By Kylee Baumlee

In less than a week, another Christmas Day will be upon us and we'll celebrate in ways familiar to many, and with those known only to our particular families.

That's part of the charm that this time of year holds for many of us, isn't it? We keep traditions going, year after year, and it's as important to us as teaching our kids to say please and thank you.

Even those who don't practice the Christian faith will acknowledge the holiday in some way. Decorated trees glimmer with lights and can be seen in homes where God's very existence is questioned. The custom of putting up a tree at Christmas is believed by some to have begun with Martin Luther.

Legend has it that Luther was walking through the forest one Christmas Eve and was awed by the beautiful sight of millions of stars as they twinkled through the branches of the evergreen trees. He is said to have cut a small tree and taken it home, where he placed candles on the ends of the branches to recreate those twinkling stars.

Another lesser known Christmas legend involves a common perennial plant, the Lady's Mantle (Alchemilla mollis). I've grown Lady's Mantle in my garden for years and love how the rain and dew collects in little puddles on its leaves.

Beading up in a unique way, it causes the leaves to sparkle as if they held diamonds. But the way Lady's Mantle reproduces makes it even more unique.

As part of the whole "birds and the bees and the flowers and the trees" thing, many plants reproduce by the process of a male flower pollinating a female flower, and when it's finished

with its bloom, it will form seeds. This assures that the plant species will continue.

Lady's Mantle does this in a different way. It sets seed by a process known as parthenogenesis, without fertilization. Legend states that early Christians saw this as a type of virgin birth, and so named the plant in honor of the Virgin Mary, known in some faiths as "Our Lady."

Though holly is used at Christmas time, there is the tradition that the red berries represent the blood of Christ and the prickly points on its foliage are symbolic of the crown of thorns. In some northern European countries, holly has the common name of "Christ's Thorn."

The tradition of hanging a wreath on the door at Christmas is two-fold. The essence of pine is said to aid in the treatment of colds and coughs and if you've ever gotten a good whiff of pine sap, you probably won't doubt that it could help.

But the circular shape of the wreath itself is said to be representative of God's never-ending love for us and His infinite presence.

Other plants have religious holiday connections too, such as the dogwood tree, whose blooms are said to be symbolic of the crucified Christ. The Passion Flower (Passiflora sp.) has a similar Easter significance.

Read more at Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at www.ourlittleacre.com and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/OurLittleAcre. Contact her at PauldingProgressGardener@gmail.com.