

How Do We Celebrate Christmas?

Christmas is a magical time that is celebrated in many countries around the world. Christians believe that it marks the birth of Jesus in a small stable in Bethlehem. But how is this festival celebrated in homes?

Timeless Traditions

Many children enjoy writing their letter to Father Christmas each year. The letters are then sent to the North Pole so that the elves can begin making toys and presents in time for Christmas Day. In some schools, children perform in a Christmas play. The play may be a retelling of the Nativity story or can be winter-themed. Costumes, props and songs are all used as part of this festive tradition.

Christmas markets have also become a tradition across the UK. Cities and towns put up market stalls and small gifts, decorations and food are sold.

Dazzling Decorations

Houses and homes are traditionally decorated to celebrate Christmas. Small, multicoloured fairy lights are put on trees and around windows, whilst ornaments such as reindeer, stars and elves decorate shelves and fireplaces. Christmas trees are brought into houses and are decorated with baubles, tinsel and small chocolates. Around 8 million Christmas trees are bought in the UK each year.

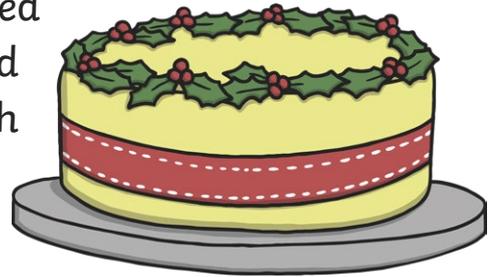


Festive Food

Several weeks of planning and preparation is complete when the Christmas meal is cooked for families and friends to enjoy. Most families eat their Christmas dinner on the 25th of December.

This tasty meal includes meat (usually turkey but can also be goose, chicken or a nut roast for vegetarians). Many vegetables are served with this meal including potatoes, carrots, broccoli and sprouts! Brussels sprouts are not everyone's favourite vegetable but they are packed full of vitamins to keep winter colds away.

One traditional pudding that is eaten at Christmas time, is Christmas cake. This fruit cake is made several months in advance and is made with different dried fruits including raisins, currants and sultanas. The cake is then topped with marzipan, before being covered with white royal icing.



How Do We Celebrate Christmas? Questions

1. Where in the world do Christians believe Jesus was born?

2. Where are the letters for Father Christmas sent to?

3. Name two things that might be used in a school Nativity play.

4. How many Christmas trees are sold in the UK each year?

5. Name two ornaments that may be used to decorate people's homes.

6. What do some vegetarians have as part of their Christmas dinner?

7. Why might some people not eat their Christmas meal on 25th December?

8. What is put underneath the royal icing on a Christmas cake?

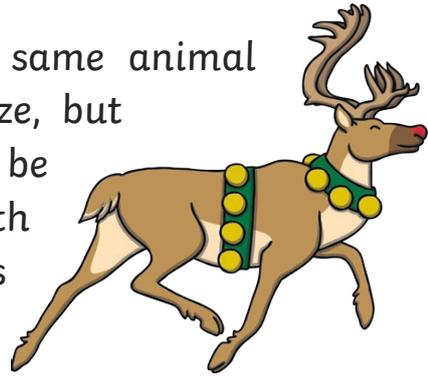
9. What does the word 'traditional' mean?

10. What traditions do you have in your family at Christmas time?

Reindeer

What Do Reindeer Look Like?

Reindeer and caribou are part of the same animal species. Reindeer vary in colour and size, but are smaller than caribou. Reindeer can be kept as pets or as working animals. Both male and female reindeer grow antlers every year, but the male's antlers are usually bigger. The males shed theirs every winter.



What Do They Eat?

Reindeer eat some types of lichens (a slow-growing plant), leaves and grass. Some also eat mushrooms and fish.

Where Do They Live?

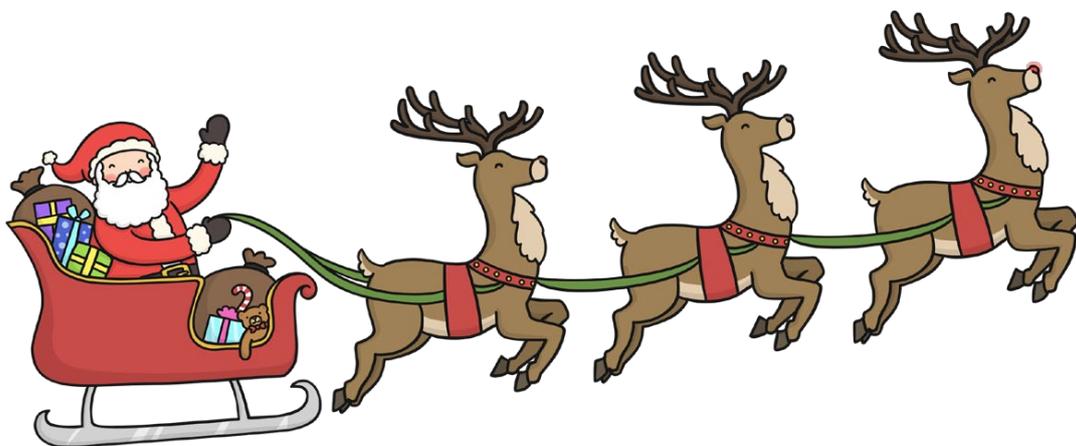
Many wild reindeer can be found in Norway, Finland, Alaska, Canada and Greenland. They are built for cold weather, but like to shelter in forests during winter.

