

Pastor's Perspective: Christmas traditions around the world



Special to Pelahatchie News

By Guest Columnist John Vaughn, Pastor, Cross Roads Baptist Church

As the old song goes, this is “the most wonderful time of the year!” With Christmas just a few weeks away, many people are already in the Christmas spirit. And if you are not there yet, with all the decorations, parades, shopping, holiday music and the excitement of children, it’s hard not to slip into “Christmas mode.”

I thought it would be interesting to learn about some of the specific Christmas traditions that are practiced in other countries. And it seems that every country has their own. There are even variations among the regions of some countries.

Here are a few examples that I found most interesting.

In Ethiopia, Christmas Day is listed as an official Public Holiday. Many Christians in Ethiopia fast for 40 days prior to Christmas. It’s called the “Fast of the Prophets.” Then, they head to church at dawn on Christmas morning. Throughout Christmas Day, there will be colorful musical celebrations which involve the priests dressed in their best

robes performing rituals, including dancing and playing drums and other instruments. Late in the afternoon of Christmas Day, there will be the traditional game of “Gena,” a kind of Field Hockey. According to an Ethiopian legend, the game was being played by the shepherds who were tending their flocks on the night that Jesus was born.

Christmas for El Salvador still carries a strong meaning that brings families together. Despite the business on the streets and the red, green and white colors flooding the environment, Salvadoran people try to honor what they consider to be the true meaning of Christmas, the birth of Jesus. Families have parties in which they dance and eat. Santa Claus is known for appearing in TV and print ads, but people ask children if they already wrote a letter to little baby Jesus. At 12 a.m. on December 25, everyone gathers around the Christmas tree and opens their presents.

Christmas is a statutory holiday in Mexico, and workers can have the day off with pay. One of the traditions in Mexico is that over the nine days before December 25, groups of towns-

people go from door to door to symbolize Mary and Joseph, the parents of the unborn baby Jesus Christ, looking for shelter to pass the night when they arrived at Bethlehem. Often, they will be invited inside for snacks and fellowship. Another custom followed by many is to have a Nativity scene in their home, minus the baby Jesus. Then at midnight on Christmas Eve, the figure of baby Jesus is placed in the manger of the Nativity scene, to symbolize His birth.

Japan does not have a Christian orientation, therefore there is generally no celebration associated with the Birth of Jesus. However, encouraged by commerce, the secular celebration of Christmas is popular in Japan, even though Christmas

is not a national holiday. Gifts are sometimes exchanged, and Christmas parties are held around Christmas Day. Christmas lights decorate cities, and Christmas trees adorn living areas and malls. Christmas Eve has become a holiday for families to spend time together and exchange gifts. A successful advertising campaign in the 1970s made eating at Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) around Christmas a national custom. The chick-

en meals at KFC are so popular during the season that stores take reservations months in advance.

In the Czech Republic, Christmas Eve is known as “Generous Day” and the giving of gifts is encouraged, especially to those who are less fortunate. According to tradition, gifts for children are brought by the “baby Jesus.” Other Czech Christmas traditions involve predictions for the future. Apples are always cut crosswise: if a perfect star appears in the core, the next year will be successful, a distorted star means a bad year or illness, while a cross may suggest death.

What Christmas traditions or customs do you follow? If you don’t have any, maybe this year you can start some. Resolve to listen only to Christian music stations during December; provide supplies to a food ministry like Ever Reaching Community Outreach, right here in Pelahatchie; surprise a struggling family with gifts for their children; serve at a soup kitchen; contact and make amends with someone; send a “thank you” note to the Fire or Police Department; say “Merry Christmas” a lot! There are a lot of things you can do to make sure this will be the best Christmas season you have ever had. And it should include taking your family to church!



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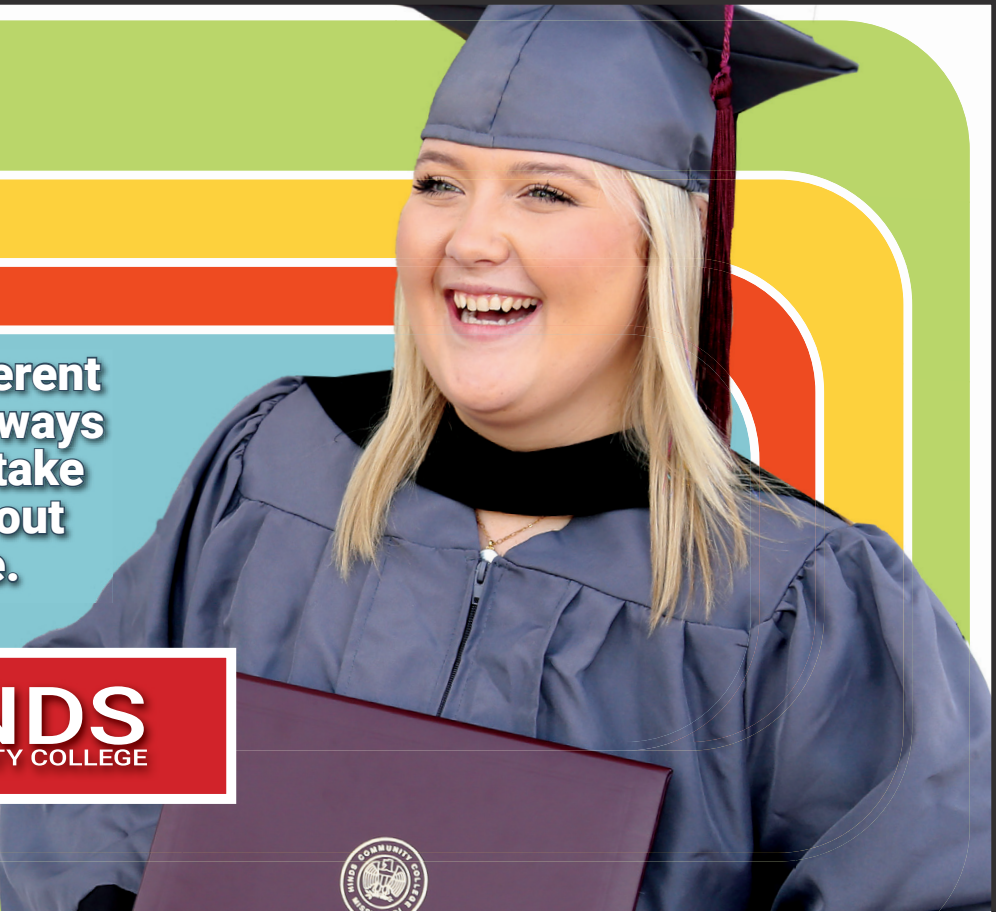
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