

GLOBAL HOLIDAY TRADITIONS – Year A

A few (pretty awful) Christmas jokes



Knock Knock
Who's there?
Mary
Mary who?
Mary Christmas

Knock Knock
Who's there?
Snow
Snow who?
Snow business like show business

Match the two-line jokes	
1. How long should a reindeer's legs be?	a. It depends on where you leave them
2. What do reindeer have that no other animals have?	b. Just long enough to reach the ground
3. Why did the reindeer wear sunglasses at the beach?	c. Because they would look silly in plastic macs
4. Where do you find reindeer?	d. Because he didn't want to be recognized
5. Why do reindeer wear fur coats?	e. Woof, woof
6. What did the dog say to the reindeer?	f. Baby reindeer

What's an ig?
An eskimo's home without a loo

What do you call a penguin in the Sahara desert?
Lost

What do you call people who are afraid of Santa?
Claus-trophobic.

The First Christmas Cards



The first recognized commercial Christmas card was produced in England in 1843 by Henry Cole, the founder of the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was a hand-coloured print showing a family scene flanked by scenes of Christmas charity. This was inscribed with the words: "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You" with space at the top to put the name of the recipient and at the bottom for the name of the sender.

However, it was not until the 1860's that the Christmas card as we know it came into being. Initially these were small cards with a simple greeting set within an embossed border. However, as the demand for Christmas cards grew, the cards became larger and more elaborate. Folded sheets of white paper were ornamented with borders of overlapping lace that lifted to form a raised framework for a central picture and turkeys, fireside scenes, plum puddings etc. became popular themes.

The founder of the American Christmas card is said to be Louis Prang of Boston who printed a wide variety of album cards and visiting cards. In 1875 he issued seasonal greeting cards which were an immediate success.

By 1880 the popularity of Christmas cards was such that many prominent artists of the time had their work reproduced in this form. It was also the year that the familiar 'Post early for Christmas' plea as issued for the first time.



The History of the Christmas Tree



Although it is generally agreed that the Christmas tree in its current form came from Germany in the early 19th century, the tradition of decorating a tree to mark winter celebrations dates back hundreds of years to Roman times, when they used to decorate evergreen trees with small pieces of metal to celebrate Saturnalia.

In medieval times the 'Paradise Play' was performed every year on 24 December. This depicted the creation of Man and the fall of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and always included an evergreen hung with apples which represented the apple tree of temptation.

The first mention of decorated trees being taken indoors came in 1605 in Germany - a country with a long Christmas tree history! The trees were initially decorated with fruit and sweets together with hand made objects such as quilled snowflakes and stars. German Christmas Markets began to sell shaped gingerbreads and wax ornaments which people bought as souvenirs of the fair and took home to hang on their tree.

Artificial trees were invented in the 1880's in a bid to try and stop some of the damage being caused to real trees due to people lopping the tip off large trees, thus preventing the trees from growing any further. It got so bad in Germany that laws had to be brought in to prevent people having more than one tree.



Saint Nicholas

St Nicholas was a real person who was born to a wealthy family in Lycia, Asia Minor (now known as Turkey) sometime between 270 and 280 AD. He was orphaned at an early age and grew up in a monastery becoming one of the youngest priests ever at the age of 17. He travelled to Palestine and Egypt before returning to Lycia to become Bishop of Myra.

Nicholas was a very generous man, known for his charity and wisdom, who gave away his wealth to those in need. He would often go out at night, disguised in a hooded cloak, to leave gifts of money, clothing, or food for the poor and underprivileged.

He died on 6 December 340 and was buried in the church in Myra. After his death he was canonised, becoming the patron saint of Greece, Russia, children, scholars, merchants, sailors, and travellers.

In 1087 religious soldiers from Italy took the remains of St Nicholas back to Bari in southern Italy where they built a church in honour of him - the Basilica of San Nicola. This greatly increased his popularity in Europe, with pilgrims from all over the world coming to visit his shrine. Each of them took his legend back to their native countries where, as his fame spread, it took on the characteristics of each country. One thing remained common to all however, and that was the traditional image of the bishop's mitre, long flowing robes, red cape, and white beard.

There are many legends surrounding St Nicholas, the most famous of which tells how he gave bags of gold to three poor sisters for their dowries, throwing them down the chimney where they landed in some stockings which had been hung up by the fire to dry. This gave rise to the custom of giving gifts on his feast day (6 December), a practice which is still followed in the Netherlands and Germany where children leave their shoes out on St Nicholas Eve and hope that they will be filled with sweets and gifts the next morning. Elsewhere this has been incorporated into Christmas due to his identification with Santa Claus - a corruption of his Dutch name of 'Sinter Klaas'.

The Christmas Pudding



The origins of the Christmas pudding go back to the 14th century when a porridge called **frumenty** was made by boiling beef and mutton with raisins, currants, prunes, wines, and spices. This was similar to a soup and was eaten as a **fasting dish** in preparation for the Christmas festivities.

By 1595 frumenty was beginning to evolve into plum pudding - it was thickened with eggs, breadcrumbs and dried fruit and was given more flavour by the addition of ale and spirits.

Over the years it became the customary Christmas dessert. However, with the arrival of the Puritans in 1664 it was banned as a lewd custom and its rich ingredients described as being 'unfit for God fearing people'

In 1714 plum pudding was restored to the Christmas table by George I who had tasted and enjoyed it, despite some objections by the Quakers.

By Victorian times, the plum pudding had evolved into something which looked similar to the Christmas puddings enjoyed by people today and it is now estimated that in the UK over 40 million people will finish their festive meal with a bit of Christmas pudding.

One of the many customs surrounding the Christmas pudding is that they should be made by the 25th Sunday after Trinity, prepared with 13 ingredients (to represent Jesus and his Disciples) and that every member of the family should take turns to stir the pudding from east to west with a wooden spoon, in honour of the three Kings.

