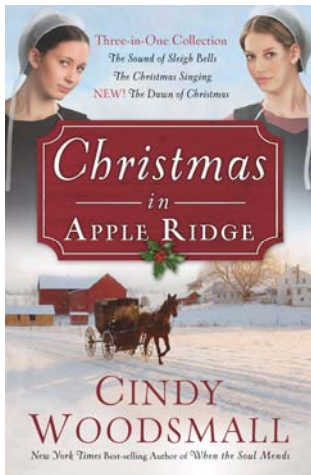


How the Amish Decorate for Christmas

By Cindy Woodsmall



Christmas is a sacred time for Christians. Since we know how most Christians decorate for that Holy Day, I thought I'd share what some of my Old Order Amish friends have told me about their decorations.

I'm sure it won't surprise you when I say that the Amish use almost no decorations. Most Amish consider such "trappings" a distraction from the story of Christ's birth.

But for many decades they've enjoyed making or buying Christmas cards, and they enjoy sending and receiving them. They often hang up the cards throughout their homes as a form of simple holiday trimming. Also, many Amish have traditionally put candles in the window and light them after dark, giving the house a warm, homey feel during Christmastime.

Even the Amish, however, are not immune to change. As the years have progressed, they are enjoying a few more freedoms...and decorations. It is now common for some Amish to place battery-operated candles in their windows, although this wouldn't take place in several of my Amish friends' homes.

Most Amish are comfortable putting candles surrounded by wreaths on surfaces throughout the house. But you won't find a Christmas tree or stockings hanging inside an Amish home. Based on the second commandment, which says not to make any graven image, you won't find a nativity scene or angel figurines, and definitely no traces of Santa.

Some Amish wrap Christmas presents in beautiful, shiny paper and set them in a special place, like near the hearth, while waiting for Christmas to arrive.

On Christmas Day, most Old Order Amish decorate their kitchen tables for the family's Christmas dinner, adorning it with candles and greenery. That adds a special festive feel to the day.

Although their homes may be devoid of most Christmas decorations, the Amish enjoy celebrating the season and cherish their own special traditions with their families.

Amish schoolchildren have a Christmas program each year in their one-room schoolhouse. The program usually includes a play of the Christmas story, and the parents, grandparents, and siblings are invited. The Amish also have what they call *Zwedde Grischtdaag*, which means Second Christmas. Second Christmas is usually celebrated the day after Christmas. Both days are holidays for the Amish. Unlike in our public or private schools, Amish children don't get even a whole week off. The teacher may dismiss them after a half day of school on Christmas Eve, or she/he may not. But they always get Christmas Day and Second Christmas off before school resumes.

However you decorate for Christmas, I hope you'll soak in the hope we have through Christ and that you celebrate in a way that fills your mind and heart with Him while making the day a precious memory for loved ones.