



The History of Christmas



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Published by: DementiAbility Enterprises Inc., Burlington, ON, Canada

ISBN: [978-1-990262-21-0](https://www.isbn-international.org/product/9781990262210)

December 25th is an important day for people across the world. The Christmas holidays symbolize a time where family's gather, give thoughtful gifts to each other and spend time laughing, singing and rejoicing. But how did Christmas come to be and how has it changed over the years? Let's explore the history of Christmas.

Did you know that celebrations in the middle of winter existed even before Christmas came to be? Many early Europeans celebrated winter solace to symbolize that the worst of winter was behind them. They celebrated the return of the sun by setting logs on fire – feasting until the flames burnt out. This could take as many as 12 days.

Many believe that December 25th is the day Jesus Christ was born – however, this is not true. The actual day Jesus was born is not actually known as it is not recorded in the bible.

Pope Julius I was the person who deemed December 25th Jesus's birthday. It was assumed he did so to continue past traditions of the pagan Saturnalia festival –similar to the winter solstice celebration.

The tradition of celebrating Christmas and the birth of Jesus Christ spread far and wide by the year 432. What started as a pagan holiday, eventually became one celebrated by Christians. Early Christians believed this was the right time of year to celebrate the birth of Jesus because he is said to be the light of the world – and winter solstice celebrates the coming of the light.

The reason the term “Christmas” was formed by Christians was because it combined the words “Christ” and “Mass”. In other languages, Christmas does not directly translate. Rather, other terms such as Navidad are used which connects to the word nativity – the nativity of Jesus Christ.

Americans didn't begin to embrace Christmas until about the 19th century. In 1819, Washington Irving wrote "The Sketchbook of Geoffrey Crayon". Many believe this was the beginning of Christmas tradition – a world in which rich and poor mingle in a peaceful, joyous manor. Many believe this was the start of the Christmas tradition.

Not long after, Charles Dickens wrote the famous holiday story “A Christmas Carol”. This showed society the importance of spreading joy and charity – while also celebrating and taking time to enjoy time with those closest to you – and show them what they mean to you. Christmas became a time that families could spoil their children with gifts without being judged by others.

Christmas traditions were adopted by many things such as the teachings of the bible, but also from other traditions from around the world. For example, the decorating of Christmas trees began long before Christianity. Trees such as pine, spruce and fir stay green throughout the winter, so, people would decorate their homes with them as a reminder of sunnier months.

The first known example of a Christmas tree being used to celebrate the holidays is in a picture from 1846 of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria. Since they were considered icons at the time, this tradition was rapidly adopted in Britain, and then America and Canada. Trees were often decorated with homemade decorations such as popcorn strings, berries, apples and nuts.

The tradition of Santa Claus has roots as far back as 280 A.D. in Turkey. Santa Claus is often referred to as St. Nick who was a man known for his kindness and reputation for protecting children and women. The story goes that he acquired a great wealth and gave it all away to those less fortunate than he. He helped those who were poor and sick across the entire countryside.

St. Nick passed away on December 6th and was celebrated by many Dutch families on that day. St. Nick was often referred to by his Dutch name “Sinter Klaas”, which soon became commonly known as Santa Claus. In 1823 Dr. Clement Clarke Moor wrote the book “T’Was the Night before Christmas” which popularized the jolly man who brought gifts to the children.

“T’was The Night Before Christmas” helped to create the image of Santa Claus as we now know him. He was a man who travelled from a far-off land on a sleigh magically pulled by reindeer, and came down the chimney with presents. The poem also named the reindeer; Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, and Blitzen. Rudolph came later from the popular song.

Rudolph The Red Nosed Reindeer did not come to be until 1939 when Robert L. May wanted to create a Christmas story that would drive people to his store Montgomery Ward. That year alone, the story sold over two and a half million copies. 7 years later, “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer” was written and was recorded by Gene Autry – also selling over two million copies.

Based off the poem, a man named Thomas Nast, drew an image in Harper's Weekly of what Santa looked like. Nast drew an image of a jolly old man with a big white beard, a large rotund belly, a red with white fur trimmed suit, and a sack full of toys. He depicted him in a workshop in the North Pole full of Elves who built toys alongside Mrs. Claus – creating the back story of Santa Claus.

Christmas has changed a lot over the years – but many traditions still remain.

Throughout the years one thing has stayed the same – the gathering of families. Christmas is a time to reconnect with love ones and force ourselves to slow down, sit back and enjoy each other's company.

Merry Christmas to all and to
all a good night.

What is your favourite memory
of Christmas?

Do you have any Christmas
traditions that are important to
you?

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