

# The History of the American Christmas And Its Traditions

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## **Brief Introduction**

The Christmas Tree. Hanging Stockings. Christmas Cards. Carolling. Santa Claus. Gift Giving. Egg Nog. The Yule Log.

Do you know where these traditions came from? Are you someone that believes they've simply "always existed" and is something we, as a Nation have always done every year around December 24th? Or do you believe that we simply "created" them ourselves?

If you are, then you really don't know the history of Christmas traditions. Have you ever wondered why we do the things we do when the snow begins to fall and the air becomes oh so chilly?

There is a reason we perform every single Christmas tradition we know today. And some of them may not be why you think!

Throughout these pages, you will discover why certain Christmas traditions are performed every year, and where exactly in the world they came from. Here's a secret you may not know. . . .Many of the Christmas traditions we use to celebrate our National Holiday didn't even originate in our country! Hard to believe? Well, it's 100%, without a doubt F-A-C-T.

Guess what else? Christmas almost didn't exist in our country!  
What?????

Yep, it's true. In fact, some of the earliest "Powers That Be" did not believe in the Holiday because of it's origins.

Now you might be thinking, "How Can That Be?? Surely That Isn't The Case At All. Someone Must Be Misinformed About This Sacred Holiday!".

I can assure you that someone IS misinformed about this holiday. And, it could be you. Or someone you know that doesn't understand the true history behind Christmas and the traditions that surround our most sacred of holidays.

Wouldn't you like to know exactly where it all began and how we celebrate the Christmas holiday today is a result of our past?

Well, you're going to read about the whole thing. Right here and now within these very pages. So sit back, grab a cup of your favorite Holiday beverage, and prepare yourself to discover The History of The American Christmas and its Traditions!

To A Happy Holiday Season,

**[YOUR NAME]**

[YOUR INFO]

## **Christmas: Where It All Began**

**Christmas.** The word itself inspires feelings of joy and good will towards our fellow man. A day when the greatest gift in all the world was bestowed upon us from Heaven.

When you think of the name "Christmas", what immediately comes to your mind? The birth of Jesus Christ? Yes, traditionally, that is what we believe is the reason behind the Christmas holiday and celebration. The birth of Jesus Christ. I mean, goodness sake! His name is in the word itself!

But is that really where the beginning of the Christmas holiday comes from? Or is it somewhere else? Would you believe that it is indeed rooted somewhere else?!

Let's go back though, to the time before Jesus Christ's birth, and see if we can't make sense of this. . . .

Centuries before Christ was born there was a group of people who celebrated something they called "The Winter Solstice". In this celebration, early Europeans would gather together and rejoice that the worst part of the Winter Season was passing and that they had managed to survive another harsh, cold Winter. And also, that they could begin enjoying longer days. In other words, this was a celebration of light itself. And life as well.

This celebration of light and survival would take place around December 21st or the 22nd every year. And, depending on the calendar shift, it could occur anywhere between December 20th to the 23rd. Pretty close to the time when we traditionally celebrate our Christmas holiday, wouldn't you agree?

Indeed, all across the European countryside, the end of December was an ideal time to have a celebration due in most part because cattle were slaughtered so that they would not have to be fed throughout Winter. And for lots of people, this would be one of the only times throughout the entire year that they would have access to fresh meat.

Not only this, but most beverages consumed, such as beer and wine, cultivated throughout the year had finished the fermentation cycle and were ready to be consumed. Beer and burgers? Now if that ain't a party, I don't know what is! ;-)

One last thing to mention is that in Germany, during this time, many people would pay tribute to the pagan god Oden. Now, long ago, many Germans who believed in this god were extremely afraid of him. The reason for this is because they believed that Oden would make "nightly rounds" to check up on his people, deciding who would thrive and who would, well, not. Due to this, many German people would stay indoors with their families.

To be truthful, many different cultures celebrated this time of year. Not just Winter Solstice and praising Oden. Romans later celebrated Saturnalia, the god of agriculture. Guess what his birthday was?

## **December 25th.**

As you can see, there are lots of similarities in the way in which we celebrate Christmas. Small, yes, but similar nonetheless.