Another custom is for silver coins to be put into the pudding mixture before it is baked - whoever finds it will have health, wealth, and happiness for the coming year.

The History of the Yule Log



The custom of burning the Yule Log goes back to, and before, medieval times. It was originally a Nordic tradition. Yule is the name of the old Winter Solstice festivals in Scandinavia and other parts of northern Europe, such as [Germany](#).

The Yule Log was originally an entire tree, that was carefully chosen and brought into the house with great ceremony. The largest end of the log would be placed into the fire hearth while the rest of the tree stuck out into the room! The log would be lit from the remains of the previous year's log which had been carefully stored away and slowly fed into the fire through the [Twelve Days of Christmas](#). It was considered important that the re-lighting process was carried out by someone with clean hands. Nowadays, of course, most people have central heating, so it is very difficult to burn a tree!

In Provence (in [France](#)), it is traditional that the whole family helps to cut the log down and that a little bit is burnt each night. If any of the log is left after Twelfth Night, it is kept safe in the house until the next Christmas to protect against lightning! In some parts of [Holland](#), this was also done, but the log had to be stored under a bed! In some eastern European countries, the log was cut down on Christmas Eve morning and lit that evening.

In Cornwall (in the [UK](#)), the log is called 'The Mock'. The log is dried out and then the bark is taken off it before it comes into the house to be burnt. Also in the UK, barrel makers (or [Coopers](#) as barrel makers were traditionally called) gave their customers old logs that they could not use for making barrels for Yule logs.

The custom of the Yule Log spread all over Europe and different kinds of wood are used in different countries. In England, Oak is traditional; in Scotland, it is Birch; while in France, it's Cherry. Also, in [France](#), the log is sprinkled with wine, before it is burnt, so that it smells nice when it is lit.

In Devon and Somerset in the UK, some people have a very large bunch of Ash twigs instead of the log. This comes from a local legend that Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were very cold when the shepherds found them on Christmas Night. So, the shepherds got some bunches of twigs to burn to keep them warm.

In some parts of [Ireland](#), people have a large candle instead of a log and this is only lit on New Year's Eve and Twelfth Night.

Different chemicals can be sprinkled on the log like wine to make the log burn with different coloured flames!

- Potassium Nitrate = Violet
- Barium Nitrate = Apple Green
- Borax = Vivid Green
- Copper Sulphate = Blue
- Table Salt = Bright Yellow

This sounds very dangerous, so please only try this out with some adult supervision!!

The ashes of Yule logs were meant to be **very good for plants**. This is true, because the **ash from burnt wood contains a lot of 'potash'**, which helps plants flower. But if you throw the ashes out on Christmas day it was supposedly very unlucky!



A Chocolate Yule Log or 'bûche de Noël' is now a popular Christmas dessert or pudding. It's traditionally eaten in France and [Belgium](#), where they are known as 'Kerststronk' in Flemish.

They are made of a chocolate sponge roll layered with cream. The outside is covered with chocolate or chocolate icing and decorated to look like a bark-covered log. Some people like to add extra decorations such as marzipan mushrooms!

<http://www.whychristmas.com/customs/yulelog.shtml>

KRAMPUS

Krampus isn't exactly the stuff of dreams: Bearing horns, dark hair, and fangs, the anti-St. Nicholas comes with a chain and bells that he lashes about, along with a bundle of birch sticks meant to swat naughty children. He then hauls the bad kids down to the underworld.

Krampus, whose name is derived from the German word *krampen*, meaning claw, is said to be the son of [Hel in Norse mythology](#). The legendary beast also shares characteristics with other scary, demonic creatures in Greek mythology, including satyrs and fauns. The legend is part of a centuries-old Christmas tradition in Germany, where Christmas celebrations begin in early December.

Krampus was created as a counterpart to kindly St. Nicholas, who rewarded children with sweets. Krampus, in contrast, would swat "wicked" children and take them away to his lair.

According to folklore, Krampus purportedly shows up in towns the night before December 6, known as *Krampusnacht*, or Krampus Night. December 6 also happens to be *Nikolaustag*, or St. Nicholas Day, when German children look outside their door to see if the [shoe or boot they'd left out the night before](#) contains either presents (a reward for good behavior) or a rod (bad behavior).

A more modern take on the tradition in Austria, Germany, Hungary, Slovenia, and the Czech Republic involves drunken men dressed as devils, who take over the streets for a *Krampuslauf*—a Krampus Run of sorts, when people are chased through the streets by the "devils."

Why scare children with a demonic, pagan monster? Maybe it's a way for humans to get in touch with their animalistic side.

Such impulses may be about assuming "a dual personality," according to [António Carneiro](#), who spoke to National Geographic magazine earlier this year about [revitalized pagan traditions](#). The person dressed as the beast "becomes mysterious," he said.

Lump of Coal Preferred?

Krampus's frightening presence was suppressed for many years—the Catholic Church forbade the raucous celebrations, and fascists in World War II Europe found Krampus despicable because it was considered a creation of the Social Democrats.

But Krampus is making a comeback now, thanks partly to a "bah, humbug" attitude in pop culture, with people searching for ways to celebrate the yuletide season in non-traditional ways. National Geographic has even [published a book in German](#) about the devilish Christmas beast.

In the [U.S., people are buying into the trend](#) with [Krampus parties](#). Monday night's [episode](#) of *American Dad*, called "Minstrel Krampus," highlighted the growing movement of anti-Christmas celebrations.

For its part, Austria is attempting to commercialize the harsh persona of Krampus by selling chocolates, figurines, and collectible horns. So there are already complaints that [Krampus is becoming too commercialized](#).

Looks like Santa might have some competition.



