



## HOW DO VIETNAMESE-AMERICAN PEOPLE ENJOY TET 2014? (Thich Nu Gioi Huong)

This is the fourth year I am in Southern California. New Year (Tet Nguyen Dan) is the most favorite festival for all people in the world. The day is shaped by different traditions, religions and cultures. Each country celebrates this holiday in its own unique way. We who are Vietnamese-American living in Southern California, have our own way to celebrate New Year. We don't go by the American calendar except the lunar calendar. Asian New Year is the period between January and February of the American calendar. For example, midnight of January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014 is the New Year's Eve in Vietnam or Asian countries. There are many new things for us to prepare for this special occasion.

The preparation starts by decorating house, buying presents, and making a fresh look at everything. Definitely the Vietnamese New Year will not perfect without the symbols of New Year such as dao and mai flowers (the Peach and Apricot blossoms), tet and chung cakes (made by sticky rice with green bean), mam ngu qua (a five-fruit tray), mut (the candied fruits and seeds), cau doi lien (New Year wishes by calligraphist writing), bao *li-xi* (a small sum of lucky money wrapped in the red envelope), and so on. Addition, presenting gifts and enjoying party with family and friends, offering food to our ancestors, paying homage at the pagoda or church (hanh huong chiem bai) are also our traditional custom which we often to do at the first days of New Year. This culture is transcended from generation to generation in Vietnam and even in the United States for Vietnamese-American people. We cherish this valuable culture because we strongly believe the symbols of New Year will bring good fortune and happiness for us in whole year. Regardless what religion you belong to, you should pilgrimage your religious place to pray for having a good New Year.

We, who are Buddhist followers in the new clothing, often gather together at a Buddhist temple at Giao Thua - the New Year's Eve (midnight of December 30 on the lunar year). We take few minutes to contemplate, mediate, and remember the bad and good speech, thought and deed that happen during the past year. At the last minute of the current year, we perform the confessional ritual for the negative things and make a promise to develop the positive things. It is a beautiful motive to start our life in a new year. Religion will help us in this role to prepare a better future ahead. Right exactly at twelve o'clock, the pagoda bell strikes at the turning point of the New Year's Eve, an awaited fantastic moment for us happens. We begin to chant the scripture of Maitreya Buddha, who will be the next Buddha, adverts to the world, and who blesses for us in this moment. Then the celebration begins, we are going to receive the *li-xi* and best wishes from the Buddhist monks and nuns. After that we can head straight for the temple's garden to enjoy the inner peace and the surrounding bonsai view.

New Year is the most significant celebration, because it has the elements of enchantment of Vietnamese-American people and the Vietnamese traditional culture and religion. It is also a precious time for family and community to remembrance, reflection, and understanding one another. Each of the New Year's first days is important because it has its own pureness and sacredness to mark how New Year will go on.

Huong Sen Temple, January 01<sup>st</sup>, 2014 / Thich Nu Gioi Huong