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CHRISTMAS EVE

Christmas Eve is the evening or entire day before [Christmas Day](#), the festival commemorating [the birth](#) of [Jesus](#).^[4] Christmas Day is [observed around the world](#), and Christmas Eve is widely observed as a full or partial holiday in anticipation of Christmas Day. Together, both days are considered one of the most culturally significant celebrations in [Christendom](#) and [Western society](#).

Christmas celebrations in the [denominations](#) of [Western Christianity](#) have long begun on Christmas Eve, due in part to the Christian liturgical day starting at sunset,^[5] a practice inherited from Jewish tradition^[6] and based on the [story of Creation](#) in the [Book of Genesis](#): "And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day."^[7] Many churches still ring their [church bells](#) and hold [prayers](#) in the evening; for example, the Nordic [Lutheran](#) churches.^[8] Since tradition holds that [Jesus](#) was born at night (based in Luke 2:6-8), [Midnight Mass](#) is celebrated on Christmas Eve, traditionally at midnight, in commemoration of his birth.^[9] The idea of Jesus being born at night is reflected in the fact that Christmas Eve is referred to as *Heilige Nacht* (Holy Night) in German, *Nochebuena* (the Good Night) in Spanish and similarly in other expressions of Christmas spirituality, such as the song "[Silent Night, Holy Night](#)".

Many other varying cultural traditions and experiences are also associated with Christmas Eve around the world, including the gathering of family and friends, the singing of [Christmas carols](#), the illumination and enjoyment of [Christmas lights](#), trees, and other decorations, the wrapping, exchange and opening of gifts, and general preparation for Christmas Day. Legendary Christmas gift-bearing figures including [Santa Claus](#), [Father Christmas](#), [Christkind](#), and [Saint Nicholas](#) are also often said to depart for their annual journey to deliver presents to children around the world on Christmas Eve, although until the [Protestant](#) introduction of Christkind in 16th-century Europe,^[10] such figures were said to instead deliver presents on the eve of [Saint Nicholas' feast day](#) (6 December).

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