

# The Emblems of Christmas:

Where they came from and what they can mean to us.

By: Jeff Grismer, *for my precious niece and nephew  
Lacy Lee and Jesse, December 1998*



**ANGELS** – Angel simply means messenger. Despite the current “angel craze” affecting society today, angels become more prevalent at Christmastime. You’ll find them hanging on streetlights, office doors, truck grills and the tops of Christmas trees abroad.

Biblically they have many associations with Christmas. This is because it was the angel Gabriel who first told Mary she would be “overshadowed by the power of the Most High when the Holy Spirit came upon her and, although she was a virgin, she would be with child and the Holy One to be born would be called the Son of God.”

The Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph, Mary’s husband to be, and told him, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife because what was conceived in her was from the Holy Spirit. She would give birth to a son who you are to name Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins.” (Jesus most literally means, “the Lord is salvation”).

The Angel of the Lord, with a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, appeared to certain shepherds and announced good news of great joy to all the world: In Bethlehem that day a Savior, Christ the Lord, was born onto all men.

*Luk 1:26-38 / Mat 1:18-22 / Luk 2:8-15*

**BELLS** – Biblically bells represent Holiness. They were sewn onto the High Priest’s Ephod to wear into the Most Holy Place once a year to atone for the sins of the people. “In that day”, even on horses, bells will be inscribed with HOLY TO THE LORD.

*Exo 28:35 / Zec 14:20*

Symbolically: shepherds ring bells to call lost sheep back to the fold. Moreover, shepherds will put bells around the necks of sheep that keep getting lost to make them easier to find. Thank God our Great Shepherd calls out to us and searches for us when we all, like sheep, go astray.

*Isa 53:6 / 1Pet 2:25*

**BOWS** – Biblically I don’t find any significance.

Symbolically however, I like to see the bow as safely keeping the gift together with its holder as we are safe in the hands of Christ.

The bow also brings all the parts of the package together into one body, just as we were all baptized into one body by the Holy Spirit.

The bow seals the gift and only one who is worthy is able to open the bow and reveal the gift inside – praise God there is One who is worthy to open the Scroll and its Seven Seals.

*Joh 10:28 / 1Cor 12:13 / Rev 5:5*

**CANDLES** – Biblically candles (KJV) represent man's life spirit and the glory of Christ living within him. Jesus gave His Spirit freely, so we should not put our candles under a bushel but rather on a candlestick so those who come in may see the True Light that gives us our light.

*Job 18:6 / Mat 5:15, Luk 11:33 / (esp.1:4&9)*

**CANDY CANES** – Biblically there is no significance but the *true story of why an Indiana candy maker invented the candy cane* was to symbolically represent the shepherd's staff. They are used to gently guide wondering sheep back to the fold and to defend helpless sheep from attack-ing wolves and lions. They are hard and solid, like the solid Rock upon which the church is built. They are white because Jesus was born of a virgin and lived without sin. Three small red stripes represent the stripes on His back which heal us. One large red stripe represents the blood of the Cross which saves us.

**CHRISTMAS CAROLS** – Carol means to sing joyfully. The best biblical discussion I can think of is The First Noel. Noel means Christmas carol and the first Christmas carol / noel sung was by angels to certain shepherds, just as the song states. The First Noel sings the story told by in chapter 2, verse 14.

There are three kinds of 'Christmas carols' easily recognized:

1. Noels – *Silent Night / Joy to the World / O Come All Ye Faithful* – are examples of true Christmas carols which joyfully put to song the glorious story of the birth of our promised Messiah, our Savior, the Son of God, Immanuel, God with us.

2. Seasonal Songs – *Jingle Bells / Deck the Halls / Frosty the Snowman* – nice little songs that sing about the holidays, winter, Santa, Rudolph, shopping or whatever. There's nothing really wrong with them at all. Some are personal favorites of mine, but they aren't truly Christmas carols because they don't *carol* Christ.

3. Secular Garbage – are the songs which paganize the spiritual history of the true meaning of Christmas.

*Santa Baby* is all about greed and self-centeredness. It is a song, written to Santa by an adult, about all the things he deserves to get for Christmas because of being such a good person. (Excuse me, but isn't the idea on Christmas to give? Isn't the reason a Savior needed to be born is because we are not good?).

Bon Jovi's, *I'm Your Backdoor Santa* is about being cool by sneaking around having pre-marital sex with your friend's girlfriends. That's a Halloween carol. It glorifies the works of our adversary the devil, not the birth of our best friend the Christ child. How it could be included on a Christmas album is explained only by the fact that the world has taken the Christ out of Christmas.

