

# Christmas



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**Christmas**<sup>[2]</sup> or **Christmas Day**<sup>[3][4]</sup> is an annual holiday celebrated on December 25 that commemorates the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>[5][6]</sup> The date of commemoration is not known to be Jesus' actual birthday, and may have initially been chosen to correspond with either a historical Roman festival<sup>[7]</sup> or the winter solstice.<sup>[8]</sup> Christmas is central to the Christmas and holiday season, and in Christianity marks the beginning of the larger season of Christmastide, which lasts twelve days.<sup>[9]</sup>

Although traditionally a Christian holiday, Christmas is widely celebrated by many non-Christians,<sup>[1][10]</sup> and some of its popular celebratory customs have pre-Christian or secular themes and origins. Popular modern customs of the holiday include gift-giving, music, an exchange of greeting cards, church celebrations, a special meal, and the display of various decorations; including Christmas trees, lights, and garlands, mistletoe, nativity scenes, and holly. In addition, Father Christmas (known as Santa Claus in North America, Australia and Ireland) is a popular mythological figure in many countries, associated with the bringing of gifts for children.<sup>[11]</sup>

Because gift-giving and many other aspects of the Christmas festival involve heightened economic activity among both Christians and non-Christians, the holiday has become a significant event and a key sales period for retailers and businesses. The economic impact of Christmas is a factor that has grown steadily over the past few centuries in many regions of the world.

## Christmas



Christmas decorations on display

<b>Also called</b>	Christ's mass Nativity Yuletide Noel Winter Pascha
<b>Observed by</b>	Christians Many non-Christians <sup>[1]</sup>
<b>Type</b>	Christian, cultural
<b>Significance</b>	Traditional birthday of Jesus
<b>Date</b>	<b>December 25</b>
<b>Observances</b>	Gift giving, church services, family meetings, decorating
<b>Related to</b>	Annunciation, Advent, Epiphany, Baptism of the Lord, Winter solstice

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## Etymology

The word *Christmas* originated as a compound meaning "Christ's Mass". It is derived from the Middle English *Christemasse* and Old English *Cristes mæsse*, a phrase first recorded in 1038.<sup>[6]</sup> "Cristes" is from Greek *Christos* and "mæsse" is from Latin *missa* (the holy mass). In Greek, the letter *X* (chi), is the first letter of Christ, and it, or the similar Roman letter *X*, has been used as an abbreviation for Christ since the mid-16th century.<sup>[12]</sup> Hence, Xmas is often used as an abbreviation for Christmas.

## Celebration

*Further information: Christmas worldwide*

Christmas Day is celebrated as a major festival and public holiday in most countries of the world, even in many which are not majority Christian. In some non-Christian countries periods of former colonial rule introduced the celebration, in others, Christian minorities or foreign cultural influences have led populations to take it up. Major exceptions, where Christmas is not a formal public holiday, include China, (excepting Hong Kong and Macao), Japan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Thailand, Nepal, Iran, Turkey and North Korea.

While most countries celebrate Christmas on December 25 each year, some national churches including those of Russia, Georgia, Egypt, Armenia, the Ukraine and Serbia celebrate on January 7. This is because of their use of the traditional Julian Calendar, under which December 25 falls on January 7 as measured by the standard Gregorian Calendar.

Around the world, Christmas celebrations can vary markedly in form, reflecting differing cultural and national traditions. Countries like Japan and Korea where Christmas is popular despite there being only a small number of Christians, adopt many of the secular trappings of Christmas such as gift-giving, decorations and Christmas trees.

## Commemoration of Jesus' birth

*Main articles: Annunciation, Nativity of Jesus, and Child Jesus*

In Christianity, Christmas is the festival celebrating the Nativity of Jesus, the Christian belief that the Messiah foretold in the Old Testament's Messianic prophecies was born to the Virgin Mary. The story of Christmas is based on the biblical accounts given in the Gospel of Matthew, namely Matthew 1:18-Matthew 2:12 and the Gospel of Luke, specifically Luke 1:26-Luke 2:40. According to these accounts, Jesus was born to Mary, assisted by her husband Joseph, in the city of Bethlehem. According to popular tradition, the birth took place in a stable, surrounded by farm animals, though neither the stable nor the animals are specifically mentioned in the Biblical accounts. However, a manger is mentioned in Luke 2:7 where it states "She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Early iconographic representations of the nativity placed the stable and manger within a cave (located, according to tradition, under the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem). Shepherds from the fields surrounding Bethlehem were told of the birth by an angel, and were the first to see the child.<sup>[13]</sup> Many Christians believe that the birth of Jesus fulfilled prophecies from the Old Testament.<sup>[14]</sup>



*Adorazione del Bambino (Adoration of the Child)* (1439-43), a mural by Florentine painter Fra Angelico.