The legend of la Befana



Like children everywhere, Italian kids look forward to the arrival of the red-suited Babbo Natale on Christmas Eve. However, this relatively modern tradition pales in comparison to the anticipation generated by the arrival of an old witch in early January. On Epiphany Eve, the old, tattered and soot-covered Befana flies around the world on a broomstick and comes down chimneys to deliver candy and presents to children who have been good during the year. For those who have fallen a bit short of model behavior, la Befana will leave lumps of coal. (Realizing that no one can be perfect for a whole year, these days la Befana often leaves a sweet "lump of coal" made from black sugar.)

La Befana has been an Italian tradition since the XIII century and comes from Christian legend rather than popular culture. The story is that la Befana was approached by the Three Wise Men who asked her to lead them to the stable where the baby Jesus lay in a manger. La Befana was too busy cleaning her house at the time, so she declined the offer to go with them. Very soon she realized that she had made a huge mistake, so she gathered up a bag full of gifts and set off alone in search of the baby Jesus. Though she followed the same star as the Magi, she was unable to find the stable. Undaunted, la Befana continues to travel the world over to this day searching every house for the Christ child. On January 6, the first day of Epiphany, Italian children hold their breaths as they search their stockings for a sign that they have been good that year.

The arrival of la Befana is celebrated with traditional Italian foods such as panettone (a Christmas cake) and marks the end of the long and festive holiday season in Italy.

<http://monteverdituscany.com/italian-christmas-traditions-the-legend-of-la-befana/>

Christmas in Germany



A big part of the Christmas celebrations in Germany is Advent. Several different types of Advent calendars are used in German homes. As well as the traditional one made of card that is used in many countries, there are ones made out of a wreath of Fir tree branches with 24 decorated boxes or bags hanging from it. Each box or bag has a little present in it. Another type is called a 'Advent Kranz' and is a ring of fir branches that has four candles on it. This is like the Advent candles that are sometimes used in Churches. One candle is lit at the beginning at each week of Advent.

Christmas Trees are very important in Germany. They were first used in Germany during the Middle Ages. If there are young children in the house, the trees are usually secretly decorated by the Mother of the family. The Christmas tree was traditionally brought into the house on Christmas eve, and during that evening the family would read the Bible and sing Christmas songs such as O Tannenbaum, Ihr Kinderlein Kommet and Stille Nacht (Silent Night).

Sometimes wooden frames, covered with coloured plastic sheets and with electric candles inside, are put in windows to make the house look pretty from the outside.

Christmas Eve is the main day when Germans exchange presents with their families.

In German Happy/Merry Christmas is 'Frohe Weihnachten'. Germany is well known for its Christmas Markets where all sorts of Christmas foods and decorations are sold. Perhaps the most famous German decorations are glass ornaments. The glass ornaments were originally hand blown glass and were imported in the USA in 1880s by the Woolworth stores. The legend of the glass 'Christmas Pickle' is famous in the USA, but it's that, a legend. Most people in Germany have never heard of the Christmas Pickle! In some parts of Germany, children write to the 'Christkind/Christkindl' ('The Christ Child' in English) asking for presents. The letters to the Christkind are decorated with sugar glued to the envelope to make them sparkly and attractive to look at. Children leave the letters on the windowsill at the beginning of or during Advent.

The Christkind is often described as a young girl with 'Christ like' qualities. In Nürnberg a young girl is chosen every year to participate in a parade as the Christkind. She wears a long white and gold dress, has long blond curly hair and wears a gold crown and sometimes wings like an angel. This is similar to St Lucia is Sweden. (And it can seem a bit confusing calling the 'Christ Child', Jesus, a girl!)

The Nürnberg Christkind officially opens the Christmas market on the Friday before Advent starts. And before Christmas she has over 150 'official duties' including visiting hospitals, old people's homes and children's nurseries! She also has to give TV interviews and visit other cities.

Santa Claus or Father Christmas (der Weihnachtsmann) brings the presents on December 24th. December 6th is St. Nicholas' Day and "der Nikolaus" brings some small gifts, such as sweets and chocolate, to the children. He comes in the night between the 5th and the 6th and puts the presents into the shoes of the children, who usually place them by their doors on the previous evening. In some regions of Germany, there is a character called "Knecht Ruprecht" or "Krampus" who accompanies Nikolaus (St. Nicholas) on the 6th of December. He is big horned monster clothed in rags and carries a birch. He will punish the children who were bad and will give them a birch as a present. He is usually the one who scares the little children. In north west Germany Santa is joined by Belsnickel a man dressed all in fur. Some people say that Santa/Father Christmas (Weihnachtsmann) brings the presents and some say it is Christkind!

At small work places and school parties, secret presents are often exchanged. A door is opened just wide enough for small presents to be thrown into the room. The presents are then passed around among the people until each person has the correct present! It is thought to be bad luck to find out who sent each present.

Another tradition is the Sternsinger (or star singers) who go from house to house, sing a song and collect money for charity (this is a predominantly Catholic tradition). They are four children, three who dress up like the Wise men and one carries a star on a stick as a symbol for the Star of Bethlehem. When they're finished singing, they write a signature with chalk over the door of the house. The sign is written in a special way, so Christmas 2014 would be: 20*C*M*B*15. It is considered to be bad luck to wash the sign away - it has to fade by itself. It has usually faded by the 6th of January (Epiphany). The Sternsingers visit houses between December 27th and January 6th. Carp or Goose are often served for the main Christmas meal. Stollen is a popular fruited yeast bread that is eaten at Christmas.

<http://www.whychristmas.com/cultures/germany.shtml>

Christmas in Mexico

Mexicans share many traditions with the Spanish. Their main Christmas celebration is called **La Posada**, which is a religious procession that reenacts the search for shelter by Joseph and Mary before the birth of Jesus. During the procession, the celebrants go from house to house carrying the images of Mary and Joseph looking for shelter.

