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# Christmas Candle Traditions

By Sarita Mehra

**CHRISTMAS IS A SEASON** rich in tradition. From the turkey to the tree, they all have their place in Christmas history – even the Christmas candle. We use candles for many occasions – birthdays, weddings, and to create a desired atmosphere. But there is a tradition behind Christmas candles that goes further than the turkey.

## TAPERS IN TIME

Through the centuries, candles have been offered as gifts and used to ward off darkness. The first use of candles at Christmas was during the Roman festival of Saturnalia. Tall tapers of wax were given as gifts to guests and offered to Saturn as a symbol of his light.

The Pagans also used candles during Yule festivities. Candlelight and bonfires

were used as symbols of the sun, and a farewell to the past seasons as well as a welcome to the beginning of a new cycle of seasons.

As Christianity spread, candles were placed in the front window to guide the Christ Child as he wandered from house to house on Christmas Eve. In some parts of Europe, this tradition still continues. In Sweden, St. Lucia is still celebrated with the youngest girl in the family wearing (or carrying) a crown of small lit tapers.

## SEASON TRADITIONS

Candles also play a significant role in other traditions of the season, including Chanukah, Kwanzaa, Yule and Candlemas. Chanukah is also known as the Festival of Lights. During Chanukah a special eight-branched candelabrum is slowly lit over

eight days.

Kwanzaa's central practice is the lighting of the mishumaa (seven candles) of Kwanzaa which signifies each of the Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles).

Although Candlemas was originally a Pagan festival to celebrate purification, Christians now celebrate it on February 2, the 40th day after Christmas. It is a day representing and honoring Christ and Mary's purification in the temple.

## MODERN TRADITIONS

During the Victorian era, candles were used on Christmas trees and were considered a symbol of the Star of Wonder. Often, various merchants and tradesmen would give a bundle of pine-oil perfumed tapers, tied together with ribbon as gifts to their loyal patrons.

Today, scented candles continue to enhance Christmas. Pine, cinnamon and gingerbread spice are just a few of the scented candles that have become popular over the years. Even little tea-lights help to spread the wonderful smells of potpourri.

Christmas dinner isn't the same without a couple of candles. Fringed with small wreaths or majestically standing in heirloom candlesticks, their warm glow cradles the faces of family and friends; and adds brilliance to the golden hue of a table laden heavy with feast.

This Christmas continue the tradition of candles in your décor. Enjoy their colors, aromas and light as they add a touch of magic to a wonderful time of year.

Author's note: Candles are a treasure, and like any treasure should be carefully looked after. Please do not leave lit candles unattended, in the reach of children, or in high traffic areas of your home where they may cause harm.

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