

# Christmas



The word “**Christmas**” means “**Mass of Christ**,” later shortened to “**Christ-Mass**.” The even shorter form “Xmas” – first used in Europe in the 1500s – is derived from the Greek alphabet, in which X is the first letter of Christ’s name: Xristos, therefore “X-Mass.”

Today we know that Christ was not born on the 25th of December. The date was chosen to coincide with the pagan Roman celebrations honoring Saturnus (the harvest god) and Mithras (the ancient god of light), a form of sun worship. These celebrations came on or just after the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year in the northern hemisphere, to announce that winter is not forever, that life continues, and an invitation to stay in good spirit.

Christmas is a sacred festival of the Christians. It is celebrated with great enthusiasm and gaiety all over the world. It is observed on 25th December to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. It is largely characterized by exchanging gifts within families and by gifts brought by Santa Claus or other mythical figures.

Christmas was not among the earliest festivals of the Christians. The exact date of the birth of Christ was unanimously fixed some two centuries after his death, as the Catholic Church began to establish its tradition. Now Christmas is celebrated on 25th December in Catholic, Protestant and most orthodox churches.

The period of celebration varies in different countries. In the United Kingdom, the Christmas season traditionally runs for twelve days following the Christmas Day. These twelve days of Christmas are a period of feasting and merrymaking which ends on Twelfth Night the feast of the Epiphany.

Christmas period has grown much longer in some countries including the United States. It begins many weeks before. During Christmas people enjoy shopping and meet one another. The celebration continues up to New Year's Day.

The numerous customs related to Christmas vary from country to country. Most of the familiar traditional practices and symbols of Christmas are named as the Christmas tree & the Christmas ham.

The Yule Log holly, mistletoe and giving of presents, were adapted or appropriated by Christian missionaries from the earlier Asatru pagan midwinter holiday of Yule.

The Christmas tree is believed to have first been used in Germany. Gift giving is a near-universal part of Christmas celebrations. The concept of a mythical figure that brings gifts to children derives from Saint Nicholas, a good-hearted bishop of Asia Minor.

In many countries, offices, schools and social communities organize Christmas parties and dances during the several weeks before Christmas Day. Christmas pageants, which include the retelling of the story of the birth of Christ, are common in Latin America. People sing Carol and visit neighborhood homes and exchange gifts. Traditional feasting with special meal of Christmas dishes is also a part of Christmas.

### Christmas in India

Christians in India decorate trees. They also light small oil-burning lamps as Christmas decorations and fill their churches with red flowers. They give presents to family members and baksheesh, or charity, to the poor people.

In India, the poinsettia is in flower and so the churches are decorated with this brilliant bloom for the Christmas Midnight Mass.

In South India, Christians put small clay lamps on the rooftops and walls of their houses at Christmas, just as the Hindus do during their festival called Diwali.