Santa Claus is not predominant, but the bright red suit is represented in the traditional flower of the season. This flower is the **poinsettia**, which has a brilliant red star-shaped bloom. It is believed that a young boy walking to the church to see the nativity scene showing the birth of Jesus had realized on the way that he had no gift to offer the Christ child so he gathered up some plain green branches as he walked in he was laughed at but upon placing the branches near the manger they started to bloom a bright red **poinsettia** flower on each branch.

The Mexican children receive gifts. On Christmas day they are blindfolded and taken to try and break a decorated clay **piñata** that dangles and swings at the end of a rope. Once the piñata has been broken, the children clamber to recover the candy that was inside the piñata. Those children who have been good also on January 6th receive a gift from the **Three Wise Men**.

Mexicans attend a midnight mass service which is called **la Misa Del Gallo** or "the rooster's mass," and at the mass they sing lullabies to Jesus.

- 1) Traditionally Posadas are celebrated 9 days before Christmas (one a day) from the 16 to the 24 of December. Songs, prayers and candles take place in the event were we accompany the "Peregrinos (Joseph and Mary)" in their search for shelter.
- 2) In the northern states of Mexico Santa Clause "Santo Clos" brings children big presents, while the "Reyes Magos" bring the small presents in January. In the southern states the gift giving is inverted and "El niño Dios" (Jesus) brings a few presents, while "Los Reyes Magos" (the 3 wise men) bring the equivalent of Santa Clause's presents.
- 3) The "poinsettia" flowers are known as "Noche Buenas" (literally the good nights)
- 4) The 3 wise men (Reyes magos) and the "Rosca de Reyes" (source: <http://www.inside-mexico.com/ReyesMagos.htm>)

"People go to the markets and stores to get the needed ingredients to prepare the feast.

All over the country, in every city and in every little town, bakeries offer the **Rosca de Reyes**, an oval sweetbread, decorated with candied fruit. There are Roscas of all sizes, very small ones for two or three people and up to the ones that will delight more than twenty people.

The **Merienda de Reyes** is truly a multicultural event. The Spaniards brought the tradition of **celebrating the Epiphany** and sharing the Rosca to the New World. The Rosca is served along with Tamales, made of corn which was the pre-Hispanic food per excel lance, and hot chocolate. Chocolate is also a gift from the native peoples of the New World.

Hidden inside this delicious Rosca, a plastic figurine of the Baby Jesus. The Baby is hidden because it symbolizes the need to find a secure place where Jesus could be born, a place where King Herod would not find Him.

Each person cuts a slice of the Rosca . The knife symbolizes the danger in which the Baby Jesus was in.

One by one the guests carefully inspect their slice, hoping they didn't get the figurine.

Whoever gets the baby figurine shall be the host, and invite everyone present to a new celebration on February 2, Candelaria or Candle mass day, and he also shall get a new Ropón or dress for the Baby Jesus of the Nativity scene.

The **Mexican Christmas season is joyously extended up to February 2** ! - when the nativity scene is put away, and another family dinner of delicious tamales and hot chocolate is served with great love and happiness."

<http://www.santas.net/mexicanchristmas.htm>

Celebrating Christmas with 13 trolls

The Icelandic Yule Lads



The Icelandic Christmas period is an intriguing mixture of religious practice and traditional folklore, beginning on 23 December and ending on Epiphany, 6 January. As many countries do, Iceland celebrates Christmas mostly with good food and gifts to loved ones, but unlike most countries that have a single Father Christmas / Santa Claus character, Icelandic children are fortunate enough to be visited by 13 Yule Lads. Other Christmas stories are rather bleak in nature, perhaps reflecting the harshness of winter and the isolation of the community in previous centuries.

Gýla

From a relatively young age Icelandic children are told the story of Gýla, the ogress living in the Icelandic mountains. She is a dreadful character, described as part troll and part animal and the mother of 13 precocious boys (the Yule Lads). Gýla lives in the mountains with her third husband, her thirteen children and a black cat. Every Christmas, Gýla and her sons come down from the mountains: Gýla in search of naughty children to boil in her cauldron and the boys in search of mischief. She can only capture children who misbehave but those who repent must be released.

The Yule Lads

Icelandic children place a shoe in their bedroom window each evening in the 13 days before Christmas. Every night one Yuletide lad visits, leaving sweets and small gifts or rotting potatoes, depending on how that particular child has behaved on the preceding day. Each Yuletide lad has a specific idiosyncrasy and will therefore behave in a particular manner.

The Christmas Cat

Old Icelandic folklore states that every Icelander must receive a new piece of clothing for Christmas or they will find themselves in mortal danger. An enormous black cat prowls Iceland on Christmas Eve and eats anyone who doesn't follow this simple rule. This obnoxious feline is known as the Christmas Cat.

Christmas in Korea

Because Christianity and Western culture are both fairly new in Korea, most of the Christmas celebrations are very similar to those found in Europe and the United States. Popular Christmas traditions include:

- **Exchanging Christmas cards:** Korean [Christmas cards](#) are generally less expensive than cards in the United States, and they often have peaceful outdoor scenes, Korean landscapes, or other artwork on them. Most cards will use the phrase "Season's Greetings" instead of "Merry Christmas" in order to appeal to a wider segment of the population.
- **Church services and pageants:** Christian churches in Korea hold traditional evening services on [Christmas Eve](#) as well as mass on Christmas Day, which often includes a baptismal service.
- **Christmas movies:** Holiday cartoons and [Christmas movies](#) are popular seasonal entertainment in Korea, especially for children and families.
- **Exchanging gifts:** Young children eagerly await the arrival of Santa Haraboji, or Santa Grandfather, on Christmas Eve. Friends and family members may also exchange gifts for Christmas in Korea.
- **Decorated trees:** Not every family in Korea will have a [Christmas tree](#), but those that do will often decorate it with lights and ornaments similar to those found in the United States.
- **Christmas dinner:** A formal dinner is a popular way to celebrate the holiday with family members, though the menu usually includes popular Korean dishes such as sweet potato noodles, rice cake soup, barbecued beef (bulgogi), and spicy pickled cabbage (gimchi).
- **Public decorations:** Because Christmas is a public holiday in South Korea, many businesses such as department stores and other retailers will decorate lavishly to attract customers with seasonal cheer.