Christians celebrate Christmas in many ways. In addition to this day being one of the most important and popular for the attendance of church services, there are numerous other devotions and popular traditions. Prior to Christmas Day, the Eastern Orthodox Church practices the Nativity Fast in anticipation of the birth of Jesus, while much of the Western Church celebrates Advent. People decorate their homes, and exchange gifts. In some Christian denominations, children perform plays re-telling the events of the Nativity, or sing carols that reference the event. Some Christians also display a small re-creation of the Nativity, known as a Nativity scene or crib, in their homes, using figurines to portray the key characters of the event. Live Nativity scenes and tableaux vivants are also performed, using actors and live animals to portray the event with more realism.<sup>[15]</sup>

There is a very long tradition of producing painted depictions of the nativity in art. Nativity scenes are traditionally set in a barn or stable and include Mary, Joseph, the child Jesus, angels, shepherds and the Three Wise Men, Balthazar, Melchior, and Caspar, who are said to have followed a star, known as the Star of Bethlehem, and arrive after his birth.<sup>[16]</sup>

### Varied traditions

Christmas Day is celebrated as a major festival and public holiday in most countries of the world, including many which are not majority Christian. Even where there is a strong Christian tradition, Christmas celebrations can vary markedly from country to country. For Christians, a religious service plays an important part in the recognition of the season. And Christmas, along with Easter, is the period of highest annual church attendance. In many Catholic countries religious processions are held in the days preceding Christmas. In other countries secular processions, featuring Santa Claus and other

seasonal figures are often held. Family reunions and the exchange of gifts are a widespread feature of the season. Gift giving takes place on Christmas Day itself in most countries. However 6th December, Saint Nicholas Day, and 6th January, Epiphany are more popular days for this in some countries. A special Christmas family meal is an important part of the celebration, but what is actually eaten can vary greatly from country to country. In England, and countries influenced by its traditions, a standard Christmas meal would include turkey, potatoes, vegetables, sausages and gravy, followed by Christmas pudding or mince pies. In Poland and other parts of eastern Europe and Scandinavia, fish often provides the traditional main course, but richer meat such as lamb is gaining ground. Ham is the main meal in the Phillippines, while in Germany, France and Austria Goose and Pork are favoured. Beef, ham and chicken in various recipes are popular throughout the world. The eating of sweets and chocolates has become popular worldwide, and sweeter Christmas delicacies include the German *stollen* marzipan cake, and Jamaican rum fruit cake.

## Decorations

*Main article: Christmas decoration*

*See also: Christmas tree, Christmas lights, Christmas stocking, and Christmas ornament*

The practice of putting up special decorations at Christmas has a long history. From pre-Christian times, evergreen plants had been brought indoors throughout the Roman Empire. Such customs were eventually adapted for Christian usage. In the fifteenth century it is recorded that in London it was the custom at Christmas for every house and all the parish churches to be "decked with holm, ivy, bays, and whatsoever the season of the year afforded to be green".

<sup>[17]</sup> The heart shaped leaves of ivy were said to symbolise the coming to earth of Jesus, while holly was seen as protection against pagans and witches, its thorns and red berries held to represent the Crown of Thorns worn by Jesus at the crucifixion.<sup>[18]</sup> Nativity scenes are known from 10th century Rome, and were popularised by Saint Francis of Asissi from 1223, quickly spreading across Europe.<sup>[19]</sup> Many different types of decorations developed across the Christian world, dependant on local tradition and available resources. The first commercially produced decorations appeared in Germany in the 1860s, inspired by the paper chains made by children.<sup>[20]</sup>



A house decorated for Christmas

The Christmas tree is often explained as a Christianisation of pagan tradition and ritual surrounding the Winter Solstice, which included the use of evergreen boughs, and an adaptation of pagan tree worship.<sup>[21]</sup> The English language phrase "Christmas tree" is first recorded in 1835<sup>[22]</sup> and represents an importation from the German language. The modern Christmas tree tradition is believed to have begun in Germany in the 18th century<sup>[21]</sup> though many argue that Martin Luther began the tradition in the 16th century.<sup>[23][24]</sup> From Germany the custom was introduced to Britain, first via Queen Charlotte, wife of George III, and then more successfully by Prince Albert during the reign of Queen Victoria, and by 1841 the Christmas tree had become even more widespread throughout Britain.<sup>[25]</sup> By the 1870s, putting up a Christmas tree had become common in America.<sup>[26]</sup> Christmas trees may be decorated with lights and ornaments.

Since the 19th century, the poinsettia, a native plant from Mexico, has been associated with Christmas. Other popular holiday plants include holly, mistletoe, red amaryllis, and Christmas cactus. Along with a Christmas tree, the interior of a home may be decorated with these plants, along with garlands and evergreen foliage.

