

the
**SUNDAY
TIMES**

SUNDAY
DECEMBER 24, 2023



FUN DAY

TIMES

We wish you
Peace & Joy
this Christmas!



Art by Onithi Herath (13 years)



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Immy Kids International Montessori held their annual Christmas celebration recently.

Pix by M. A. Pushpa Kumara



A Nicholite Christmas

St. Nicholas' International College, Colombo, celebrated College Day on December 6, which is the feast of St. Nicholas (better known as Santa Claus). The annual celebration which always includes a visit by Santa Claus, was accompanied by a Nativity play and Carol service, as well as a Fair at the school.



Festivities at Park Street Mews with the Christmas Tree light-up in early December.

Pix by Akila Jayawardena



In our online issue this week:

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Please log on to the Funday Times website on www.fundaytimes.lk or check out the Sunday Times epaper on www.sundaytimes.lk for additional pages of this week's Funday Times.

Happy Birthday



Siyath Dissanayaka
14 years on December 22



Hanfa and Haya Nafas
8 years on December 5



The Happiest Christmas

By Manoshi De Silva

Dylan was Christmas tree shopping with his father and sister. The well-decorated shop had trees of different sizes on display. While his father and sister were busy looking at trees, Dylan went outside the shop where boxes of shiny tinsel and decorations were kept for sale. As he was looking at the decorations, a boy around his age walked in, carrying two wooden structures.

The boy had two small doll house-like structures with him. As he walked in, his legs got entangled in some Christmas light wires and he fell down breaking one structure into pieces.

The boy had saw-dust on his cheeks and his discoloured clothes had small holes. Dylan found the whole incident to be funny and laughed out loud. The boy looked embarrassed and upset.

Hearing the noise the shop owner came out and sighed, "Broke one didn't you? Now I can only buy one from you!" he said taking the unbroken structure and leaving some notes on the boy's palm. The boy took the broken structure and crossed the road. Dylan saw him walk into a small house opposite the road. Adjoining the house was something like a small carpentry workshop where an older man was working.

"There aren't any big trees," said Dylan's father walking out with his sister. "Come tomorrow Sir. We will have a new stock of the best trees by tomorrow," said the shop owner full of smiles. "Buy some decorations to decorate the house till then," said the children's father and although they already had enough decorations at home, the children excitedly started choosing new ones.

The next day Dylan's father took them to the same shop to check out the new Christmas trees. There were ones as tall as the ceiling and they ordered the biggest tree of the lot. Dylan saw the structure the boy sold the day before, kept in the middle of the shop. It was beautifully decorated and had statues of the Holy Family and Baby Jesus kept in a manger at the centre. "Oh it's a Nativity crib," smiled Dylan identifying what it was.



Dylan stepped out and saw the boy doing something in his workshop. He crossed the road and walked in. The boy was making another Nativity stable. He looked at Dylan in surprise. "What's your name?" asked Dylan. "Jude," replied the boy. "Do you make these on your own?" asked Dylan. "My father helps me," replied the boy. "We earn extra money during Christmas time by making these."

Dylan peeped into the living room of the house. It was small and basic, almost like a storeroom. "Where is your Christmas tree?" he asked Jude. "We've never had one. Only a decorated crib because we make them," replied Jude. Dylan was surprised. The way they celebrated Christmas seemed so much grander than this boy and his family. Dylan walked out with a heavy heart.

Dylan's father tied their new tree to the top of their jeep, with the help of the shop owner. His sister carried another big box full of new decorations. After going home and decorating the Christmas tree, Dylan looked at how beautiful his house was. There were a few boxes with leftover decorations on the ground. Yet Dylan didn't feel happy and felt a sense of sadness. So he confessed to his father about what happened. "I feel so bad for laughing at that boy the other day," he sighed.

"You know the father of Jesus Christ was also a carpenter. Jesus was from a humble family but now He is called the 'Prince of Peace', for He taught the world about love and forgiveness!" said Dylan's father. "When we are celebrating Christmas, we should not forget the true

meaning of it. Maybe we should share our joy with this child also!"

"Jude told me that he has never had a Christmas tree. We have so many decorations left, even after decorating our whole house. Can't we give him these along with a Christmas tree?" asked Dylan. "Of course, that's a lovely idea! We'll go there tomorrow on Christmas Eve and gift him a beautiful new tree!" said his father making Dylan smile from ear to ear.