What Korean Christmas Celebrations Don't Have

Korean Christmas traditions are less elaborate than most holiday celebrations in the West. Non-Christians may enjoy family gatherings and gift exchanges, but in general the holiday is much more subdued and it is not one of the largest holidays on the Korean calendar. In fact, for many families [New Year's Day](#) is a more important holiday and is spent celebrating with large gatherings, while Christmas celebrations are more popular with teens and children. Korean Christmas

celebrations also do not have multiple gifts. Because the holiday is not as popular or widespread in Korea, it is more traditional to give a relative or close friend one thoughtful gift rather than several presents. Because of the Western influence that has brought Christmas to Korea, the celebrations also usually lack specific ceremonies to honor one's ancestors, which are normally a significant part of major Korean holidays.

Celebrating Korean Christmas Traditions

Celebrating Christmas with Korean cultural awareness can introduce new meaning to the holiday. Many families who want to celebrate their Korean heritage or share unique cultures choose to incorporate Korean traditions into their holiday festivities. Easy ways to honor Korean traditions include:

- Organizing a caroling party on Christmas Eve.
 - Limiting the number of gifts to focus on the meaning behind them rather than their materialism.
 - Adding Korean foods to the Christmas dinner menu.
 - Learning how to say Merry Christmas in Korean - sun tan chuk ha.
 - Attending Christmas religious services.
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Korean Christmas traditions are very similar to traditions found in Europe and the United States, but they also include Asian modesty and cultural awareness. By celebrating Christmas customs from around the world, it is possible to enjoy Christmas in many ways while learning about the spirit of the season that unites everyone during this holiday.

http://christmas.lovetoknow.com/Korean_Christmas_Traditions

SOURCES:

http://www.developingteachers.com/tips/xmasplan_01.htm

Why Don't Jehovah's Witnesses Celebrate Christmas?

Jehovah's Witnesses only celebrate the one event that Jesus commanded his followers. The [memorial of his death](#) (1 Cor. 11:23-26). They also celebrate other events which are referred to favorably in the Scriptures such as [marriages, anniversaries, the birth of a baby, graduations and many other happy occasions.](#)

But why don't Jehovah's Witnesses celebrate Christmas? Jehovah's Witnesses take their worship very seriously and insist upon keeping their worship of God undefiled (James 1:27). So, Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Christmas simply because Christmas has pagan origins and associations; [Christmas is based upon falsehoods and Christmas also promotes idolatry, a practice the Bible condemns.](#) Jehovah's Witnesses [do not want to offend God by imitating](#) these celebrations which incorporate so much falsehood and are associated with the [most horrible beliefs from the past.](#)

Christmas Has Pagan Origins and Associations

Christmas is a [corruption of Christianity](#) and was adopted from [terribly pagan customs and celebrations:](#)

"December 25 was already a major festival in the pagan Roman world, the Dies Natalis Solis Invicti, or 'Birthday of the Unconquered Sun,' a feast honoring the [renewal of the sun at the winter solstice.](#) **Pagan celebrations** on December 25 had included feasting, dancing, lighting bonfires, decorating homes with greens, and giving gifts. So when this became a Christian [?] festival, the customs continued, but with a Christian [?] meaning imparted to them." - p. 414, Vol. 4, Encyclopedia International, Grolier, Inc., 1966.

"Most of the Christmas customs now prevailing in Europe [and America] ... are not [genuine Christian customs](#), but **heathen** customs which have been absorbed or tolerated by the Church... The Saturnalia in Rome provided the model for most of the merry customs of the Christmas time.... Christmas inherited the general merriment in a more restrained form (excessive only in eating and drinking) [but see 1 Pet. 4:3, 4]: games, giving of gifts (especially to children), abundance of sweet meats and, as more ceremonious elements, burning of candles..." - Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, Hastings, Vol. III, pp. 608, 609.

Concerning Christmas trees:

"It is believed that the custom is a survival of the tree worship of ancient German tribes."
-- "Tree worship was common in Scandinavian countries.... When the pagans of Northern Europe became Christians, they made their sacred evergreen trees part of the Christian festival, and decorated the trees with gilded nuts, candles (a carry-over from sun worship), and apples to stand for the stars, moon, and sun." - pp. 1429, 1425, The World Book Encyclopedia, 1958 ed.

<http://defendingjehovahswitnesses.blogspot.ca/2011/12/why-dont-jehovahs-witnesses-celebrate.html>

Black Peter

Christmas comes early in Belgium and the Netherlands. Children get their presents on 6 December from St Nick or Sinterklaas, as they call him. Many towns hold festivals and parades when he comes visiting, but British and Americans, happily pushing their children forward to get a little present and an early glimpse of Father Christmas, tend to do a shocked double take when they spot his helper.

While recognizably the model for Father Christmas, Santa here is still a saint and a churchman. He wears a long red robe and a golden mitre, and carries a bishop's crook. He is kindly, sober and very much the visiting dignitary. His sidekick Zwarde Piet (Black Pete), however, is a rascal and a prankster who throws sweets in the air. There's also the dark possibility that he could put you in his sack and take you away if you've been naughty. But that's not the reason for the double take.

Zwarde Piet is nearly always a blacked-up white man or woman with big, rouged lips, a tight curly wig and dressed in bright pantaloons, a big ruff and gold earrings. A very old-fashioned and, to many, offensive caricature of a black man.