**CHRISTMAS LIGHTS** – Biblically I don't find any significance. Symbolically the different colors can all be a representation of their Biblical significance as follows:

Green

Life / Prosperity

*Pro 11:28, Luk 23:31*

Gold	Divinity	<i>Exo 25:10-22</i>
Silver	Redemption	<i>Gen 20:16, Lev 5:15, 18:16</i>
Purple	Royalty	 — <i>Exo 26:31-36, 27:16, Joh 14:6*</i>
Blue	the Son of God	
White	Jesus' sinless life	
Red	Salvation through His atoning Blood	

\*The Tabernacle was the center of worship for all of Israel. The curtains into the Outer Court, Holy Place and Most Holy Place were all woven of red, blue, purple and white fabrics. The Jews called the entrance to the outer court “the Way”, because that was the only entrance into the Tabernacle. The curtain into the Tent they called “the Truth”, because as you stepped out of the world and into the Holy Place, the first thing revealed to you was light from the lampstand. The curtain between the Holy Place and Most Holy Place they called “the Life”, because it maintained your separation from the very presence of God. With these insights it is easy to see why the Jews were so offended at Jesus’ claim to be the Way, the Truth and the Light – He was declaring Himself to be God.

**CHRISTMAS TREES** – Biblically a tree is a symbol of the cross. Even Webster’s 9<sup>th</sup>, definition 2a(2), defines *tree* as, “the cross on which Jesus was crucified.”

*Act 5:30, 1Pet 2:24*

Fir trees, the most common Christmas trees, symbolize celebration onto the Lord as all Israel and David did so with instruments made of Fir. Fir was also used throughout the construction of the Temple by Solomon.

*2Sam 6:5 kjv / 1Kin 6:15 kjv*

Trees also symbolize people. Jesus said He is the vine and we are the branches. As such, note that it is the branches that are brown (a color symbolic with death and dying). But the green leaf grows out of the branch, just as Jesus came from the woman.

*Mat 7:15-19, Luk 6:43-45 / Joh 15:5 / Mat 1:21*

Historically it was Martin Luther who had the first Christmas tree. He was out one evening near Christmastime walking in the woods and praising God when he came upon a clearing with a snow covered tree reflecting the bright light of the full moon. He cut down a tree and put it in his house, decorated with candles, in an attempt to simulate in his house some of the beauty of God’s creation.

Symbolically fir trees are evergreen trees representing our eternal life in Christ. All the leaves on a fir tree bend to point upwards towards Heaven just as we can lift our heads to Heaven because our Redemption draws near.

*Gal 6:8 / Luk 21:28*

A special note: Don’t be fooled by any who may come knocking on your door and telling you that you are practicing heathen rituals by having a Christmas tree. They will most likely be quoting from *Jeremiah 10:1-5*. This they quote out of context as the Scripture in context is clearly and only speaking of the carving of trees into idols and then worshiping the idols.

**DOVES** – Biblically Doves represent Peace, Purity, Innocence and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit “like a Dove” came upon Jesus to begin His ministry and also raised Him from the grave to conquer death once and for all.

*Gen 8:11 / Mat 10:16 / Mat 3:16, Luk 3:22, Joh 1:32 / 1Pet 3:18*

**GIFTS** – Biblically the first establishing of a specific day of feasting and joy and giving presents of food to one another and gifts to the poor was ‘Purim’ in the days of Queen Esther. It was a celebration by Israel of their deliverance from death by their enemies.

What could be a more appropriate parallel to the birth of our Savior – the one who delivered us from our death by our enemy of sin.

*Est 9:20-32 / Joh 1:29*

Thus the first Christmas present is Jesus: for God so loved the world that He *gave* His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jesus – the best gift – indescribable.

The next three gifts were from the wise men to Jesus – Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. Gold symbolized Jesus’ divinity; frankincense, the worship due Him; myrrh, His death to come (myrrh was the finest burial spice of the day). They are also Old Testament symbols of His titles as King, Priest and Prophet.

Since we are created in God’s image, shouldn’t we also be givers? Besides, when we give to each other in His name we actually give to God!

Jesus chose to give up His Spirit so that the Holy Spirit could be given to us as the Father had promised. On the cross, Jesus took our death and gave us His life!!

*Joh 3:16, 2Cor 9:15 / Mat 2:11 / Gen 1:26, Mat 25:40 / Mat 27:50, Joh 19:30, Act 1:4 / Heb 9:15, 28*

**MANGERS** – Biblically mangers symbolize a world that doesn’t have any “room” for Jesus. So like today’s world that can’t fit Jesus into a busy schedule, or chooses not to because He requires certain sacrifices that don’t seem consistent with the obtaining of our goals.

