

Christmas

It's a *Christian* Holiday!

Where does the word Christmas come from?

Old English *Cristes Maesse*, meaning Christ's Mass

Christians should use traditions to share the Good News of Jesus ^{2 Timothy 2:8}.

- **Christmas Tree**
- **Santa Claus**
- **Candy Canes**
- **Christmas Wreath**
- **Gift Giving**
- **The Holiday Song: *The Twelve Days of Christmas***

The Christmas Tree: Even though pagans actually started the practice of bringing an evergreen tree into the house and decorating it with lights, the Christmas tree, as we generally know it today, became well established in Christian homes by the end of the 16th century.

- There is a legend that Martin Luther (in the early 16th century) was the first Christian to have an indoor Christmas tree with lights.
- In general, the true "Christmas Tree" originated in Germany from the combination of two Christian symbols previously found in homes at Christmas time. The first was called a *Paradise Tree*: an evergreen tree hung with apples, representing the Tree of Life from the Garden of Eden. The second was a *Christmas Pyramid*: a triangular-shaped shelf holding Christmas figurines and decorated with a star (the "Star of David").
- The evergreen tree is a symbol of the everlasting life obtained through Jesus Christ.
- The lights on the tree are a reminder that Jesus is the "light" of the world.

Santa Claus: During the 4th century, a man named Nicholas was a Roman Catholic Bishop of the Asia Minor city of Myra. The Roman emperor Diocletian persecuted many Christians, including Nicholas, for their faith. Nicholas refused to deny Christ, so he was imprisoned, branded with hot irons and his skin pinched with pliers. Later, Constantine became the emperor of Rome and the persecution ended; however, heresy became prominent in the church. Church history notes that Nicholas physically attacked the heretic Arius, who argued that Jesus was not fully divine. As a result, Nicholas was removed from leadership within the church; however,

he spent the latter part of his life founding orphanages and helping poor children. His service to the destitute children of his time personified the sacrificial giving of Christ. Nicholas died in AD 343; however, his acts of kindness resulted in his being made a Catholic Saint and then later, he was held up as the symbol of the Christmas spirit of giving.

St. Nicholas ⇒ Sinter Klaas ⇒ Santa Claus

The Candy Cane: The candy cane was initially produced to remind us of the most important characteristics of the greatest Christmas gift of all: **Jesus Christ**.

- The shape of the candy cane is that of a shepherd's crook (or staff) to remind us that Jesus is our eternal Shepherd.
- The white color represents the purity of Jesus, who lived the sinless life that we are not capable of living. His perfect life allowed Him to be the spotless Lamb capable of paying the debt for our sins. This is a debt that we cannot pay and a debt that He did not owe.
- The red color is a symbol of the blood of Jesus, that was shed for the redemption of all mankind. We were all bought with a price: the suffering & death of Jesus on the cross.

The Christmas Holly Wreath: The wreath also has characteristics of Jesus.

- The circular shape reflects the wholeness and never-ending nature of Jesus (Alpha/Omega).
- The sharp points of the holly leaves are reminders of Jesus' crown of thorns.
- The "evergreen" holly leaves are symbolic of the gift of everlasting life from Jesus.
- Certain types of holly have berries that portray the life of Jesus. They are initially white (the pure sinlessness of Jesus' life), then they turn green (representing the eternal life He offers), finally turning red (representing His blood, shed for the redemption of sins).

Gift Giving: We must keep in mind that Jesus "needs" nothing from us; however, He taught us when we give to others, we are giving to Him ^{Matthew 25:40}. So, if we keep our gift-giving to a reasonable level, do not put ourselves in debt, and expand our gift-giving to include some who are truly in need (reflecting God's freely offered kindness and generosity toward us ^{Matthew 10:8b}), then giving gifts is not heretical, but a good act. In fact, we should use gift-giving moments as opportunities to remind our friends and family that our gifts, which are given out of our love for them, pale in comparison to God's love for us and His most precious gift of our Savior, Jesus.

A Christmas Song: When the Puritans were in control of England in the 16th century, they outlawed anything having to do with Catholicism. *The Twelve Days of Christmas* was a seemingly harmless song written by Catholics as a secret teaching tool for children to memorize the

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basics of the Christian faith. The "true love" mentioned in the song is not an earthly lover, but refers to the love of God, and the "me" receiving the presents represents every true Christian.