In Australia, North and South America, and Europe, it is traditional to decorate the outside of houses with lights and sometimes with illuminated sleighs, snowmen, and other Christmas figures. Municipalities often sponsor decorations as well. Christmas banners may be hung from street lights and Christmas trees placed in the town square.<sup>[27]</sup>

In the Western world, rolls of brightly colored paper with secular or religious Christmas motifs are manufactured for the purpose of wrapping gifts. The display of Christmas villages has also become a tradition in many homes during this season. Other traditional decorations include bells, candles, candy canes, stockings, wreaths, and angels.

In many countries a representation of the Nativity Scene is very popular, and people are encouraged to compete and create most original or realistic ones. Within some families, the pieces used to make the representation are considered a valuable family heirloom. Christmas decorations are traditionally taken down on Twelfth Night, the evening of January 5. The traditional colors of Christmas are pine green (evergreen), snow white, and heart red.

## Music and carols

*Main article: Christmas music*

The first specifically Christmas hymns that we know of appear in fourth century Rome. Latin hymns such as *Veni redemptor gentium*, written by Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, were austere statements of the theological doctrine of the Incarnation in opposition to Arianism. *Corde natus ex Parentis (Of the Father's love begotten)* by the Spanish poet Prudentius (d. 413). is still sung in some churches today.<sup>[28]</sup>

In the ninth and tenth centuries, the Christmas "Sequence" or "Prose" was introduced in North European monasteries, developing under Bernard of Clairvaux into a sequence of rhymed stanzas. In the twelfth century the Parisian monk Adam of St. Victor began to derive music from popular songs, introducing something closer to the traditional Christmas carol.

In the thirteenth century, in France, Germany, and particularly, Italy, under the influence of Francis of Assisi a strong tradition of popular Christmas songs in the native language developed.<sup>[29]</sup> Christmas carols in English first appear in a 1426 work of John Awdlay, a Shropshire chaplain, who lists twenty five "caroles of Cristemas", probably sung by groups of wassailers, who went from house to house.<sup>[30]</sup> The songs we know specifically as carols were originally communal songs sung during celebrations like harvest tide as well as Christmas. It was only later that carols began to be sung in church. Traditionally, carols have often been based on medieval chord patterns, and it is this that gives them their uniquely characteristic musical sound. Some carols like "*Personent hodie*", "*Good King Wenceslas*", and "*The Holly and the Ivy*" can be traced directly back to the Middle Ages, and are among the oldest musical compositions still regularly sung. *Adeste Fidelis (O Come all ye faithful)* appears in its current form in the mid 18th century, although the words may have originated in the thirteenth century.

Carols suffered a decline in popularity after the Reformation in the countries where Protestant churches gained prominence (although some Reformers, like Martin Luther, authored carols and encouraged their



Trumpeter at a concert of Christmas music.

use in worship), but survived in rural communities until the revival of interest in carols in the 19th century. Charles Wesley wrote texts for at least three Christmas carols, of which the best known was originally entitled *Hark! How All the Welkin Rings*, later edited to *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*.<sup>[31]</sup> In 1840 Felix Mendelssohn wrote a tune which was adapted to fit Wesley's words. *Silent Night*, was composed for the St Nicholas Church, Oberndorf, Austria by Mohr and Gruber in 1818.

Completely secular Christmas songs such as *Jingle Bells* emerged in the late eighteenth century (for example, "Deck The Halls" from 1784), and grew increasingly popular in the twentieth.

## Cards

*Main article: Christmas card*

Christmas cards are usually exchanged during the weeks preceding Christmas Day on December 25 by many people (including non-Christians) in Western society and in Asia. The traditional greeting reads "wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year", much like the first commercial Christmas card, produced by Sir Henry Cole in London 1843. There are innumerable variations on this greeting, many cards expressing more religious sentiment, or containing a poem, prayer or Biblical verse; others stay away from religion with an all-inclusive "Season's greetings".

A Christmas card is generally commercially designed and purchased for the occasion. The content of the design might relate directly to the Christmas narrative with depictions of the Nativity of Jesus, or have Christian symbols such as the Star of Bethlehem or a white dove representing both the Holy Spirit and Peace. Many Christmas cards are secular and show Christmas traditions such as Santa Claus, objects associated with Christmas such as candles, holly and baubles, and Christmastime activities such as shopping and partying, or other aspects of the season such as the snow and wildlife of the northern winter. Some secular cards depict nostalgic scenes of the past such as crinolined shoppers in 19th century streetscapes; others are humorous, particularly in depicting the antics of Santa and his retinue.



A Christmas card of 1870.

