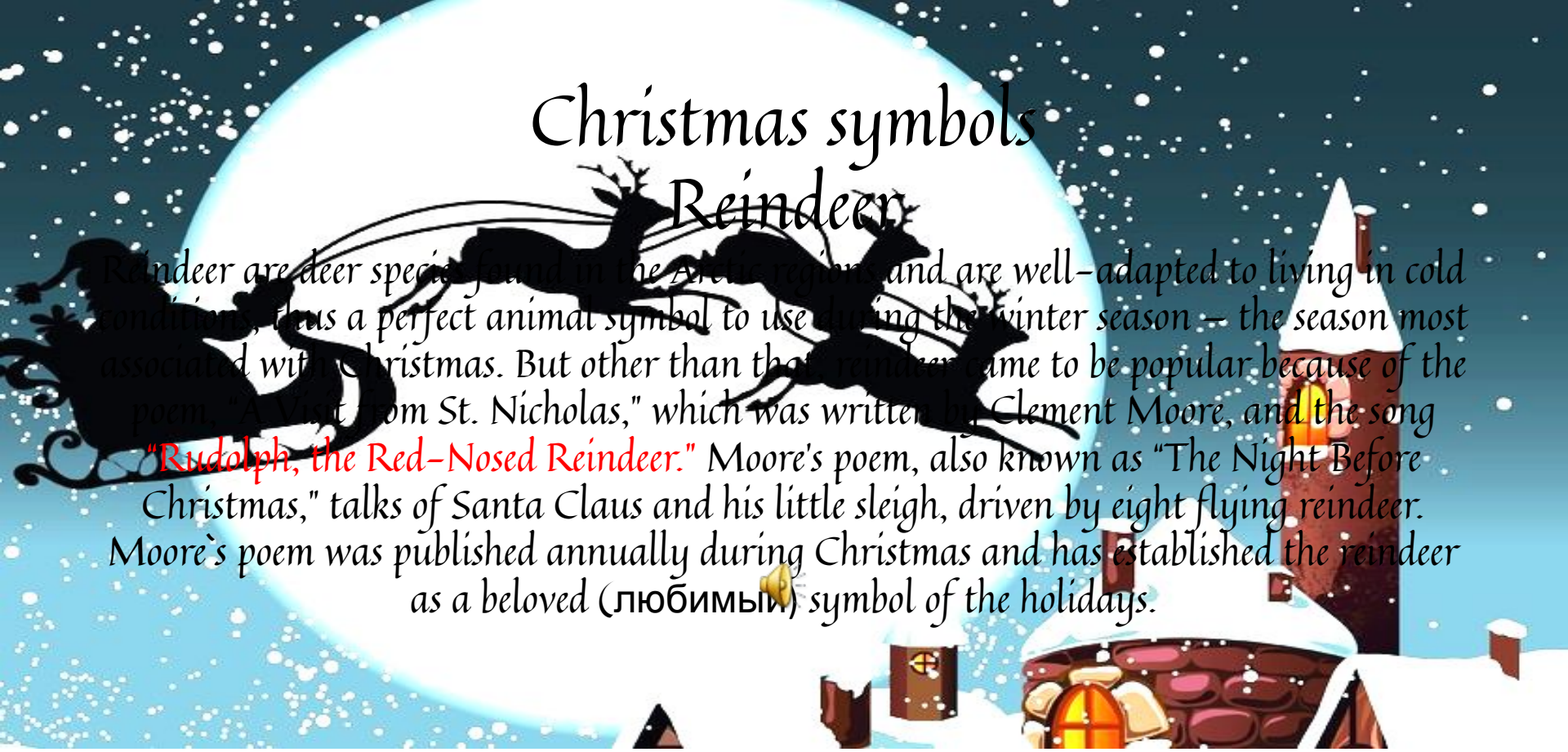
- St. Nicholas was a Bishop (епископ) who lived in the 4th century in a place called Myra in Asia Minor (now called Turkey). He was a very rich man because his parents died when he was young and left him a lot of money. He was also a very kind man and had a reputation for helping the poor and giving secret gifts to people who needed it. There are several legends about St. Nicholas.
- The most famous story about St. Nicholas tells how the custom of hanging up stockings to get presents in first started! It goes like this:
- There was a poor man who had three daughters. He was so poor, he did not have enough money for a dowry (приданое), so his daughters couldn't get married. One night, Nicholas secretly dropped (спустил) a bag of gold down the chimney (дымоход) and into the house (This meant that the oldest daughter was then able to be married.). The bag fell into a stocking that had been hung by the fire to dry! This was repeated later with the second daughter. Finally, determined to discover the person who had given him the money, the father secretly hid by the fire every evening until he caught Nicholas dropping in a bag of gold. Nicholas begged the man to not tell anyone what he had done, because he did not want to bring attention to himself. But soon the news got out and when anyone received a secret gift, it was thought that maybe it was from Nicholas.

Christmas symbols

Reindeer



Reindeer are deer species found in the Arctic region and are well-adapted to living in cold conditions, thus a perfect animal symbol to use during the winter season – the season most associated with Christmas. But other than that, reindeer came to be popular because of the poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas," which was written by Clement Moore, and the song "**Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer.**" Moore's poem, also known as "The Night Before Christmas," talks of Santa Claus and his little sleigh, driven by eight flying reindeer. Moore's poem was published annually during Christmas and has established the reindeer as a beloved (ЛЮБИМЫМ) symbol of the holidays.



Santa's Team



Dasher Dancer Prancer Vixen Comet Cupid Donner Blitzen Rudolf

Christmas symbols

Christmas carols (рождественские песнопения)

Carols were first sung in Europe thousands of years ago, but these were not Christmas Carols. They were pagan songs (языческие песни), sung at the Winter Solstice (зимнее солнцестояние) celebrations as people danced round stone circles (The word carol originally meant to dance to something). The Winter Solstice is the shortest day of the year, usually taking place around the 22nd December. The word Carol actually means dance or a song of praise (восхваление) and joy! Carols used to be written and sung during all four seasons, but only the tradition of singing them at Christmas has really survived (сохранилась).

Silent Night (тихая ночь)

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