So the day before Christmas, Dylan took all their extra decorations along with a new Christmas tree and went to Jude's house with his father. He had some beautifully wrapped Christmas cake pieces in a bag as well, to gift his new friend. When the jeep stopped near Jude's house, he came out. It was clear that they were working hard, even on the day before Christmas to earn some extra money.

As Dylan helped to unload the tree and the shiny decorations, Jude's eyes sparkled more than the decorations. Dylan's father talked with the boy's father for awhile and gave him some money and asked him to buy whatever they needed for Christmas. Then they all got together and fixed the tree and decorated it. Jude's family looked so happy and couldn't stop smiling.

On Christmas Day, after returning home from Holy Mass, Dylan's family stopped by to wish Jude's family a 'Merry Christmas'. Jude and his family were dressed in new clothes and although their house was small it was decorated beautifully and looked very bright and cheerful.

"Here's a small gift from me. I made this especially for you!" said Jude handing Dylan his gift. "Oh it's a beautiful Christmas crib! Thank you so much," smiled Dylan. "I have the statues carefully packed. Once you go home you can arrange it. Thank you so much for making Christmas very special for us!" said Jude hugging Dylan.

Dylan hugged his friend back, "We've never celebrated Christmas like this before. This time I truly feel the spirit of Christmas like never before. Thank you for making Christmas very special for us too!" smiled Dylan. "I wish you and your family the happiest Christmas ever!"



Christmas

By Cecilia Hewavitharana

Christmas is celebrated annually on December 25, to mark the birth of Jesus Christ. Celebrated by non-Christians as well, despite being a Christian holiday, it is the biggest holiday season in the world.

However, in the Christian calendar, Easter is considered the most important event, with Christmas coming second.

A number of popular yuletide traditions exist, such as recreating the nativity scene, exchanging gifts, sending Christmas cards, decorating Christmas trees, singing Christmas carols and sharing special Christmas meals.



The Nativity

Over 2000 years ago, the Roman Emperor decreed a census to be taken, compelling everyone to return to their hometowns. Amongst them, in the town of Nazareth, were Mary and her husband Joseph, whose hometown was Bethlehem.

Upon reaching Bethlehem, they were unable to find accommodation due to the large number of people who had travelled for the census, so they are believed to have taken shelter in a cave. That night, Mary gave birth to Jesus, who was laid in a manger (a long trough for animal feed), as there was nowhere else to keep him.

According to the Bible, Jesus is a descendant of King David, and is the Son of God, so the fact that he lay in a manger after he was born and that his first visitors were poor shepherds, was meant to highlight the importance of humility.

The Christmas Truce

In the midst of World War I, on Christmas Eve 1914, the German troops in the trenches began singing carols, such as Silent Night (*Stille Nacht* in German). To their surprise, the Allied Forces joined in from across No Man's Land.

This led to a brief truce between the opposing sides in certain areas and on Christmas Day, they met, exchanged gifts and even played football together.

Santa Claus

The benevolent gift-giving figure is arguably more synonymous with Christmas than Jesus himself.

Known by many names across the world, such as Father Christmas, Saint Nick, Kris Kringle or simply Santa, Santa Claus' name derived from 'Sinterklaas', the Dutch name for Saint Nicholas, a 4th century saint who was likely the Bishop of Myra (near modern Demre, Turkey), and was known for his kindness and generosity.



Christmas Villages

Popular decorations in some parts of the world are miniature villages with Christmas lights and decorations, made from a variety of materials ranging from paper or cardboard to ceramic.

Although Christmas is associated with gifts from Santa Claus and with decorations, this often distracts from the most important part of the festive season: **giving to those less fortunate.**





Christmas Art



Manthusha Perera (8 years)
Mount Calvary High School, Galle



Kaveen Gnanaweera (8 years)
Brisbane Int. School, Nugegoda



Shamal Gunawardene (9 years)
Royal College



Rasandi Ranasinghe (7 years)
Musaeus College



Aaron De Sylva (4 years)
Marjorie De Alwis Montessori, Nugegoda



Mahmood Ali (4 years)
Ratmalana



Minudi Chandrapala (11 years)
Ku/Maliyadewa Model School



Atarah Roshan (12 years)
Bishop's College



Aaish Rehan (4 years)
Daybridge Nursery, Dehiwala



Binuwari Ekanayake (9 years)
Vidura College, Colombo



Eshal Borham (13 years)
Trincomalee



Evani Wickramasinghe (8 years)
Visakha Vidyalaya, Colombo



Christmas celebrations around the world

December 18, 2023

Many people worldwide are getting into the festive spirit but not everyone celebrates the holiday in the same way. Here are some unique Christmas customs from around the world.