## Stamps

*Main article: Christmas stamp*

A number of nations have issued commemorative stamps at Christmastime. Postal customers will often use these stamps to mail Christmas cards, and they are popular with philatelists. These stamps are regular postage stamps, unlike Christmas seals, and are valid for postage year-round. They usually go on sale some time between early October and early December, and are printed in considerable quantities.

In 1898 a Canadian stamp was issued to mark the inauguration of the Imperial Penny Postage rate. The stamp features a map of the globe and bears an inscription "XMAS 1898" at the bottom. In 1937, Austria issued two "Christmas greeting stamps" featuring a rose and the signs of the zodiac. In 1939, Brazil issued four semi-postal stamps with designs featuring the three kings and a star of Bethlehem, an angel and child, the Southern Cross and a child, and a mother and child.

Both the US Postal Service and the Royal Mail regularly issue christmas-themed stamps each year.

## Santa Claus and other bringers of gifts

*Main articles: Santa Claus and Father Christmas*

For many centuries Christmas has been a time for the giving and exchanging of gifts, especially between friends and family members. A number of Christian and legendary figures have been associated with both Christmas and the giving of gifts. Among these are Father Christmas, also known as Santa Claus, Saint Nicholas, Sinterklaas, the Christkind, Kris Kringle, Père Noël, Joulupukki, Babbo Natale, Weihnachtsmann, Saint Basil and Father Frost).

The most famous and pervasive of these figures in modern celebration worldwide is Santa Claus, a mythical gift bringer, dressed in red, whose origins have disputed sources. Santa Claus is a corruption of the Dutch *Sinterklaas*, which means simply Saint Nicholas. Nicholas was Bishop of Myra (in modern day Turkey) in the fourth century. Among other saintly attributes, he was noted for the care of Children, generosity, and the giving of gifts. His feast on the 6th of December came to be celebrated in many countries by the giving of gifts. Saint Nicholas appeared in bishoply attire, accompanied by helpers, and enquired about the behaviour of children during the past year, before deciding whether they deserved a gift or not. By the 13th century Saint Nicholas was well known in the Netherlands, and the practice spread to other parts of central and southern Europe. At the Reformation, many Protestants changed the gift bringer to the Christ Child or *Christkindl*, (corrupted in English to Kris Kringle), and the date of giving gifts changed from December the 6th to Christmas Eve.<sup>[32]</sup>



Sinterklaas or Saint Nicholas, considered by many to be the original Santa Claus.

In the United States, and particularly in New York, the modern popular image of Santa Claus was created, with the aid of six notable contributors including Washington Irving and the German-American cartoonist Thomas Nast (1840–1902). Following the American Revolutionary War, the inhabitants of New York City, a former Dutch colonial town (New Amsterdam) which had been swapped by the Dutch for other territories, reinvented their Sinterklaas tradition, as Saint Nicholas was a symbol of the city's non-English past.<sup>[33]</sup> In 1809, the New-York Historical Society convened and retroactively named *Sancte Claus* the patron saint of Nieuw Amsterdam, the Dutch name for New York City.<sup>[34]</sup> At his first American appearance in 1810, Santa Claus was drawn in bishops robes. However as new artists took over, Santa Claus developed more secular attire.<sup>[35]</sup> Nast drew a new image of "Santa Claus" annually, beginning in 1863. By the 1880s, Nast's Santa had evolved into the robed, fur clad, form we now recognize, perhaps based on the English figure of Father Christmas. The image was standardized by advertisers in the 1920s.<sup>[36]</sup>

Father Christmas, a jolly well nourished bearded man who typified the spirit of good cheer at Christmas, predates the Santa Claus character, was first recorded in early 17th century England, but was associated with holiday merrymaking and drunkenness.<sup>[22]</sup> In Victorian Britain, his image was remade to match that of Santa. The French Père Noël evolved along similar lines, eventually adopting the Santa image. In Italy, Babbo Natale acts as Santa Claus, while La Befana is the bringer of gifts and arrives on the eve of the Epiphany. It is said that La Befana set out to bring the baby Jesus gifts, but got lost along the way. Now, she brings gifts to all children. In some cultures Santa Claus is accompanied by Knecht Ruprecht, or Black Peter. In other versions, elves make the toys. His wife is referred to as Mrs. Claus.