So, even before Jesus Christ was born, we have groups of people in entire countries celebrating around a specific time frame during the winter months.

Now let's discuss the birth of Jesus Christ.

It is believed by many through the words of the Holy Bible that Jesus Christ was born on or around December 25th. This would be his "Birthday".

But, was it truly his Birthday?

In reality, no one has this finite answer. We can only assume that what we are reading is the truth, handed down from God Himself to us. There are no "official" birth and death records for Jesus' time period we can go back and look at to see exactly when He was born.

However, there is some evidence to suggest that maybe His birth actually occurred earlier in the year than during Winter.

If you take a look at the Biblical evidence, it says that there were shepherds in the fields during the time Jesus was being delivered.

But, if that were true, then He would not have been born during December as shepherds would not be herding their sheep in the middle of winter, would they? Maybe they would and maybe they wouldn't. We don't know this for sure. What we do know is this. . . .

Jesus' actual birth date is not mentioned throughout the pages of the Bible. In contrast, His death is. Which is why we celebrate Easter.

In fact, in the earlier days of Christianity, Easter was the main holiday celebrated with relation to Jesus Christ. His birthday wasn't even celebrated at all!

Only in the 4th century did Church officials declare Jesus Christ's birthday to become a celebrated holiday event.

But, if no one knew what Jesus' actual birth date was, why would Pope Julius I have selected December 25th for it to be celebrated on?

Some historians believe this was done to try and dissolve the Saturnalia festival in early Roman times along with other pagan worship festivals that were frowned upon by the Church occurring around this time.

Why were these celebrations "frowned" upon? Let's take Saturnalia for example.

During this celebration, which lasted an entire week, Roman people would participate in all sorts of activities that included drinking and eating as much as they wanted, and basically doing as they pleased without recourse from any laws or authorities to themselves or others.

At the start of the festival, the Roman authoritative buildings would be shut down and Roman officials would select someone to represent the "Lord of Misrule". More often than not, this would be someone deemed as "an enemy of the Roman people", or a criminal for lack of a better term. In addition, each Roman community would do likewise within their individual communities.

The persons selected by their communities would then enjoy a week long binge of drinking, sex, and any indulgence they pleased. At the end of the week, the person selected as the "Lord of Misrule" would be executed as a way of combating "dark forces".

It's pretty easy to see why the Church would want to do away with this type of celebration.

The Christmas celebration envisioned by the Church, or the celebration of Jesus Christ's birth, was appealing to many in it's earliest form. Simply because it allowed different cultures to continue their celebrations on as they normally did, but to celebrate them at a specific designated time. December 25th.

In the following years, the Christmas celebration gained in popularity so much so that it had extended all the way to places such as England by the end of the sixth century and Scandinavia by the end of the eighth. Now Christmas, or a form of it, is celebrated worldwide.

Of course some cultures still reserve "Christmas" as a holiday season to celebrate the power of "light". But, what is Jesus but God's Holy



"Light"?

In all cultures, in some form or other, the Christmas holiday is one of joyous celebration of life and goodness, which can also be seen as a celebration of "light". Even if the celebration isn't called "Christmas", the concepts are still rooted in the same historical religious ideas.

However, some Christians, like the Puritans, didn't even want to observe Jesus Christ's birthday as a holiday. Nor would they allow their followers to either.

The reason? Firstly because they did not believe that December 25th was in fact the birth date of their Saviour, Jesus Christ. And, that the only reason this date was chosen to represent His birth, and to create a worldwide celebration was to conform all pagan religions over to Christianity. Therefore it was not a date that the Puritans wanted to celebrate.

In fact, by some early Puritan American colonists, the celebration of Christmas was completely banned in Boston roughly between the years 1659 and 1681. And, if you were caught in the act of celebrating such a pagan originated holiday, you would be fined for doing so.

Although, there were other colonies that did take part in Christmas celebrations throughout early America and went against the grain, as it were. And so it is that the Christmas we celebrate has survived throughout the long years.

But, how do we go from celebrating Jesus Christ's birthday to stockings, Christmas trees, drinking egg nog, receiving gifts and all the commercialization elements of the holiday as we celebrate it today?

