

THE LEGEND OF 'LA BEFANA'



La Befana is the benevolent old woman with magical powers who brings gifts to the children of Italy on the eve of Epiphany.

Like most legends there are many versions. This is just one of them.

The name Befana is derived from the word epifania, the Italian name for the religious festival of the Epiphany.

In the weeks preceding the Epiphany, the children of Italy are busy writing notes to La Befana, telling her the presents they would most like to receive. They are on their best behavior because they know that La Befana will leave a lump of Coal, instead of sweets and toys, for ill-behaved children.

A short story of the Legend of La Befana follows:

The story takes place at the time of the birth of the baby, Jesus, the Christ Child. La Befana is an old woman who lives in a house in the hills of Italy. She once had a husband and Child, but now lives alone. La Befana spends her days sweeping and baking. One night, she notices a bright light in the sky. She thinks nothing of it and goes back to her work. Later a caravan led by the Three Wise Men stops at her door. They ask her for directions to Bethlehem. They also invite her to join in their search for the Christ child. Befana refuses because she is too busy and knows nothing of this faraway place and the birth of a special baby. After the caravan disappeared over the hills, La Befana thought of how much she missed her child who sadly died at very young age. She changed her mind and wanted to visit this special child, mainly because she loved children very much. So she placed some baked goods and gifts for the child in a sack, and took her broom to help the new mother clean. She raced out after the caravan in search of the Baby Jesus. La Befana soon became lost. Just as she tired, Angels appeared from the bright magic star that she had seen earlier. The Angels bestowed magic powers to La Befana that allowed her to use her broom to fly in the sky. This was a night of miracles. She searched and searched for the Baby Jesus but could not find him. She still searches after all these centuries. Every year on the eve of Epiphany, whenever La Befana comes to a house where there is a child, she drops in through the chimney, to see if it might be the child she seeks. It never is, but La Befana leaves a gift any way. For La Befana has come realize, over the years, that her searching is not in vein, that in a way the Christ Child can be found in all children. Merry Little Christmas!!

***Adapted from a story that appeared at Calandra Italian Institute Internet site.**

***Researched and submitted by Salvatore J. Mangano, PNP**