The Legend of the Nian Monster

Chinese people held the first New Year Festival more than 3,000 years ago. Farmers gave thanks for the harvest and prayed. They asked the gods for good crops in the coming year.

But there is a story behind all the celebration; below is the legend of how the Chinese New Year celebration began.

According to legend, there was a man-eating wild monster "Nian" with an extremely large mouth, capable of swallowing several people in a single bite. This beast appeared in a country village, towards the end of winter when there was nothing to eat it would visit the villages and attack and eat whatever it could. The villagers would live in terror over the winter.

The next year it returned and the same thing happened. The monster seemed too strong to be defeated. So, all the villagers would take their old and young deep into the mountains to hide from Nian.

One day, a wise old man passed through the village and told an old woman, "I will teach you how to scare Nian away!"

That evening when Nian arrived at the village, he saw that all the houses were dark except the house in which an old woman lived. Nian approached the house, licking his lips in anticipation. Suddenly, the deafening noise of firecrackers sounded endlessly.

The monster was startled and jumped. Suddenly he realized that the house was covered in red paper. This scared him even more and it ran off into the mountains. When the villagers returned they saw that the old woman was unharmed! People later learned that "Nian" was afraid of loud noises and the color red, The villagers came together and agreed that when it was time for Nian's annual visit towards the end of winter they would start a fire in front of every door and not go to sleep but rather make noise.

The following year, the villagers were ready for it. They set off firecrackers, lit all their lamps and decorated their houses in red; they pasted red paper on the doors, wore red clothing, and hang up red lanterns. They made loud music, played the gong and drums and they danced and burned the fireworks whenever Nian was about to arrive, to scare away the beast.

Nian had not come down the mountain to cause any trouble thereafter.
This eventually become a tradition of China and leads to the celebration for another year of safe life. Chinese people continue to celebrate in remembrance of this legend today!