We all know the original Santa Claus, or St Nicholas, was a bishop from Myra in what is now Turkey. He probably attended the critical council of Nicaea and was martyred by a Roman Emperor. His remains are buried in Bari in Italy.

But that's not where he lives now. You probably think he comes from Lapland or the North Pole and gets around in a sleigh pulled by Rudolph and his pals. But every child in the Low Countries knows that he resides in Spain and travels north in a steam ship. In the old days if you were naughty Black Pete might give you a strapping or put coal in your shoes. But if you were really bad he might put you in his sack and take you back to far off Iberia.

The Spanish connection is easy: the Lowlands were ruled from Spain under the Hapsburgs and Spanish soldiers would have been both a familiar sight. Spain equals far away and foreign. Saint Nick is not so daft, if he prefers the Costas to the tundra.

Black Pete's origins are more problematic. There are suggestions that he started life as a Moorish servant from Spain, a Turkish orphan rescued by St Nick, or an Ethiopian slave freed by him. Some, squirming with embarrassment, explain that Black Pete gets black from soot coming down the chimney. If so it doesn't explain why he looks like a Victorian colonialist's supposedly humorous caricature of a black person. But perhaps Black Pete's origins lie further back and raise even more concerns about today's portrayal.

Among his miracles and good deeds St Nicholas also had time to combat the devil and medieval pictures show him with Satan in chains. The devil is often painted black, but it's possible Pete is pre-Christian. One of his jobs is to look after Sleipnir, Santa's horse. He's an elegant but normal nag and has the same name as Norse god Odin's eight-legged steed. Odin is often portrayed taking dead souls back to the underworld.

Observers point out that it is Pete who is really loved by the kids, not the stuffy Bishop, and they always add that it's a bit of harmless fun. Here in Canada, it's a debate that is as seasonal as Christmas itself.

<http://www.historyextra.com/feature/christmas-controversy>

Is Santa Claus Red and White because of Coca-Cola?



Urban Myth: The jolly old St. Nick that we know from countless images did not come from folklore, nor did he originate in the imaginations of Moore and Nast. He comes from the yearly advertisements of the Coca-Cola Company. He wears the corporate colors — the famous red and white — for a reason: he is working out of Atlanta at Coke corporation, not out of the North Pole.

Origins: Among the pantheon of characters commonly associated with the Christmas season (both the religious holiday and the secular wintertime celebrations), the beloved persona of Santa Claus is somewhat distinctive in that his appearance is neither one that has been solidified through centuries of religious tradition nor one that sprang fully-formed from the imagination of a modern-day writer or artist. Santa Claus is instead a hybrid, a character descended from a religious figure (St. Nicholas) whose physical appearance and backstory were created and shaped by many different hands over the course of years

until he finally coalesced into the now familiar (secular) character of a jolly, rotund, red-and-white garbed father figure who oversees a North Pole workshop manned by elves and travels in a sleigh pulled by eight reindeer to deliver toys to children all around the world every Christmas Eve.

We want details about time, place, and source and tend to eschew ambiguous, indefinite, open-ended explanations. We don't find satisfying the notion that Santa Claus is an evolutionary figure with no single, identifiable point of origin, so instead many of us have clung to the more satisfying, pat (and somewhat cynical) explanation that the modern appearance of Santa Claus was a commercial creation of the Coca-Cola company, who cannily promoted a version of Santa garbed in their red-and-white corporate colors.

It is true that, since Santa Claus is an evolutionary figure, he did not suddenly appear fully-formed one day and immediately supplant every other character traditionally associated with Christmas. However, it is not true in any realistic sense that Coca-Cola "created" the modern Santa Claus: they did not invent the now-familiar rotund, bearded fellow clothed in red-and-white garb, nor did they pluck him from a pantheon of competing, visually different Christmastime figures and elevate him to the supreme symbol of Christmas gift-giving. The red-and-white Santa figure existed long before Coca-Cola began featuring him in print advertisements, and he had already supplanted a bevy of competitors to become the standard representation of Santa Claus before he began his tenure as a

pitchman for Coke.

At the beginning of the 1930s, as the burgeoning Coca-Cola company was looking for ways to increase sales of their product during winter (then a slow time of year for the soft drink market), they turned to a talented commercial illustrator named Haddon Sundblom, who created a series of memorable drawings (inspired in large part by Clement Clark Moore's 1822 poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas") that associated the figure of a larger than life, red-and-white garbed Santa Claus with Coca-Cola and the slogan "The Pause That Refreshes," such as the following:



However, illustrations of lavishly bearded Santas (and his predecessors), showing figures clothed in red suits and red hats with white fur trimming, held together with broad black belts, were common long before Coca-Cola's first Sundblom-drawn Santa Claus advertisement appeared in 1931, as evidenced by these examples from 1906, 1908, and 1925, respectively:



There was a period of overlap during which the modern Santa Claus character coexisted with other Christmas figures and other versions of himself, as his now-standard appearance and persona jelled and his character grew in popularity to become the dominant (secular) Christmas figure in the western world. However, that period had ended before Coca-Cola began utilizing Santa for their holiday season advertisements. As noted in a *New York Times* article published in 1927, four years before the appearance of Sundblom's first Santa-based Coca-Cola ad, the Santa Claus figure rendered by Sundblom was based upon what had already become the standard image of Santa:

A standardized Santa Claus appears to New York children. Height, weight, stature are almost exactly standardized, as are the red garments, the hood and the white whiskers. The pack full of toys, ruddy cheeks and nose, bushy eyebrows and a jolly, paunchy effect are also inevitable parts of the requisite make-up.

