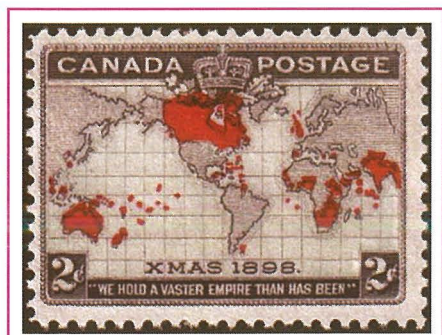


# Marian Stamps from around the world

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## Who issued the First Christmas Stamp?

The answer for this question has been debated for years on end. The fact is that the first stamp ever issued with an indication of Christmas was by Canada on 7 December 1898. This issue consisted of 3 stamps with the same design and value of 2 cents. (Stanly Gibbons nos. 166,167 and 168) Each stamp depicts the famous Gerhardus Mercator World Map. On this map the British possessions are depicted in Red. The only difference between the stamps is the colour of the seas, lavender, greenish blue and blue. At the bottom of each stamp the word 'XMAS 1898' was printed in black. Actually the stamps were not issued to commemorate Christmas but the introduction of the Imperial Penny Postage. One might ask why was the word 'XMAS 1898' added to this stamp. The story goes that at that time all stamp designs which the British Colonies, including Malta were to issue had to be approved by the all powerful Queen Victoria of Great Britain. For this reason a Canadian official went to Great Britain to obtain permission from Her Majesty for the design of a new stamp for the Imperial Penny Postage rate of 2cents. Trying to please her, the official suggested that the stamp was to serve as a tribute to the Prince. Actually the post office official was referring to the Prince of Wales whose birthday was to occur on the 9 November, the date when the new stamp was supposed to be released. The Queen who was supreme and wanted everybody to know it asked in no gentle manner 'What prince?' indicating her supremacy over everybody. The cunning official realizing his gaff answered immediately 'Why Madam, the Prince of Peace'. Naturally he was referring to Jesus Christ. It is said that the word 'XMAS 1898' was added to the stamp as a result of this.





In the beginning the issuing of Christmas stamps was a very slow process. After the Canadian 'Map Stamp' of 1898, the next nation to issue a Christmas stamp was Austria in 1937. This issue consisted of 2 stamps depicting a rose and zodiac signs. Stanly Gibbons refer to this set of stamps as Christmas Greetings stamps. After Austria, Brazil issued a set of four semi-charity stamps in 1939. These stamps show the Three Kings and the Star, an Angel and child, a Southern cross and child and a mother and child.



In 1941 Hungary issued its first Christmas stamp with a semi postal stamp depicting a Soldier's Christmas. While the first stamps to depict the Nativity were the Hungary issue of 1943. Ten years later Cuba issued its first Christmas stamp depicting the Poinsettia and Bells. Haiti followed in 1954 with two stamps. During the mid 1950's Christmas stamps became more and more popular. Country after country started their Christmas stamps issues. In 1955 Luxemburg and Spain were followed by Liechtenstein, Korea and Australia who issued their Christmas stamps in 1957. This was the start of a new fashion of Christmas stamps issued by a long list of countries that continues to this very day.



Malta had to gain its independence in 1964 to issue its first Christmas Set of Stamps. The Malta set consisted of three stamps in different colours and value but with a common design showing the Nativity. This set was issued on 3 November 1964 and was designed by Chev. Evin Cremona. The Postal administration of our country issued this set immediately after the Independence commemorative set. This makes the Malta Christmas set of stamps as the second issue after Independence. ♦