Santa Claus famous around the world for giving gifts to good children

There has been some opposition to the narrative of the American evolution of Saint Nicholas into the modern Santa. It has been claimed that the Saint Nicholas Society was not founded until 1835, almost half a century after the end of the American War of Independence.<sup>[37]</sup> Moreover, a study of the "children's books, periodicals and journals" of New Amsterdam by Charles Jones revealed no references to Saint Nicholas or Sinterklaas.<sup>[38]</sup> However, not all scholars agree with Jones's findings, which he reiterated in a booklength study in 1978;<sup>[39]</sup> Howard G. Hageman, of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, maintains that the tradition of celebrating Sinterklaas in New York was alive and well from the early settlement of the Hudson Valley on.<sup>[40]</sup>

Current tradition in several Latin American countries (such as Venezuela and Colombia) holds that while Santa makes the toys, he then gives them to the Baby Jesus, who is the one who actually

delivers them to the children's homes, a reconciliation between traditional religious beliefs and the iconography of Santa Claus imported from the United States.

In Alto Adige/Südtirol (Italy), Austria, Czech Republic, Southern Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Slovakia and Switzerland, the Christkind (Ježíšek in Czech, Jézuska in Hungarian and Ježiško in Slovak) brings the presents. The German St. Nikolaus is not identical with the Weihnachtsman (who is the German version of Santa Claus). St. Nikolaus wears a bishop's dress and still brings small gifts (usually candies, nuts and fruits) on December 6 and is accompanied by Knecht Ruprecht. Although many parents around the world routinely teach their children about Santa Claus and other gift bringers, some have come to reject this practice, considering it deceptive.<sup>[41]</sup>

## History

For many centuries, Christian writers accepted that Christmas was the actual date on which Jesus was born.<sup>[43]</sup> However, in the early eighteenth century, scholars began proposing alternative explanations. Isaac Newton argued that the date of Christmas was selected to correspond with the winter solstice,<sup>[8]</sup> which in ancient times was marked on December 25.<sup>[44]</sup> In 1743, German Protestant Paul Ernst Jablonski argued Christmas was placed on December 25 to correspond with the Roman solar holiday *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* and was therefore a "paganization" that debased the true church.<sup>[7]</sup> In 1889, Louis Duchesne suggested that the date of Christmas was calculated as nine months after the Annunciation (March 25), the traditional date of the Incarnation.<sup>[45]</sup>



Mosaic of Jesus as *Christo Sole* (Christ the Sun) in Mausoleum M in the pre-fourth-century necropolis under St Peter's Basilica in Rome.<sup>[42]</sup>

## Pre-Christian background

### Dies Natalis Solis Invicti

*Main article: Sol Invictus*

*Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* means "the birthday of the unconquered Sun." The use of the title Sol Invictus allowed several solar deities to be worshipped collectively, including Elah-Gabal, a Syrian sun god; Sol, the god of Emperor Aurelian; and Mithras, a soldiers' god of Persian origin.<sup>[46]</sup> Emperor Elagabalus (218–222) introduced the festival, and it reached the height of its popularity under Aurelian, who promoted it as an empire-wide holiday.<sup>[47]</sup> This day had held no significance in the Roman festive calendar until it was introduced in the third century.<sup>[48]</sup>

The festival was placed on the date of the solstice because this was on this day that the Sun reversed its southward retreat and proved itself to be "unconquered." Several early Christian writers connected the rebirth of the sun to the birth of Jesus.<sup>[6]</sup> "O, how wonderfully acted Providence that on that day on which that Sun was born...Christ should be born", Cyprian wrote.<sup>[6]</sup> John Chrysostom also commented on the connection: "They call it the 'Birthday of the Unconquered'. Who indeed is so unconquered as Our Lord . . .?"<sup>[6]</sup>

## **Winter festivals**

*Main article: List of winter festivals*

A winter festival was the most popular festival of

Christmas was promoted in the Christian East as part of the revival of Catholicism following the death of the pro-Arian Emperor Valens at the Battle of Adrianople in 378. The feast was introduced to Constantinople in 379, and to Antioch in about 380. The feast disappeared after Gregory of Nazianzus resigned as bishop in 381, although it was reintroduced by John Chrysostom in about 400.<sup>[6]</sup>



*The Examination and Trial of Father Christmas, (1686), published shortly after Christmas was reinstated as a holy day in England.*

## Middle Ages

In the Early Middle Ages, Christmas Day was overshadowed by Epiphany, which in the west focused on the visit of the magi. But the Medieval calendar was dominated by Christmas-related holidays. The forty days before Christmas became the "forty days of St. Martin" (which began on November 11, the Afeast of St. Martin of Tours), now known as Advent.<sup>[61]</sup> In Italy, former Saturnalian traditions were attached to Advent.<sup>[61]</sup> Around the 12th century, these traditions transferred again to the Twelve Days of Christmas (December 25 – January 5); a time that appears in the liturgical calendars as Christmastide or Twelve Holy Days.<sup>[61]</sup>

The prominence of Christmas Day increased gradually after Charlemagne was crowned Emperor on Christmas Day in 800. King Edmund the Martyr was anointed on Christmas in 855 and King William I of England was crowned on Christmas Day 1066.

