

Ancient greek myths

Apollo and Daphne

Apollo, the god of sun and music, fell deeply in love with a nymph named Daphne. But Daphne much preferred woodland sports and hunting to love and ran away in terror. Apollo followed Daphne around, hoping that she would change her mind, but she carried on running away. She wasn't interested in him at all.



Finally when Apollo was about to catch up with her, Daphne cried out to her father, Peneus, a river god, to save her. Suddenly, her skin turned into bark, her hair became leaves, and her arms were transformed into branches. She stopped running. Her feet became rooted to the ground. Apollo embraced the branches, but even the branches shrank away from him! Daphne's father had changed her into a laurel tree.

And from then on, the laurel – with its evergreen leaves – was considered Apollo's sacred tree. And from then on, laurel leaves were used to decorate the heads of leaders, like a crown.

The golden bough

The Greeks and the Trojans went to war. There was a long battle and Aeneas was one of the few Trojans to survive. He travelled to Italy and there he met a 700-year-old spirit called Deiphobe. Aeneas longed to see his dead father and Deiphobe agreed to accompany him to the underworld. But, first, she instructed Aeneas to pick a branch or bough of golden leaves from the woods near her cave. She said that this would protect him in the underworld. When Aeneas found the tree, he broke off a bough and another golden one grew immediately in its place. Deiphobe told him that that was a good omen for the task ahead.



Aeneas was the Trojan hero of a Greek story called the Aeneid. He is the legendary founder of Rome. Many writers and scholars believe that Aeneas' 'golden bough' was mistletoe.

The holly and the ivy

A traditional English Christmas carol

The holly and the ivy,
When they are both full grown,
Of all trees that are in the wood,
The holly bears the crown

[Refrain:]

*O, the rising of the sun,
And the running of the deer
The playing of the merry organ,
Sweet singing in the choir.*

The holly bears a blossom,
As white as lily flow'r,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
To be our dear Saviour

[Refrain]

The holly bears a berry,
As red as any blood,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
To do poor sinners good

[Refrain]



The holly bears a prickle,
As sharp as any thorn,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
On Christmas Day in the morn

[Refrain]

The holly bears a bark,
As bitter as the gall,
And Mary bore sweet Jesus Christ,
For to redeem us all

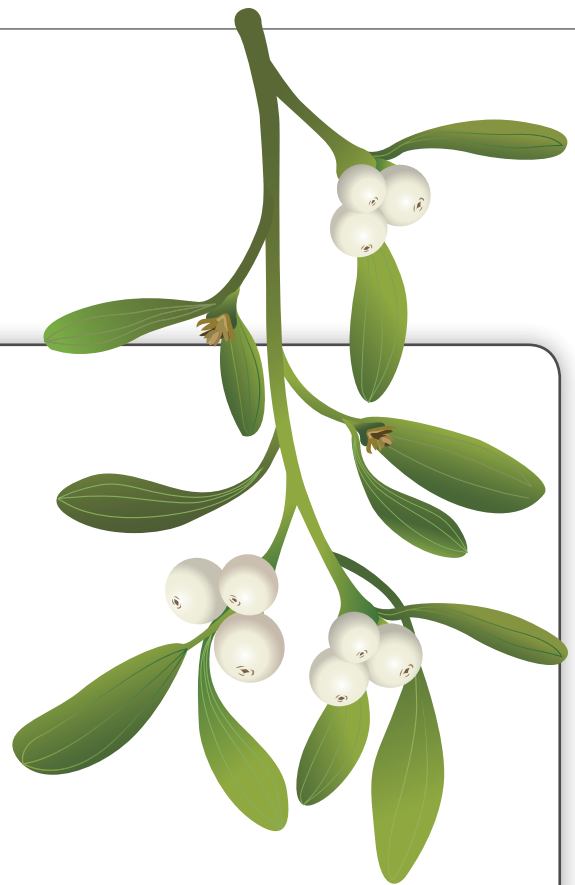
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A Viking myth

Frigga and the mistletoe



Balder had a dream in which he died. His mother, Frigga, the Goddess of Love and Beauty, was so worried by the dream, that she went to all the elements, air, fire, water and Earth, as well as all the animals and plants on Earth, and asked them to spare her son.

They said yes, and so, satisfied that she had secured their co-operation of all, she assured Balder that he would live forever. But Balder had one enemy, Loki, God of Evil, and Loki found a single plant that Frigga had forgotten about - mistletoe. Now mistletoe does not grow on the ground or under the ground, it is an aerial parasite with no roots – it attaches itself to the tree it grows on.

Loki made a poisoned arrow tip with the mistletoe and tricked Balder's blind brother, Hoder, into shooting the arrow and killing Balder. For three days, the Earth grew dark and rain poured down. Each of the elements tried to bring Balder back to life, but none was successful. But Frigga, cried so many tears, which the story goes turned into the white berries on the mistletoe plant and Balder was resurrected.

She was so happy that she reversed the mistletoe's poisonous reputation, kissed everyone who passed beneath the tree on which it grew and issued a decree that should one ever pass beneath the Mistletoe, they should have a token kiss and no harm would befall them.

The Vikings believed that the Mistletoe had magical powers. These beliefs were rooted in the myth of the resurrection of Balder, god of the summer sun.