

Let's Talk About It

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A Gift of Poinsettias

Merry Christmas and a joyful new year. This is the time of the year when friends, relatives, and lovers show how they appreciate each other by exchanging gifts. Gifts, however, should not be used to buy a relationship. They should be given to affirm each other in a mutually supportive relationship. Therefore, before gifts are given, there should first be a loving relationship. Some spend lots of money to purchase gifts; but there is still something missing. It is in the heart of the giver. If you have never affirmed your friend, relative, spouse, or lover without a gift, then the gift you plan to give now would be meaningless, no matter how valuable it is. A very special way of showing someone your appreciation is by making a gift with your own hands. It can be in the form of a letter, homemade card, or an art piece. Most importantly, the best gift you can give during this time of the year is yourself.

One of the most beautiful gifts given this time of the year is that of Poinsettias. This red and green plant adds life and color to the environment. Below is the famous story of the Legend of the Poinsettia. Although it is only a legend, enjoy it and grasp its meaning. Then share it with a friend for Christmas.

THE LEGEND OF THE POINSETTIA

“Juanita was a little girl who lived in the small village of San Pancho, Mexico hundreds of years ago. Juanita's family were farmers and they were very poor. As Christmas approached Juanita's mama and papa became sick and Juanita had to help care for her little brother and sister. There was much work to be done and young Juanita did her best to cook and clean and help with the burro in the fields. All the people of the village were decorating the church and making special gifts to give to the Christ Child on Christmas Eve.

Everyone would take part in the Christmas Eve procession, singing and carrying candles. Then Padre Gonzalez would place the figure of the Baby Jesus in the manger and the villagers would put their special gifts around the manger. Juanita had tried to weave a colorful blanket for the Christ Child, but she was too little and the yarns became tangled. She tried to sew little leather boots for her gift, but the leather was too tough and she was not strong enough to push the needle through. She tried to think of something very special that her family could give to the Baby Jesus, but with mama and papa sick and her younger brother and sister too small to help, she could think of nothing. At last it was Christmas Eve. The entire village was ready to form the procession, the candles were lit, the singing began as the villagers walked through San Pancho carrying their gifts to place at the manger.

Juanita hid in the darkness, watching with tears in her eyes as the procession went to the church.

Suddenly an old man stepped from the shadows nearby. "Little girl, are you Juanita?" He said. "Si," answered Juanita, wondering who he could be. "I have a message for you. Your mama and papa are going to get well soon. So do not worry. Go to the church and celebrate Christmas with the other villagers. Your brother and sister are waiting for you." "I can't," Juanita told him. "I don't have a gift for the Baby Jesus. I tried and tried to make something but I couldn't finish it."

"Ah, Juanita, don't you know that any gift is beautiful because it is given. Whatever you give, the Baby Jesus will love, because it comes from you." "But what can I give?" And Juanita began looking around. She saw a big patch of green weeds nearby. Juanita rushed over and picked a huge armful. Then turned to the old man. But he was gone. Juanita walked into the church. All of the candles were blazing, the children were singing as she walked down the aisle with her bundle of green weeds. "What is Juanita carrying?" the villagers whispered.

"She's bringing weeds into the church!" Juanita placed the green weeds all around the manger. Then she bowed her head and prayed. A hush fell over the church. Voices whispered, "Look!, Look at the weeds!" Juanita opened her eyes. Each weed was topped with a flaming red star. And when everyone went outside after the Mass, all the bunches of tall green weeds throughout the town were shining with red stars. Juanita's simple gift had become beautiful.

And every Christmas to this day, the red stars shine on top of the green branches in Mexico. The people call the plant la Flor de Nochebuena. The flower of the Holy Night - the Poinsettia. When we first heard the Mexican legend of the Poinsettia, our whole family was touched by it as only Christmas can touch. This Mexican wildflower is known by many names in Mexico: flor de fuego (fire flower), flor de Navidad (Christmas flower), and flor de la Noche buena (flower of the Holy Night.) The Poinsettia came to the United States through Dr. Joel Roberts Poinsett, who served as the nation's minister to Mexico from 1825 to 1830. He was fascinated with its beauty and called the plant "painted leaves", because the part often thought of as the flower actually consists of leaves surrounding a smaller flower portion. He took cuttings home to South Carolina when he returned from Mexico in 1830. The Christmas plant, which we call Poinsettia after Dr. Poinsett, found its way into our own Christmas traditions, and nothing seems to say "Merry Christmas" better than a beautiful red and green Poinsettia." Merry Christmas to all. Send your questions to P.O. Box N 896, or call 393 2818, or email encouragement@coralwave.com, or visit the web site www.soencouragement.org.