By the High Middle Ages, the holiday had become so prominent that chroniclers routinely noted where various magnates celebrated Christmas.

King Richard II of England hosted a Christmas feast in 1377 at which twenty-eight oxen and three hundred sheep were eaten.<sup>[61]</sup> The Yule boar was a common feature of medieval Christmas feasts. Caroling also became popular, and was originally a group of dancers who sang. The group was composed of a lead singer and a ring of dancers that provided the chorus. Various writers of the time condemned caroling as lewd, indicating that the unruly traditions of Saturnalia and Yule may have continued in this form.<sup>[ ]</sup> "Misrule"—drunkenness, promiscuity, gambling—was also an important aspect of the festival. In England, gifts were exchanged on New Year's Day, and there was special Christmas ale.<sup>[61]</sup>

Christmas during the Middle Ages was a public festival that incorporated ivy, holly, and other evergreens.<sup>[62]</sup> Christmas gift-giving during the Middle Ages was usually between people with legal relationships, such as tenant and landlord.<sup>[62]</sup> The annual indulgence in eating, dancing, singing, sporting, card playing escalated in England, and by the 17th century the Christmas season featured lavish dinners, elaborate masques and pageants. In 1607, King James I insisted that a play be acted on Christmas night and that the court indulge in games.<sup>[63]</sup>

## Reformation into the 19th century

Following the Protestant Reformation, groups such as the Puritans strongly condemned the celebration of Christmas, considering it a

Catholic invention and the "trappings of popery" or the "rags of the Beast."<sup>[64]</sup> The Catholic Church responded by promoting the festival in a more religiously oriented form. King Charles I of England directed his noblemen and gentry to return to their landed estates in midwinter to keep up their old style

Christmas generosity.<sup>[63]</sup> Following the Parliamentary victory over Charles I during the English Civil War, England's Puritan rulers banned Christmas in 1647.<sup>[64]</sup> Protests followed as pro-Christmas rioting broke out in several cities and for weeks Canterbury was controlled by the rioters, who decorated doorways with holly and shouted royalist slogans.<sup>[64]</sup> The book, *The Vindication of Christmas* (London, 1652), argued against the Puritans, and makes note of Old English Christmas traditions, dinner, roast apples on the fire, card playing, dances with “plow-boys” and “maidservants”, and carol singing.<sup>[65]</sup> The Restoration of King Charles II in 1660 ended the ban, but many clergymen still disapproved of Christmas celebration. In Scotland, the Presbyterian Church of Scotland also discouraged observance of Christmas. James VI commanded its celebration in 1618, however attendance at church was scant.<sup>[66]</sup>

In Colonial America, the Puritans of New England shared radical Protestant disapproval of Christmas. Celebration was outlawed in Boston from 1659 to 1681. The ban by the Pilgrims was revoked in 1681 by English governor Sir Edmund Andros, however it wasn't until the mid 1800's that celebrating Christmas became fashionable in the Boston region.<sup>[67]</sup> At the same time, Christian residents of Virginia and New York observed the holiday freely. Pennsylvania German Settlers, pre-eminently the Moravian settlers of Bethlehem, Nazareth and Lititz in Pennsylvania and the Wachovia Settlements in North Carolina, were enthusiastic celebrators of Christmas. The Moravians in Bethlehem had the first Christmas trees in America as well as the first Nativity Scenes. Christmas fell out of favor in the United States after the American Revolution, when it was considered an English custom.<sup>[68]</sup> George Washington attacked Hessian mercenaries on Christmas during the Battle of Trenton in 1777. (Christmas being much more popular in Germany than in America at this time.)

By the 1820s, sectarian tension had eased in Britain and writers, including William Winstanly, began to worry that Christmas was dying out. These writers imagined Tudor Christmas as a time of heartfelt celebration, and efforts were made to revive the holiday. In 1843, Charles Dickens wrote the novel *A Christmas Carol*, that helped revive the 'spirit' of Christmas and seasonal merriment.<sup>[69][70]</sup> Its instant popularity played a major role in portraying Christmas as a holiday emphasizing family, goodwill, and compassion.<sup>[71]</sup> The mid-Victorian revival of the holiday spearheaded by *A Christmas Carol*, historian Ronald Hutton argues that Dickens sought to construct Christmas as a family-centered festival of generosity, in contrast to the community-based and church-centered observations, the observance of which had dwindled during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>[72]</sup> Superimposing his secular vision of the holiday, Dickens influenced many aspects of Christmas that are celebrated today in Western culture, such as family gatherings, seasonal food and drink, dancing, games, and a festive generosity of spirit.<sup>[73]</sup> A prominent phrase from the tale, '*Merry Christmas*', was popularized following the appearance of the story.<sup>[74]</sup> The term Scrooge became a synonym for miser, with '*Bah! Humbug!*' dismissive of the festive spirit.<sup>[75]</sup> Also in 1843, the first commercial Christmas card was produced by Sir Henry Cole.<sup>[76]</sup> In 1847, the Christmas cracker was invented by Thomas J. Smith of London.<sup>[77]</sup> The revival of the Christmas Carol began with William B. Sandys *Christmas Carols Ancient and Modern* (1833), with the first appearance in print of '*The First Noel*', '*I Saw Three Ships*', '*Hark the Herald Angels Sing*' and '*God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen*', popularized in Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*. Other English carols such as '*We Wish You A Merry Christmas*' and '*Oh Come All Ye Faithful*' also grew in