Peru

Every Christmas, the town of Santo Tomás in Southern Peru hosts a fist-fighting festival.

The series of organized arm battles allow locals to settle disagreements outside the courts, which are hard to access from the rural town.

The five to 10-minute-long fights are carefully monitored by a neutral referee. Whoever loses has to apologize in public. The two opponents then embrace each other and promise that the dispute is over.

Following the event, locals get together for a Christmas feast.



Fist-fights allow locals to settle disputes.



Christmas is celebrated with many fun traditions worldwide.

Iceland

Kids in Iceland look forward to a visit from one of 13 Yule Lads during Christmas. The gnome-like creatures take turns sneaking into children's rooms on the 13 nights leading up to Christmas. They leave small gifts for "good" kids and rotten potatoes for "naughty" ones.

The most popular Yule Lad, Kertasnykir (Candle Stealer), comes on Christmas Eve. He "steals" candles but leaves behind generous gifts.

Japan

A meal from Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) may seem like a strange choice for Christmas. But in Japan, a bucket of the fast-food giant's world-famous fried chicken is a beloved holiday tradition. The custom can be traced back to a brilliant 1974 marketing campaign called Kurisumasu ni wa Kentakkii, or Kentucky for Christmas!

Today, as many as 3.6 million Japanese residents enjoy a KFC dinner on Christmas every year. Many pre-order the 4,000 yen (\$28) bucket — which includes cake and champagne — weeks in advance to avoid the two-hour long lines.

Joonas Rokka, an associate professor at the Emlyon Business School in France, has a theory on why the KFC campaign was so successful. "It filled a void," he says. "There was no tradition of Christmas in Japan, and so KFC came in and said, this is what you should do on Christmas."



A KFC meal is a popular Christmas tradition in Japan.

Italy

Italian children look forward to a visit from a witch called La Befana every year on January 5.

Like Santa, La Befana enters homes through the chimney.

She brings presents and candy for "good" children and coal for the "bad" ones.

According to the legend, when the Three Wise Men were seeking baby Jesus, they met an older woman and asked if she wanted to accompany them. She declined the offer because she wanted to finish cleaning her house.

Since realizing her mistake, the old lady has been flying around on her broomstick in search of baby Jesus. The friendly, soot-covered witch is also known to sweep every house she visits. Families often leave a glass of wine and a plate of traditional food for La Befana to enjoy.



La Befana

Ukraine

In Ukraine, Christmas tree decorations include at least one or two spider webs. The unusual custom is credited to a folktale about a widow who could not afford to buy ornaments for her Christmas tree. The spiders in her hut heard her prayers. They covered the tree with beautiful webs that magically turned into precious gold and silver when the sun's rays hit them.

Today, placing tinsel spider webs on a Christmas tree is thought to bring good luck.

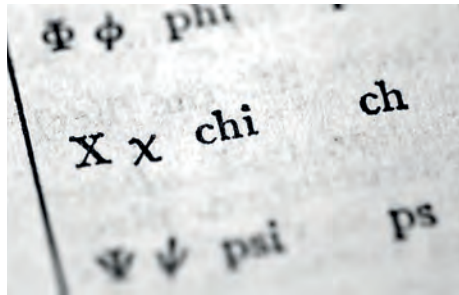


Spider webs are thought to bring good luck in Ukraine.



Ten festive Christmas facts

Many people don't like the word "Christmas" being shortened to "X'mas". But what they might not realise is that "X" actually represents the Greek letter "Chi", which is the first letter of the Greek word for Christ, "ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ".



Shortening "Christmas" to "Xmas" does actually have a historical reason.

During early Victorian times, mince pies used to be made from actual meat! It is thought this dated back to Tudor times.

However, throughout the 19th century, the traditional mince pie recipe started to develop to the one we know today, with fruit and spices.



