

So this is Christmas...

By Wesley Trobaugh



We've been scoffing at the turrón, garland and the Baby Jesus in shops now for about a month, but today, Christmas officially begins.

"No, it doesn't," I hear you saying. But it does. Today is the day after Thanksgiving and Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent, how much clearer can it be? Christmas is upon us, whether you're prepared for it or not. The shopping centres are teeming with shoppers; the hypermarkets have prepared their toy sections with the latest light-up toy pianos, dolls that throw up on you, and camouflaged, 15-centimetre soldiers prepared for battle. The prawns are up to 50€ a kilo. Ah! The glory of the holidays!

Each year, when they see me put up my Christmas tree, little blinking lights and wreath on the door on the fourth Friday in November, I imagine that my neighbours refer to me as the crazy foreigner or something of the likes, but I don't care. Ever since I can remember, Thanksgiving marks the beginning of the holiday season and as integrated into this society as I may be, Christmas does not begin on the 24th of December. It begins *today*.

As soon as I leave work, I will run home to the dusty boxes marked "Xmas" and have a fiesta of sneezing as I stick the fake branches into the fake trunk of my fake tree. Then I will proceed to untangle the

bunches of lights that I so delicately put away last year so that they would be easy to unravel this year (I am convinced that there are little Grinch gnomes that go into my storage space and snarl up my Christmas lights in August). Then, of course, I will plug them in to see if they work and they will undoubtedly not (those same little gnomes also steal, or even worse, just slightly loosen a few bulbs so that not one of the lights in the strand actually light up). So then I will try to solve that problem and proceed to decorate the tree with what seem to be way too many decorations for one metre-and-a-half tree (as the season goes on, I will inevitably buy more). After this is all finished, I will stand back and admire my work of art.

Then comes the manger scene (crèche, nativity scene, crib...), complete with a handless Virgin Mary and the two Wise Men (apparently Gaspar got lost on the way). Last year I didn't think it would be appropriate for Jesus to appear until Christmas Day. I found him in the drawer this summer. I think this year he will just have to join the group earlier. It doesn't make much sense for the entire festive entourage to be standing around staring in awe at an empty space in the middle of the table.

This is all very nice but the most wonderful part of Christmas are the carols, not "Los Peces en el Río" and "La Mari Morena," but "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and "Joy to the World." Today is the day when I begin my carolling campaign. In the car, at home, at work...you can't escape so don't even try! Today begins the most wonderful time of the year.

*It's The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year
With the kids jingle belling
And everyone telling you "Be of good cheer"
It's The Most Wonderful Time Of The Year
It's the hap -happiest season of all
With those holiday greetings and gay happy meetings
When friends come to call
It's the hap - happiest season of all*

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