Ebenezer Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present. From Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, 1843

popularity. Singing carols in church was later instituted on Christmas Eve 1880 (Nine Lessons and Carols) in Truro Cathedral, Cornwall, England, which is now seen in churches all over the world.<sup>[78]</sup>



The Queen's Christmas tree at Windsor Castle, 1848. Republished in *Godey's Lady's Book*, Philadelphia December, 1850. Victoria's crown, and Prince Albert's mustache edited

In Britain, the Christmas tree was introduced in the early 1800s at the time of the personal union with Hanover, by Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, Queen to King George III, but the custom did not immediately spread far beyond the royal family. Queen Victoria was familiar with the custom as a child, and in 1832 the young princess wrote about her delight at having a Christmas tree, hung with lights, ornaments, and presents placed round it.<sup>[79]</sup> After her marriage to her German cousin Prince Albert, by 1841 the custom became more widespread throughout Britain.<sup>[25]</sup> A powerful image of the British Royal family with their Christmas tree at Windsor Castle, initially published in the *Illustrated London News* 1848, was copied in the United States at Christmas 1850, in *Godey's Lady's Book* (illustration, left). *Godey's* copied it exactly, except removed the Queen's crown, and Prince Albert's mustache, to remake the engraving into an American scene.<sup>[26]</sup> The republished *Godey's* image in 1850, the first widely circulated picture of a decorated evergreen Christmas tree in the US, Art historian Karal Ann Marling called "the first influential American Christmas tree".<sup>[80]</sup> Folk-culture historian Alfred Shoemaker states; "In all of America there was no more important medium in spreading the Christmas tree in the decade 1850-60 than *Godey's Lady's Book*". The image was reprinted in 1860, and by the 1870s, putting up a Christmas tree had become common in America.<sup>[26]</sup>

In America, interest in Christmas had been revived in the 1820s by several short stories by Washington Irving which appear in his *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon* and "Old Christmas", for which he used the tract *Vindication of Christmas* (1652) of old English Christmas traditions, he had transcribed into his journal as a format for his stories.<sup>[63]</sup> In 1822, Clement Clarke Moore wrote the poem *A Visit From St. Nicholas* (popularly known by its first line: *Twas the Night Before Christmas*).<sup>[81]</sup> Irving's stories depicted harmonious warm-hearted holiday traditions he claimed to have observed in England. Although some argue that Irving invented the traditions he describes, they were widely imitated by his American readers. The poem *A Visit from Saint Nicholas* helped popularize the tradition of exchanging gifts, and seasonal Christmas shopping began to assume economic importance.<sup>[82]</sup> This also started the cultural conflict of the holiday's spiritualism and its commercialism that some see as corrupting the holiday. In her 1850 book "The First Christmas in New England", Harriet Beecher Stowe includes a character who complains that the true meaning of Christmas was lost in a shopping spree.<sup>[83]</sup> While the celebration of Christmas wasn't yet customary in some regions in the U.S, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow detected "a transition state about Christmas here in New England" in 1856. "The old puritan feeling prevents it from being a cheerful, hearty holiday; though every year makes it more so".<sup>[84]</sup> In Reading, Pennsylvania, a newspaper remarked in 1861 "Even our presbyterian friends who have hitherto steadfastly ignored Christmas — threw open their church doors and assembled in force to celebrate the anniversary of the Savior's birth".<sup>[84]</sup> The First Congregational Church of Rockford, Illinois, 'although of genuine Puritan stock', was 'preparing for a grand Christmas jubilee', a news correspondent reported in 1864.<sup>[84]</sup> By 1860, fourteen states including several from New England had adopted Christmas as a legal holiday.<sup>[85]</sup> In 1870, Christmas was formally declared a United States Federal holiday, signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant.<sup>[85]</sup> Subsequently, in 1875, Louis Prang

introduced the Christmas card to Americans. He has been called the "father of the American Christmas card".<sup>[86]</sup>