A Partridge in a Pear Tree	Jesus, the Christ (Acts 5:30)
Two Turtledoves	The Old and New Testaments
Three French Hens	Faith, Hope and Love (1 Corinthians 13:13)
Four Calling Birds	The Four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke & John
Five Golden Rings	The Pentateuch: First Five Books of the Bible
Six Geese a-Laying	The Six Days of Creation (Genesis 1)
Seven Swans a-Swimming	Gifts of the Holy Spirit (Romans 12:6-8)
Eight Maids a-Milking	The Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)
Nine Ladies Dancing	The Fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23)
Ten Lords a-Leaping	The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-17)
Eleven Pipers Piping	The Faithful Apostles of Jesus (Mark 3:16-19)
Twelve Drummers Drumming	The Points of Doctrine in the Apostle's Creed

Putting Christ Back in Christmas: a Summary

For many, Christmas has little to do with celebrating the birth of Jesus, and even many Christians don't know how to "put Christ back into Christmas". However, we can overcome the paganism and the commercialism with the Good News: *God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16

Below is C-H-R-I-S-T-M-A-S acronym to explain how to honor Jesus Christ this Christmas.

C: The first letter in Christmas stands for the person who gives eternal significance to every day: Christ the Lord. The world finds it easy to shove Christ aside on this holiday, but Christians should have great Joy in celebrating the birth of Jesus, whose very name means *the Lord is salvation* and whose title, *Christ*, points to His role as the Redeemer of humankind. If Jesus is not Christ in a person's life, celebrating the birth of an obscure Jewish carpenter's son is meaningless.

H: The H stands for history. The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are not myths, but are historical realities. Christmas is a reminder to all believers that Christ is not just a warm feeling in our hearts, but that God becoming man in Jesus Christ was an actual historical event.

We don't know the exact day of the year Jesus was born; however, we do know the December 25 date was advocated as early as about AD 220. The church may have chosen to celebrate on December 25 as a triumph of Christianity over paganism because it came right after the Roman holiday of Saturnalia (December 17-24), one of the popular pagan winter solstice holidays.

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- R:** The R stands for rejoice, an appropriate response in recognition of what Jesus Christ has done. The most favorite Christmas hymns show rejoicing has always been an key part of Christmas. We should rejoice because Christ came; as the psalmist said: *Come, let us rejoice in him.* ^{Psalm 66:6}
- I:** The I stands for the Incarnation, describing the glorious event in which God became man. Christ is not only eternal God ^{John 1:1}, but at a time in history He became man as well ^{John 1:14}. Matthew's gospel says, *The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means, God with us.* ^{Matthew 1:23 (Isaiah 7:14)}
- S:** S stands for St. Nicholas, the fourth century bishop of Myra, a Christian whose story illustrates Christian faithfulness and charity, is commonly referred to by the German equivalent of his name (Sinter Klaas) transliterated into English as Santa Claus. Many traditions associated with Santa Claus are objectionable – especially that he is all-knowing or able to be present everywhere. However, the themes of faithfulness and charity are biblical and honor Jesus Christ.
- T:** The T stands for tradition, the Christmas stories and customs. There are three types of Christmas traditions: those strictly pagan and inappropriate for Christians, those initially secular but adapted to affirm Christian values and those solely developed within the Christian church.
- M:** The M stands for the magi, or wise men, who were directed by God to find and worship Christ. We shouldn't forget that no one is wealthy enough, powerful enough, or far enough away that he or she should not bow before Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords ^{1 Timothy 6:15}.
- A:** A stands for advent, a word referring to Christ's coming. Jesus first came in Bethlehem, as an infant who grew to manhood, died for our sins and rose on the third day. Christians eagerly look forward to His Second Coming: *the blessed hope – the glorious appearing* ^{Titus 2:13}. Many churches conduct advent services for the four weeks prior to Christmas, encouraging Christians to look forward to Jesus' birthday (His First Coming) and also to His Second Coming ^{Revelation 19:11-16}.
- S:** The S stands for salvation, made possible by the coming of Jesus Christ. The gospel story is so simple we often forget it, but so profound that it has the power to affect every person. We are all sinners, separated from God, but the coming of Christmas also brings the recognition that because He came, He died, and He lives again, then we also may live ^{Romans 6:8, 8:11}.

Christmas is a great time to be Salt and Light to the world!

Remember that the Christmas Spirit is not “man's good will toward man”, but actually God's good will toward man in the form of His Son, and we must seize the chances we get to share our knowledge of Jesus, the Christ.

Luke 2:10-11

**“I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.
Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you;
he is Christ the Lord.”**