Coke's annual advertisements featuring Sundblom-drawn Santas holding bottles of Coca-Cola, drinking Coca-Cola, receiving Coca-Cola as gifts, and enjoying Coca-Cola became a perennial Christmastime feature which helped spur Coca-Cola sales throughout the winter (and produced the bonus effect of appealing quite strongly to children, an important segment of the soft drink market). One might therefore fairly grant Coca-Cola some credit for cementing the modern image of Santa Claus in the public consciousness, as in an era before the advent of television, before color motion pictures became common, and before the widespread use of color in newspapers, Coca-Cola's magazine advertisements, billboards, and point-of-sale store displays were for many Americans their primary exposure to the modern Santa Claus image. But at best what Coca-Cola popularized was an image they borrowed, not one they created.

Read more at

<http://www.snopes.com/holidays/christmas/santa/cocacola.asp#zgZh2WhfzXhWgiVt.99>



It is true that Coca-Cola advertising played a big role in shaping the jolly, rotund character we know and love today. Prior to this, Santa had been portrayed in a variety of ways throughout history: tall and gaunt; short and elfin; distinguished and intellectual; even downright frightening.

Sundblom's paintings for Coca-Cola established Santa as a warm, happy character with human features such as rosy cheeks, a white beard, twinkling eyes and laughter lines. This grandfather-style Coca-Cola Santa captivated the public and, as our adverts spread globally, the perception of the North Pole's most-famous resident changed forever. Norman Rockwell painted a familiar Santa in red and white in 1921 (right image).

<http://www.coca-cola.co.uk/faq/rumours/is-it-true-santa-is-red-because-of-coca-cola.html>

Kwanzaa

Kwanzaa is a seven day festival that celebrates African and African American culture and history. Kwanzaa takes place from 26th December to 1st January.

The name Kwanzaa comes from the phrase 'matunda ya kwanza' which means 'first fruits' in the Swahili language (an Eastern African language spoken in countries including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique and Zimbabwe). Kwanzaa is mostly celebrated in the USA.

During Kwanzaa a special candle holder called a kinara is used. A kinara hold seven candles, three red ones on the left, three green ones on the right with a black candle in the centre. Each night during Kwanzaa a candle is lit. The black, centre, candle is lit first and the it alternates between the red and green candles starting with the ones on the outside and moving inwards. This is quite similar to the lighting of the menorah in the Jewish Festival of Lights, Hanukkah.

The seven days and candles in Kwanzaa represent the seven principles of Kwanzaa (Nguzo Saba):

- Umoja: Unity - Unity of the family, community, nation and race
- Kujichagulia: Self-Determination - Being responsible for your own conduct and behaviour
- Ujima: Collective work and responsibility - Working to Help each other and in the community
- Ujamaa: Cooperative economics - Working to build shops and businesses
- Nia: Purpose - Remembering and restoring African and African American cultures, customs and history
- Kuumba: Creativity - Using creating and your imagination to make communities better
- Imani: Faith - Believing in people, families, leaders, teachers and the righteousness of the African American struggle

There are also seven symbols used in Kwanzaa. The seven items of often set on a Zwanzaa table, with the kinara, in the house:

- Mkeka: The Mat - A woven mat made of fabric, raffia, or paper. The other symbols are placed on the Mkeka. It symbolises experiences and foundations.

- Kikombe cha Umoja: The Unity Cup - Represents family and community. It is filled with water, fruit juice or wine. A little is poured out to remember the ancestors. The cup is shared between people and each person takes a sip.
- Mazao: The Crops - Fruit and vegetables from the harvest. These normally includes bananas, mangoes, peaches, plantains, oranges, or other favourites! They are shared out.
- Kinara: The Candleholder - It represents the days, and principles of Kwanzaa
- Mishumaa Saba: The Seven Candles - are placed in the kinara. Black, red and green are the colours of the Bendera (African Flag)
- Muhindi: The Corn - There is one ear of corn of each child in the family. If there are no children in the family, then one ear is used to represent the children in the community. It represents the future and the Native Americans.
- Zawadi: Gifts - Gifts given to children during Kwanzaa are normally educational, such as a book, dvd or game. There's also a gift reminding them of their African heritage.

There are also sometimes two extra symbols:

- Bendera: A flag with three horizontal stripes of black, red and green
- Nguzo Saba Poster: A poster of the seven principles of Kwanzaa

There's also a special greeting used during Kwanzaa in Swahili. It's 'Habari gani' and the reply is the principle for that day. (Umoja on the first day, Kujichagulia on the second and so on.)

The Kwanzaa festival was created by Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966. Dr. Karenga wanted a way bring African Americans together and remember their black culture. Harvest or 'first fruit' festivals are celebrated all over Africa. These were celebrations when people would come together and celebrate and give thanks for the good things in their lives and communities.



<http://www.mynews13.com/content/news/cfnews13/on-the-town/holidays/holiday-history.html>

Hanukkah

Chanukkah

חֲנֻכָּה

Significance: Remembers the rededication of the Temple after it was defiled by the

Greeks

Observances: Lighting candles

Length: 8 days

Customs: eating fried foods; playing with a dreidel (top)

On the 25th of Kislev are the days of Chanukkah, which are eight... these were appointed a Festival with Hallel [prayers of praise] and thanksgiving. -Shabbat 21b, Babylonian [Talmud](#)

Chanukkah, the Jewish festival of rededication, also known as the festival of lights, is an eight day festival beginning on the 25th day of the Jewish month of [Kislev](#).

Chanukkah is probably one of the best known Jewish holidays, not because of any great religious significance, but because of its proximity to Christmas. Many non-Jews (and even many assimilated Jews!) think of this holiday as the Jewish Christmas, adopting many of the Christmas customs, such as elaborate gift-giving and decoration. It is bitterly ironic that this holiday, which has its roots in a revolution against assimilation and the suppression of Jewish religion, has become the most assimilated, secular holiday on our calendar.