Fun Facts

- They are built for living in the cold and snow.
- Their footpads shrink and tighten in the winter to help stop them from slipping.
- They are very good swimmers and have a great sense of smell to help them find food in snow.
- Male reindeer are called bulls, females are called cows and babies are called calves.
- Reindeer have special noses to warm the cold air they breathe.

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer Song

Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer,
Had a very shiny nose.
And if you ever saw it,
You would even say it glows.
All of the other reindeer,
Used to laugh and call him names.
They never let poor Rudolph,
Join in any reindeer games.
Then one foggy Christmas Eve,
Santa came to say:
“Rudolph with your nose so bright,
Won't you guide my sleigh tonight?”
Then all the reindeer loved him,
As they shouted out with glee.
Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer,
You'll go down in history!



Reindeer Questions

1. What do reindeer look like and how big are they compared to caribou?

2. Name three things reindeer eat.

3. Name five places in the world you might find wild reindeer.

4. Which real fact about reindeer noses do you think Rudolph's bright nose is linked to?

5. How and why do their footpads change in the winter?

6. Write the last three lines of the song about Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer

7. Explain your favourite reindeer fact and why.

Saint Nicholas

Who was Saint Nicholas?

Saint Nicholas was born in Patara, which would now be part of Turkey, around 1,700 years ago. He was a generous person who, even from a young age, wanted to share his toys with other children. When he grew up, Saint Nicholas became a Christian bishop who devoted his life to helping the poor and needy. Stories are told of Saint Nicholas' selfless deeds, including giving money to a poor family by leaving money in their stockings that were drying by the fire.

What is a Saint?

- It is believed that a saint is someone who has a high level of holiness.
- A saint is a kind and honourable person.
- There are believed to be many different saints who each represent different virtues. For example, Saint Christopher who watches over travellers and Saint Valentine who is the patron saint of love and marriage.

Over the years, stories of his miracles and the work that he did for the poor, spread to other parts of the world. Saint Nicholas was a modest man and would often carry out these good deeds at night whilst people were sleeping. When people woke in the morning, they would thank God for their gifts. When he died, he became known as the saint of gift-giving.

Saint Nicholas has become a beloved figure for many people. He has many different names, including Sinter Klaas in Holland, Saint Nikolaus in Germany and Father Christmas in the UK. Despite the different names, he is known for one thing - bringing happiness and joy to children all around the world. With the help of his faithful reindeer, his role is to deliver presents to around 90 million sleeping children on Christmas Eve each year.



Saint Nicholas Questions

1. Which country would Patara be part of today?

2. Finish this sentence: 'He devoted his life to helping....'

3. What do you think the word 'honourable' means?

4. Who is Saint Christopher?

5. What do you think the word 'modest' means?

6. Give two different names that Saint Nicholas is known by.

7. How many children will be receiving presents on Christmas Eve?

8. Why did people thank God for their gifts, rather than Saint Nicholas?

9. How do we know that Saint Nicholas is an important figure?

10. Think about your gifts and talents. What could you be a saint of?

Advent

What Is Advent?

Advent is the start of the Christian year. It is a time when Christians prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. The word 'Advent' comes from a very old word, 'Adventus', which means the arrival of something or someone important. Christians look forward to a time when Jesus will come again. They believe that the Three Kings travelled to meet Jesus on 'Epiphany', the 6th January.



Fun Facts

- Advent began in Germany over 250 years ago.
- During advent, in some churches there are no flowers.

When Is Advent?

Advent is the four weeks before Christmas. It starts on the nearest Sunday to November 30th, and lasts until midnight on Christmas Eve.



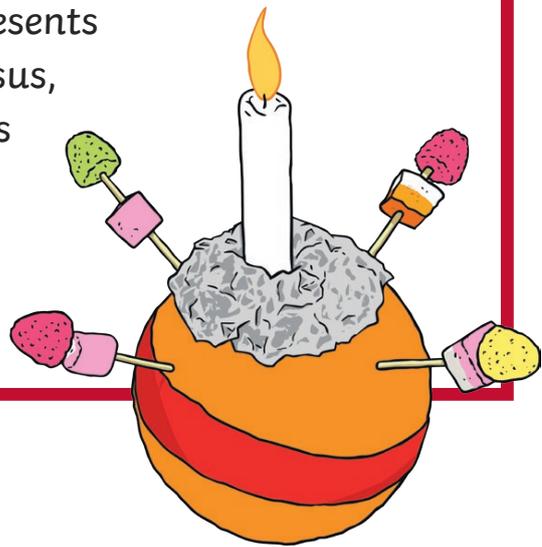
How Do People Celebrate Advent?

