

FESTIVAL INFO

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CHRISTMAS

Christmas is an annual festival commemorating [the birth](#) of [Jesus Christ](#), observed primarily on December 25^[a] as a religious and cultural celebration by billions of people [around the world](#).^{[2][10][11]} A [feast](#) central to the [Christian liturgical year](#), it is preceded by the season of [Advent](#) or the [Nativity Fast](#) and initiates the season of [Christmastide](#), which historically in the West lasts [twelve days](#) and culminates on [Twelfth Night](#).^[12] Christmas Day is a [public holiday](#) in [many of the world's nations](#),^{[13][14][15]} is celebrated religiously by a majority of Christians,^[16] as well as [culturally](#) by many non-Christians,^{[1][17]} and forms an integral part of the [holiday season](#) organized around it.

The traditional Christmas narrative, the Nativity of Jesus, delineated in the [New Testament](#) says that Jesus was born in [Bethlehem](#), in accordance with [messianic prophecies](#).^[18] When [Joseph](#) and [Mary](#) arrived in the city, the inn had no room and so they were offered a [stable](#) where the [Christ Child](#) was soon born, with [angels](#) proclaiming this news to shepherds who then spread the word.^[19]

Although the month and date of Jesus' birth are unknown, the church in the early fourth century fixed the date as December 25.^{[20][21][22]} This corresponds to the date of the [winter solstice](#) on the Roman calendar.^[23] Most Christians celebrate on December 25 in the [Gregorian calendar](#), which has been adopted almost universally in the [civil calendars](#) used in countries throughout the world. However, part of the [Eastern Christian Churches](#) celebrate Christmas on December 25 of the older [Julian calendar](#), which currently corresponds to January 7 in the Gregorian calendar. For Christians, believing that [God](#) came into the world in the [form of man](#) to [atone](#) for the [sins](#) of humanity, rather than knowing Jesus' exact birth date, is considered to be the primary purpose in celebrating Christmas.^{[24][25][26]}

The celebratory customs associated in various countries with Christmas have a mix of [pre-Christian](#), Christian, and [secular](#) themes and origins.^[27] Popular modern customs of the holiday include [gift giving](#); completing an [Advent calendar](#) or [Advent wreath](#); [Christmas music](#) and [caroling](#); viewing a [Nativity play](#); an exchange of [Christmas cards](#); [church services](#); a [special meal](#); and the display of various [Christmas decorations](#), including [Christmas trees](#), [Christmas lights](#), [nativity scenes](#), [garlands](#), [wreaths](#), [mistletoe](#), and [holly](#). In addition, several closely related and often interchangeable figures, known as [Santa Claus](#), [Father Christmas](#), [Saint Nicholas](#), and [Christkind](#), are associated with bringing gifts to children during the Christmas season and have their own body of [traditions](#) and lore.^[28] Because gift-giving and many other aspects of the Christmas festival involve heightened economic activity, the holiday has become a significant event and a key sales period for retailers and businesses. The [economic impact of Christmas](#) has grown steadily over the past few centuries in many regions of the world.

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HISTORY

The nativity sequences included in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke prompted early Christian writers to suggest various dates for the anniversary.^[42] Although no date is indicated in the gospels, early Christians connected Jesus to the Sun through the use of such phrases as "Sun of righteousness."^{[42][43]} The Romans marked the winter solstice on December 25.^[23] The first recorded Christmas celebration was in Rome on December 25, AD 336.^{[44][45]} In the 3rd century, the date of the nativity was the subject of great interest. Around AD 200, [Clement of Alexandria](#) wrote:

There are those who have determined not only the year of our Lord's birth, but also the day; and they say that it took place in the 28th year of Augustus, and in the 25th day of [the Egyptian month] Pachon [May 20] ... Further, others say that He was born on the 24th or 25th of Pharmuthi [April 20 or 21].^[46]

Various factors contributed to the selection of December 25 as a date of celebration: it was the date of the winter solstice on the Roman calendar and it was nine months after March 25, the date of the vernal equinox and a date linked to the conception of Jesus (celebrated as the [Feast of the Annunciation](#)).^[47]

Christmas played a role in the [Arian controversy](#) of the fourth century. After this controversy ran its course, the prominence of the holiday declined for a few centuries. The feast regained prominence after 800 when [Charlemagne](#) was crowned emperor on Christmas Day.

In Puritan England, Christmas was banned as it was associated with drunkenness and other misbehaviour.^[48] It was restored as a legal holiday in England in 1660, but remained disreputable in the minds of many people. In the early 19th century, Christmas festivities and services became widespread with the rise of the [Oxford Movement](#) in the [Church of England](#) that emphasized the centrality of Christmas in Christianity and charity to the poor,^[49] along with [Washington Irving](#), [Charles Dickens](#), and other authors emphasizing family, children, kind-heartedness, gift-giving, and [Santa Claus](#) (for Irving),^[50] or [Father Christmas](#) (for Dickens).^[51]