



## ***Mid-Autumn Festival and Lawrence Lantern Festival***

The Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival is the second most important festival after Chinese New Year in the Chinese cultural calendar. The festival celebrates the Autumn full moon on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 8<sup>th</sup> Moon, according to the lunar calendar. Chinese people believe the Autumn full moon to be the roundest and brightest. As lanterns are a central feature of celebrations, the festival is also known as the Lantern Festival. (There is another Lantern Festival in the Chinese cultural calendar, which falls on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the Lunar New Year, the first full moon in the year according to the lunar calendar.)

The Mid-Autumn Festival this year falls on Thursday 1 October. Celebrations can occur on the full moon, or the evenings before or after. Celebrations on the evening before are called “Welcoming the Moon” and celebrations on the evening after are called “Fare-welling the Moon”.

To acknowledge the history and heritage of the Chinese settlers in Lawrence, we will celebrate this festival with a Lantern Parade on the evening on Friday 2 October – i.e. we will farewell the full moon! **Details for this Lantern Parade will appear in the Tuapeka Times closer to the celebration.**

## ***The Legends of Mid-Autumn Festival***

The Chinese Mid-Autumn Festival has been celebrated in China for over 3,000 years. The symbolism of the roundest and brightest full moon of the year is reflected in family re-unions and friends coming together.

There are a number of legends associated with this Festival. Perhaps the most famous is about the lady in the moon. The story goes like this:

Once upon a time, there were ten suns in the sky. The heat from the suns killed the crops and people were dying. One day, an excellent archer shot down all but one sun. Earth was saved and life returned to normal. To express the people’s gratitude, the Queen presented a bottle of elixir to the archer which could make him immortal. The archer did not want to become immortal as he wanted to stay with his wife. So, he hid the elixir. A bad man tried to steal the elixir one day, when the archer was away. To prevent the elixir from being stolen, the wife of the archer drank the elixir herself, and promptly floated up to heaven. The archer was very sad, and on full moons, he would bring food and offerings to worship and remember his wife.

Then, there is the legend of the rabbit. Once upon a time, there was a fox, a monkey and a rabbit living in the forest. One day, three immortals pretending to be beggars came to the forest and asked the three animals for food. Both the fox and monkey quickly offered food. The poor rabbit did not have anything and felt guilty. It offered himself by jumping into the fire.

The three immortals were very moved by the rabbit's sacrifice. They made the rabbit an immortal, sending it to live in the Moon Palace. This is why rabbit lanterns are very popular at Lantern Festival celebrations. Children are told the story that on a clear full moon night you can see both the maiden and the rabbit in the moon!

### ***A Special Mid-Autumn Festival Food – Moon Cakes***

Mooncakes are a favourite food at Mid-Autumn Festival celebrations. There is a folk tale about the origin of Moon Cakes. Mooncakes were used by revolutionaries in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century in the overthrow of the Mongolian rulers in China. A rumour was spread about a deadly plague and the only way to prevent the disease from spreading was to eat mooncakes. Mooncakes were quickly distributed to the Han people (not Mongols). Hidden inside were secret messages to co-ordinate the Chinese revolt on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the eighth lunar month.

Mooncakes have a thin moulded pastry with a variety of sweet filling. Try the lotus seed paste with single or double salted duck egg yolk – the Chinese have invented sweet and savoury in one dish ages ago.

Yum! Great with a cup of Chinese tea, or a glass of bubbles! Do try it - but it is an acquired taste.