Mince pies used to be made with actual meat in them!

In 1843, Sir Henry Cole was behind the first printed Christmas card. He asked John Callcott Horsley to design it. It had the words 'A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year To You' printed on it. About 1,000 cards were made and it cost a shilling, which was actually a lot of money at the time.



The first Christmas card showed people drinking a toast.

The gospels in the Bible don't actually mention what date Christmas falls on. It wasn't until the 4th century that the Roman church decided December 25 was when Christians should celebrate Jesus's birth.

Some historians even think he might have actually been born during the Spring.



Some people think the fact the shepherds were said to be out in the fields with their flocks is proof that Jesus was born in the Spring, as the sheep would have been having their lambs.

The Christmas story about how Jesus was born is actually pieced together from two different versions – one written in the gospel by Matthew and one by Luke.

For example, while Matthew said the angel visited Joseph, Luke says that the angel Gabriel visited Mary to tell her she was pregnant.



This drawing shows the angel appearing to Mary.

In the 1640s, parliament banned celebrating Christmas! People called Puritans – who believed in a more modest life led by stricter, religious rules – decided there should be no decorations and parties, like there had been.

They thought Christmas had become too indulgent and that people had forgotten the religious significance of it. Many people kept celebrating in secret though until it became allowed again.



Celebrating Christmas the way it is celebrated today could have landed you in a lot of trouble in the past!

Advent – the period leading up to Christmas – starts on the fourth Sunday before Christmas. The word Advent comes from the Latin "adventus" meaning "arrival" or "coming".



The word "Advent" actually comes from a Latin word, meaning Christmas is "coming".

Jingle Bells wasn't originally written as a Christmas song. It doesn't even mention Christmas, Advent or Jesus! That's because it was actually written for Thanksgiving.

Epiphany is the name given to the day 12 days after Christmas on January 6, when the Wise Men are said to have visited the new baby and Jesus was shown to the world for the first time. The word Epiphany comes from the Greek word meaning "show" or "reveal".

The majority of Orthodox Christians mark Christmas on



Orthodox Christians waiting to worship at a church in Jerusalem on January 7.

January 7. This is because they actually use a different calendar, called the Julian Calendar, which is 13 days behind the usual calendar, called the Gregorian calendar.



December 19

News in Pictures



Jakarta, Indonesia
People gather at a Christmas display in Senayan City shopping mall.



Harbin, China
A tourist splashes water that immediately turns to ice over the frozen Songhua River in Heilongjiang province.



Reykjanes, Iceland
A coastguard helicopter flies close to a volcanic eruption taking place near Grindavík, on the Reykjanes peninsula, south-western Iceland.

Kyiv, Ukraine
Pedestrians pass a Christmas tree made from used artillery shells and parts of rockets.



December 18



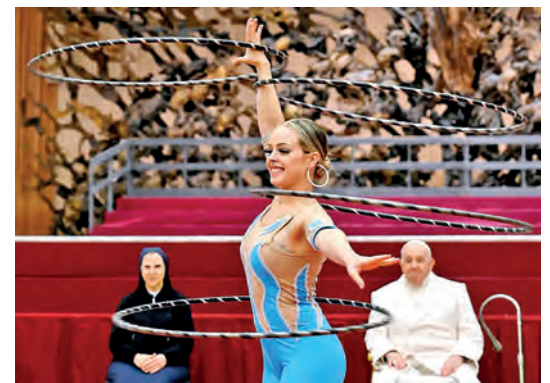
Harbin, China
Tourists visit the Harbin Ice-Snow World in north-east China which opened to the public on Monday. More than 1,000 ice and snow landscapes and sculptures have been built for the renowned annual winter wonderland.

December 17

Venice, Italy
Rowers take part in a Christmas regatta on the Grand Canal in Venice.



Rafah, Gaza Strip
Children look at the site of an Israeli strike on a house in the southern Gaza Strip.



Vatican City
Pope Francis attends a display at Santa Marta paediatric dispensary to mark his 87th birthday.



Careiro da Várzea, Brazil
Dressed as Santa Claus, Jorge Barroso arrives to give out presents to children in the Amazon basin.



Teotihuacán, Mexico
Hot-air balloons fly over the pre-Hispanic city famed for its two pyramids.

Source: The Guardian