The Story

The story of Chanukkah begins in the reign of Alexander the Great. Alexander conquered Syria, Egypt and Palestine, but allowed the lands under his control to continue observing their own religions and retain a certain degree of autonomy. Under this relatively benevolent rule, many Jews assimilated much of Hellenistic culture, adopting the language, the customs and the dress of the Greeks, in much the same way that Jews in America today blend into the secular American society.

More than a century later, a successor of Alexander, Antiochus IV was in control of the region. He began to oppress the Jews severely, placing a Hellenistic priest in the [Temple](#), massacring Jews, prohibiting the practice of the Jewish religion, and desecrating the Temple by requiring the sacrifice of pigs (a non-[kosher](#) animal) on the altar. Two groups opposed Antiochus: a basically nationalistic group led by Mattathias the Hasmonean and his son Judah Maccabee, and a religious traditionalist group known as the Chasidim, the forerunners of the [Pharisees](#) (no direct connection to the modern movement known as [Chasidism](#)). They joined

forces in a revolt against both the assimilation of the Hellenistic Jews and oppression by the Seleucid Greek government. The revolution succeeded and the Temple was rededicated.

According to tradition as recorded in the [Talmud](#), at the time of the rededication, there was very little oil left that had not been defiled by the Greeks. Oil was needed for the [menorah](#) (candelabrum) in the Temple, which was supposed to burn throughout the night every night. There was only enough oil to burn for one day, yet miraculously, it burned for eight days, the time needed to prepare a fresh supply of oil for the menorah. An eight day festival was declared to commemorate this miracle. Note that the holiday commemorates the miracle of the oil, not the military victory: Jews do not glorify war.

Traditions

Our rabbis taught the rule of Chanukkah: ... on the first day one [candle] is lit and thereafter they are progressively increased ... [because] we increase in sanctity but do not reduce. -Shabbat 21b, Babylonian Talmud

Chanukkah is not a very important religious holiday. The holiday's religious significance is far less than that of [Rosh Hashanah](#), [Yom Kippur](#), [Sukkot](#), [Passover](#), and [Shavu'ot](#).



The only religious observance related to the holiday is the lighting of candles. The candles are arranged in a candelabrum called a menorah (or sometimes called a chanukkiah) that holds nine candles: one for each night, plus a shammus (servant) at a different height. On the first night, one candle is placed at the far right. The shammus candle is lit and three [berakhot](#) (blessings) are recited: l'hadlik neir (a general prayer over candles), she-asah nisim (a prayer thanking [G-d](#) for performing miracles for our ancestors at this time), and she-hekhianu (a general prayer thanking G-d for allowing us to reach this time of year). See [Chanukkah Candle Lighting Blessings](#) for the full text of these blessings. After reciting the blessings, the first candle is then lit using the shammus candle, and the shammus candle is placed in its holder. Candles can be lit any time after dark but before midnight. The candles are normally allowed to burn out

on their own after a minimum of 1/2 hour, but if necessary they can be blown out at any time after that 1/2 hour. On [Shabbat](#), Chanukkah candles are normally lit before the Shabbat candles, but may be lit any time before candlelighting time (18 minutes before sunset). Candles cannot be blown out on Shabbat (it's a violation of the sabbath rule against igniting or extinguishing a flame). Because the Chanukkah candles must remain burning until a minimum of 1/2 hour after dark (about 90 minutes total burning time on Shabbat), some Chanukkah candles won't get the job done. On one of the earlier nights, you might want to make sure your candles last long enough. If they don't, you might want to use something else for Chanukkah on Shabbat, such as tea lights or even Shabbat candles.

Each night, another candle is added from right to left (like the [Hebrew](#) language). Candles are lit from left to right (because you pay honor to the newer thing first). On the eighth night, all nine candles (the 8 Chanukkah candles and the shammus) are lit. See animation at right for the candlelighting procedure. On nights after the first, only the first two blessings are recited; the third blessing, she-hekhanu is only recited on the first night of holidays.

It is traditional to eat fried foods on Chanukkah because of the significance of oil to the holiday. Among [Ashkenazic](#) Jews, this usually includes latkes (pronounced "lot-kuhs" or "lot-keys" depending on where your grandmother comes from. Pronounced "potato pancakes" if you are a goy.) My [recipe](#) is included later in this page.

Gift-giving is not a traditional part of the holiday, but has been added in places where Jews have a lot of contact with Christians, as a way of dealing with our children's jealousy of their Christian friends. It is extremely unusual for Jews to give Chanukkah gifts to anyone other than their own young children. The only traditional gift of the holiday is "gelt," small amounts of money.

Another tradition of the holiday is playing dreidel, a gambling game played with a square top. Most people play for matchsticks, pennies, M&Ms or chocolate coins. The traditional explanation of this game is that during the time of Antiochus' oppression, those who wanted to study [Torah](#) (an illegal activity) would conceal their activity by playing gambling games with a top (a common and legal activity) whenever an official or inspector was within sight.



A dreidel is marked with four Hebrew letters: Nun, Gimel, Hei and Shin. These letters stand for the Hebrew phrase "Nes Gadol Hayah Sham", a great miracle happened there, referring to the miracle of the oil.

The letters also stand for the Yiddish words nit (nothing), gantz (all), halb (half) and shtell (put), which are the rules of the game! There are some variations in the way people play the game, but the way I learned it, everyone puts in one coin. A person spins the dreidel. If it lands on Nun, nothing happens; on Gimel (or, as we called it as kids, "gimme!"), you get the whole pot; on Hei, you get half of the pot; and on Shin, you put one in. When the pot is empty, everybody puts one in. Keep playing until one person has everything. Then redivide it, because nobody likes a poor winner.

<http://www.jewfaq.org/holiday7.htm>