Well, the "gifts" part is understandable, to a point. Jesus was our "gift" from God. Or, if you believe differently, our life is a "gift" from an ultimate source of power. But how does this correlate with getting an iPod?

In the next chapters, we'll find out what exactly a "Christmas tradition" is, and where many of our Christmas traditions come from.

## What Is A Christmas Tradition?

In it's simplest form, a tradition is something we do, either individually or collectively in a group, each and every year around or on a specific date or time.

And, because of this, we call it a "tradition", because it's something we, and everyone who knows us, knows we do. Year in and year out.

Without fail.

Of course, in this instance, we're talking about Christmas as that specific time or date when we do these things. Hence the term "Christmas Tradition".

Some people may give presents to one another. Others may take gift giving to a whole new level and only give gifts to those that are poverty stricken. Still, others may not give any store-bought gifts and have gift qualifications of those that are only "hand-made" by their loved ones.

Every single family has their own rich, historic, family traditions that go back generations. And others make up their own for a new generation to enjoy.

All traditions whether new or old, are practiced greatly upon what each individual family, or person, feels should, or likes, to be done.

Traditions can be simple, or they can be complicated. Say, for instance, that every year, you and your family decides that there should be one

new Christmas tree decoration purchased to mark that year. To preserve that moment in time when your family was together and things were at their best.

In other cases, it can be a bit more complicated. Almost like a ceremony if you will. Take this example:

One family may have lost a dear loved one 2 days before Christmas, or maybe even on Christmas, so every year, before doing anything else, they drive out to visit the cemetery where their dearly departed has been placed. They purchase new flowers, or a grave blanket and place it on the grave, paying their respects.

Maybe they have a family prayer or simply have a conversation with their loved one letting them know all the things that have happened throughout the course of the year.

Then, maybe they light a candle. After this is over, they leave the cemetery and return to another relatives home for a wonderful Christmas gathering to further celebrate the life of their loved one and also the birth of Jesus Christ.

Or, maybe a person who doesn't regularly attend Church, or hasn't done so for years, goes to Church only on Christmas Eve, or Christmas Morning.

The point is, a tradition is something that people do every year at the same time, no matter what that "something" is. In this case, we're speaking of a Christmas tradition, which is something you specifically

do around Christmas time.

This would be where things such as decorating the Christmas Tree, hanging stockings up, wrapping presents, visiting family and friends you don't normally see throughout the rest of the year, going sledding with your children, going to school plays or pageants, going Christmas caroling, collecting donations for local charitable organizations, making cookies or home-made candies, drinking egg nog, and so on come in to the picture.

Obviously, some things we do are steeped more in history than others. But, every tradition has a history, whether it's a new tradition or one that has been passed on from generation to generation. That's the important part about Christmas traditions.

It's not really the act of doing them that makes them an integral part of our lives. It's how doing them makes us feel inside, and outside really.

Now, you may be sitting there wondering, "Why do I put up that Christmas tree every year?" It does seem silly to cut down a tree and bring it indoors. But, there's a rich history behind this tradition. As well as several others that people all over America par-take in every year.

And, in the next chapter, we're going to learn all about the history of some more well known and followed Christmas Traditions.

## **Where Did American Christmas Traditions Come From?**

In order to fully understand why, as American's, we perform different tasks throughout the celebration of Christmas, it is important to know where exactly each tradition originally came from. That's what this chapter is all about.

It may be interesting to note that many Christmas traditions we perform during the holiday did not originate in America at all. Remember, when America was just an infant itself, it was comprised of many different peoples from many different countries. And these people had their own “homeland” traditions that they carried right along with them.

### **The Christmas Tree**

### **The Yule Log**

**Christmas Caroling**

**Gift Giving**

**The Candy Cane**

**The Christmas Dinner**

**Santa Claus**

**"Merry Christmas"**

**The Christmas Card**

**The Poinsettia**

**Hanging Mistletoe**



## Conclusion

Wishing You A Happy & Healthy Holiday,

**[YOUR NAME]**

*[YOUR INFO]*

## **Resources For More Information**

For more in depth information about the History of the American Christmas and Its Traditions, please feel free to use the following links to further your research on this subject.