



## **The Legend of the Poinsettia**

**The legend of the poinsettia comes from Mexico. It tells of a girl named Maria and her little brother Pablo. They were very poor but always looked forward to the Christmas festival. Each year a large manger scene was set up in the village church, and the days before Christmas were filled with parades and parties. The two children loved Christmas, but were always saddened because they had no money to buy presents. They especially wished that they could give something to the church for the Baby Jesus. But they had nothing.**

**One Christmas Eve, Maria and Pablo set out for church to attend the service. On their way they picked some weeds growing along the roadside and decided to take them as their gift to the Baby Jesus in the manger scene. Of course they were teased by other children when they arrived with their gift, but they said nothing for they knew they had given what they could. Maria and Pablo began placing the green plants around the manger and miraculously, the green top leaves turned into bright red petals, and soon the manger was surrounded by beautiful star-like flowers and so we see them today.**

**Here is another version of the legend of the Poinsettia**

**A charming story is told of Pepita, a poor Mexican girl who had no gift to present the Christ Child at Christmas Eve Services. As Pepita walked slowly to the chapel with her cousin Pedro, her heart was filled with sadness rather than joy.**

**"I am sure, Pepita, that even the most humble gift, if given in love, will be acceptable in His eyes," said Pedro consolingly.**

**Not knowing what else to do, Pepita knelt by the roadside and gathered a handful of common weeds, fashioning them into a small**

**bouquet. Looking at the scraggly bunch of weeds, she felt more saddened and embarrassed than ever by the humbleness of her offering. She fought back a tear as she entered the small village chapel.**

**As she approached the alter, she remembered Pedro's kind words: "Even the most humble gift, if given in love, will be acceptable in His eyes." She felt her spirit lift as she knelt to lay the bouquet at the foot of the nativity scene.**

**Suddenly, the bouquet of weeds burst into blooms of brilliant red, and all who saw them were certain that they had witnessed a Christmas miracle right before their eyes.**

**From that day on, the bright red flowers were known as the Flores de Noche Buena, or Flowers of the Holy Night, for they bloomed each year during the Christmas season.**

**Today, the common name for this plant is the poinsettia!**

**The poinsettia was cultivated by the Aztecs of Mexico long before the introduction of Christianity to the Western Hemisphere. During the 17th century, Franciscan priests in Mexico began to use the flower in nativity processions because of its brilliant color and holiday bloom, A favorite flower in many countries with its beautiful red, star-shaped flower. It is called the "Flame Leaf" in Central America or "Flower of the Holy Night". Poinsettias were first introduced into the United States in 1825 by Joel Robert Poinsett, the first U.S. ambassador to Mexico. Poinsett, a skilled botanist, had some plants sent to his home in Greenville, S.C. After establishing the plants in his own greenhouse, he began to send them to various botanical gardens and fellow horticulturists.**

**They eventually reached Robert Buist, a nurseryman, who first sold the plant as *Euphorbia poinsettia*, although a German botanist had already given the plant the botanical name *Euphorbia pulcherima*. The poinsettia, however, remains the accepted name in English-speaking countries. Most of the poinsettias now come from California.**