Jesus came to a people’s inn to find a bed and wasn’t accepted; He went to an animal’s stable to find a manger and was accepted.

So too Jesus came to the Jew who didn’t accept Him; He went to the Gentile who did.

*Luk 2:7, 12 / Luk 14:15-23*

**RED & GREEN** – These come from ‘holly’, but thinking ‘Holy’ – red, or scarlet, represents the shed blood of Jesus Christ through which we obtain our redemption.

Green represents nourishment, prosperity and new life that we have when we choose to receive Him as our Good Shepherd and Savior.

*2Kin 3:22, Eph 1:7, Heb 9:22 / Gen 1:30, Pro 11:28, Luk 23:31 / Psa 23*

**STARS** – Biblically Jesus was prophesied as a Star that would come out of Jacob.

The wise men saw His Star (as prophesied by Balaam) in the East and knew to come

worship Him. They followed the star as it went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where Jesus was. That's why we "hang a shining star upon the highest bow" as Hugh Martin and Ralph Blane wrote in their 1943 song, Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas.

So who needs a movie star when you can have God's Bright and Morning Star.

*Num 24:17, Mat 2:2, Rev 22:16kjr*

WISE MEN – Traditionally there are three (based on the gifts they gave). Actually it was quite an entourage of Magi who were 'king makers'. They were sufficient in number to make King Herod and all Jerusalem to be troubled.

What also isn't so commonly known is that they traveled, following His star, roughly two years over open dessert to get to Jesus.

Overjoyed, they found Him and worshipped Him. They opened their treasures, presented their gifts to Him and then made the long journey back to their country.

*Mat 2:1-12*

WREATHS – Symbolically wreaths, like wedding bands, are circular shaped showing eternal love with no beginning or ending. Unlike marriage, where we choose the beginning and death chooses the ending, Christ's love has no beginning or ending. He loved us before the world began and will love us forever with an everlasting love.

As evergreens wreathes symbolize the eternal life available to us through Jesus Christ's birth, death and resurrection.

*Jer 31:3, Psa 103:17 / Rom 5:21*

WORDS – At Christmastime three certain words become very common, especially on streetlights, banners and front doors.

JOY, short for *Joy to the World* – quotes the Angel of the Lord speaking to the shepherds as recorded in 2:10 - *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.*

PEACE, short for *Peace on Earth* – was how the great company of angels praised God to the shepherds as tells us in 2:14 - *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace on earth to all whom God favors."*

NOEL, uncapitalized means Christmas carol. Capitalized it means Christmas.

A modern English word established in 1811, it comes from the French word *Noel*, of the same meaning. The French word was derived from the Latin, *Natalis*, meaning birthday, which was derived from the Latin *Natus*, meaning natal. Natus was derived from the Latin *Nasci*, meaning to be born. Noel most literally means, "to sing joyfully about someone's birth."

Who could have been born that would cause people to sing so much that their singing of Him would still be causing the formation of new words 17 centuries after his birth?

I speculate the answer to be held within the word itself. "Noe" is left over from the Latin root for *birthday*. Add the Hebrew word for *God*, "El". Thus, Noel – *the birth of God*.

CHRISTMAS, not one of the three but definitely common at Christmastime!!

It has been around since before the 12<sup>th</sup> century coming from the Middle English word *Christemasse*, a derivative of the Old English word *Christes Maesse*, which literally means Christ's mass.

Mass is defined as the *celebration of the Eucharist*.

Eucharist is defined as *Communion*.

Communion is defined as *a Christian sacrament in which bread and wine are partaken of as a commemoration of the death of Christ*.

Therefore Christmas literally means: *Christ's celebration of His death with the sacraments of wine and bread* i.e. → the Last Supper.

So maybe Christmas should be called Noel (*the birth of God*) and the Thursday before Good Friday should be called Christmas (*since that's the day of the Last Supper*).

Regardless of what name we choose, Good Friday is only "good" because Easter Sunday saw an Empty Tomb!

All this having been said, it is only logical to commemorate His death on the celebration of His birth since He was born to die; born to die for your sins; born to die for my sins; born to die for our sins.

The real joy is that death could not hold Him because He alone is without sin, blemish or fault. On the third day, in accordance to the Scriptures, He rose from the grave with the keys of hell and death, publicly walked the earth, and before a great number of witnesses ascended into Heaven, offering His blood as the ultimate sacrifice which was and is accepted eternally. This we know because the Father sent the promised gift, the Holy Spirit, to us His church.

*So Merry CHRISMas, because all this began with a little baby boy wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger where oxen fed on hay.*

*Love, Uncle Jeff*