## Controversy and criticism

*Main article: Christmas controversy*

Throughout the holiday's history, Christmas has been the subject of both controversy and criticism from a wide variety of different sources. The first documented Christmas controversy was Christian-led, and began during the English Interregnum, when England was ruled by a Puritan Parliament.<sup>[87]</sup> Puritans (including those who fled to America) sought to remove the remaining pagan elements of Christmas. During this period, the English Parliament banned the celebration of Christmas entirely, considering it "a popish festival with no biblical justification", and a time of wasteful and immoral behavior.<sup>[88]</sup>

Controversy and criticism continues in the present-day, where some Christian and non-Christians have claimed that an affront to Christmas (dubbed a "war on Christmas" by some) is ongoing.<sup>[89][90]</sup> In the United States there has been a tendency to replace the greeting *Merry Christmas* with *Happy Holidays*<sup>[91]</sup> Groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union have initiated court cases to bar the display of images and other material referring to Christmas from public property, including schools.<sup>[92]</sup> Such groups argue that government-funded displays of Christmas imagery and traditions violate the U.S. constitution—specifically the First Amendment, which prohibits the establishment by Congress of a national religion.<sup>[93]</sup> In 1984, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Lynch vs. Donnelly* that a Christmas display (which included a Nativity scene) owned and displayed by the city of Pawtucket, Rhode Island did not violate the First Amendment.<sup>[94]</sup> In November 2009, the Federal appeals court in Philadelphia endorsed a school-district's ban on the singing of Christmas carols.<sup>[95]</sup>

In the private sphere also, it has been alleged that any specific mention of the term "Christmas" or its religious aspects was being increasingly censored, avoided, or discouraged by a number of advertisers and retailers. In response, the American Family Association and other groups have organized boycotts of individual retailers..<sup>[96]</sup> In the United Kingdom there have also been some controversies, one of the most famous being the temporary promotion of the Christmas period as *Winterval* by Birmingham City Council in the late 1990s. There were also protests in November 2009 when the city of Dundee promoted its celebrations as the *Winter Night Light festival*, initially with no specific Christmas references.<sup>[97]</sup>

## Economics

*See also: Christmas in the media, Christmas tree production, Christmas tree cultivation, and Christmas Price Index*

Christmas is typically the largest annual economic stimulus for many nations. Sales increase dramatically in almost all retail areas and shops introduce new products as people purchase gifts, decorations, and supplies. In the U.S., the "Christmas shopping season" generally begins on Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, though many American stores begin selling Christmas items as early as October.<sup>[98]</sup> In Canada, merchants begin advertising campaigns just before Halloween (October 31), and step up their marketing following Remembrance Day on



November 11. Figures from the U.S. Census Bureau reveal that expenditure in department stores nationwide rose from \$20.8 billion in November 2004 to \$31.9 billion in December 2004, an increase of 54 percent. In other sectors, the pre-Christmas increase in spending was even greater, there being a November - December buying surge of 100 percent in bookstores and 170 percent in jewelry stores. In the same year employment in American retail stores rose from 1.6 million to 1.8 million in the two months leading up to Christmas.<sup>[99]</sup> Industries completely dependent on Christmas include Christmas cards, of which 1.9 billion are sent in the United States each year, and live Christmas Trees, of which 20.8 million were cut in the USA in 2002.<sup>[100]</sup>

A Christmas market in Clifton Mill, Ohio

In most areas, Christmas Day is the least active day of the year for business and commerce; almost all retail, commercial and institutional businesses are closed, and almost all industries cease activity (more than any other day of the year). In England and Wales, the Christmas Day (Trading) Act 2004 prevents all large shops from trading on Christmas Day. Scotland is currently planning similar legislation. Film studios release many high-budget movies in the holiday season, including Christmas films, fantasy movies or high-tone dramas with high production values.

One economist's analysis calculates that, despite increased over all spending, Christmas is a deadweight loss under orthodox microeconomic theory, due to the effect of gift-giving. This loss is calculated as the difference between what the gift giver spent on the item and what the gift receiver would have paid for the item. It is estimated that in 2001 Christmas resulted in a \$4 billion deadweight loss in the U.S. alone.<sup>[101][102]</sup> Because of complicating factors, this analysis is sometimes used to discuss possible flaws in current microeconomic theory. Other deadweight losses include the effects of Christmas on the environment and the fact that material gifts are often perceived as white elephants, imposing cost for upkeep and storage and contributing to clutter.<sup>[103]</sup>

## See also

### Christmas time

- Christmas Eve
- Christmas Sunday
- Christmas worldwide
- Christmas controversy
- Holiday season
- Little Christmas
- Midwinter Christmas
- Midwinter
- Twelve days of Christmas
- Yuletide

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