Christians and many other people enjoy the countdown from 1st December to Christmas Eve by using an 'Advent calendar'. Each day, a door is opened and a Christmas picture can be seen. Some even have a chocolate treat hidden behind each door! Advent is a time when Christians spend time with family and friends, pray, go to church and sing hymns. They celebrate with Advent crowns, Advent wreaths,

Advent candles and Christingles. Lots of people also celebrate by singing Christmas carols.

More Fun Facts

- The Advent wreath represents special things - the circle of evergreen branches (God does not change), the four candles (the light of God: Hope, Peace, Love and Joy) and the fifth centre candle lit on Christmas Day (the birth of Jesus).
- Each part of the Christingle represents something special – a candle (Jesus, light of the world), cocktail sticks (the four seasons), an orange (the world), a red ribbon (Jesus died) and sweets or dried fruit (all of God's creations).



Questions

1. What do Christians prepare for during Advent?

2. What does the word 'Advent' mean and what does it come from?

3. Explain two Christian beliefs about Advent.

4. When does Advent start and end?

5. How many years ago did Advent begin?

6. What do all five candles in the Advent wreath mean?

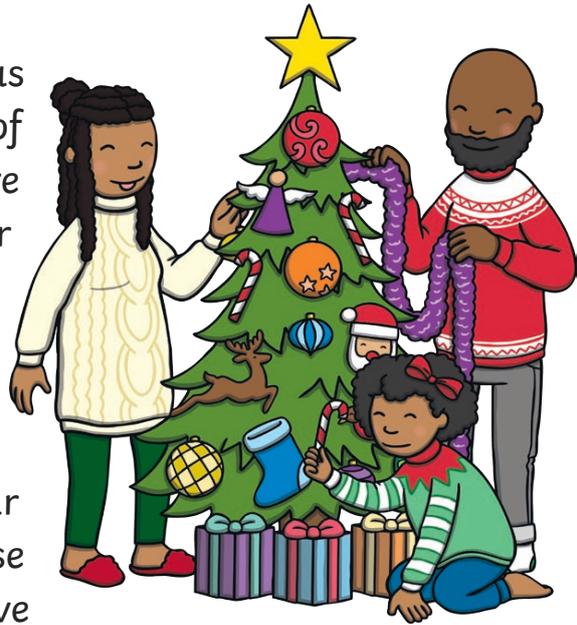
7. Why do you think Christians use an orange for the Christingle?

8. Explain two things Christians might do to celebrate Advent and how you might like to celebrate.

Christmas Trees

Decorating at Christmas

Many people feel that Christmas trees are an important part of Christmas. Christmas trees are decorated at home, ready for Christmas Day. All sorts of different decorations are used, including baubles, lights, tinsel, ribbons, angels and stars. Many people choose to decorate their tree in December, but some choose an earlier date. Many families have



a Christmas colour theme for their tree, like red, gold or silver. Christmas presents are usually put under the tree, ready to open

on Christmas morning. A long time ago, people used to decorate their trees with fruit, bread dough decorations, paper baskets, sweets, sewn snowflakes and candles - which was very dangerous!

Christmassy Facts!

1. The famous London Christmas tree in Trafalgar Square is a gift given by the people of Norway each year.
2. The world's largest floating Christmas tree is in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
3. People began decorating trees in Germany, in the 1500s.
4. Prince Albert started the Christmas tree tradition in England in the 1800s.

Different Types of Trees

Christmas trees come in different shapes and sizes. Many people choose real, evergreen trees including fir and spruce trees to decorate, because they can



have a woodland smell. Fake trees are called 'artificial' and lots of people choose these because they are less messy (since they don't lose their needles) and can be used again, year after year. Some are fibre optic and others can be made from plastic. You can even get pink, black, musical and spinning trees!

Where Else Do You Find Christmas Trees?

Many villages, towns and cities have their own outside Christmas tree for people to enjoy. These trees are usually decorated with lights and are much bigger.

Questions

1. What do many people feel about Christmas trees?

2. Name two Christmas tree decorations we use now.

3. When do people decorate their tree?

4. Name two Christmas tree decorations people used a long time ago.

5. Why do some people like real trees and some like fake trees?

6. Where does the famous Trafalgar Square Christmas tree come from?

7. When did decorating a Christmas tree first begin?

8. Why do you think it was dangerous to put candles on a Christmas tree?
