



Celebrations of Christmas

We are in the Holiday Season where many religions celebrate their traditions and beliefs. I would like to ask members and visitors to share how their faiths celebrate in the comments following the meeting. Today's program is "Christmas Traditions around the World," and if what you read interests you, feel free to get much, much more info from the [Santa's Net](#) website. There is even info on how to say "Merry Christmas" in dozens of languages - we'll copy that at the end of the program, just in case you want to hazard a try at the pronunciation in the language of one of your friends. We advise picking a patient friend.

Away we go!

Argentina: People go to the church with family, then come back to a family gathering. At midnight after eating they toast, then the adults dance while younger people go out to see the fireworks. After this they go to sleep, but before doing so they open the presents under the Christmas tree.

The dinner food is pork, turkey, and a great variety of meals. The table is covered with sweet things, cider, beer, and juice for consuming while waiting for the time of the toast. After the toast the family chats and plays.

Houses are decorated with red and white garlands, and on the door Father Christmas's Boots are placed. The Christmas tree is decorated with colored lights, ornaments and Father Christmas placed on top.

Belgium: In Belgium there are two Santa Claus figures: St. Nicholas and Pere Noel.

St Nicholas visits those who speak the Walloon language, in fact he visits them twice. The first time is on the December 4th so he can find out which children have been good and which children have been bad. He returns on December 6th with the presents. The good children usually receive candy and toys. For the bad children he leaves twigs inside their shoes or in small baskets that are left just inside the doorway.

Pere Noel visits those who speak French. He visits with his companion Pere Fouettard and asks whether the children have been good or bad. If they have been good they receive chocolates and candies, but if they have been bad they are more likely to receive a handful of sticks.

Christmas for both gift-givers is on December 6th, the feast of St Nicholas, and it is a religious occasion observed with services in churches and quiet family gatherings. Special cakes are baked and served during the holiday season and are a treat for children and adults.

Canada: Christmas celebrations are quite similar in the variety to America. In some provinces, a big winter festival called Sinck Tuck is celebrated by the Eskimos, with dancing and a present-giving party. What follows are some of the province-specific celebrations.

In Labrador, turnips are saved from the summer harvest and are given to children, with a lighted candle pushed into a hollowed-out hole.

In Nova Scotia, a country settled by Scottish highlanders, songs and carols brought from Britain two centuries ago are sung each Christmas morning.

Also in Nova Scotia, during the twelve days of Christmas small groups of belsnickers, or masked mummers, appear in neighborhoods, ringing bells, making noise, seeking candy or other treats. The hosts may try to guess who the mummers are and if they guess right the mummer removes his or her disguise and stops making rude noises and actions. Children may be quizzed by the mummers on their behavior - if they say they have been good they are rewarded with candy.

In Quebec they display Crèches or nativity scenes in their homes as the Christmas decorations. After attending midnight mass, families may be served tourtiere or pork pie. Another favorite food is Boulettes or small meatballs. A Christmas banquet is called a reveillon.

In British Columbia Christmas turkey may be accompanied by either fresh or smoked salmon.

China: The Christians in China light their homes with beautiful paper lanterns. Santa is called Dun Che Lao Ren. The children hang stockings just as do North American children.

Czech Republic: Celebrations for Christmas begin with the visit of St. Nicholas on December 6th and end with the visit of the Three Kings.

Here, St. Nicholas is called Svaty Mikalas and is believed to climb to earth down from heaven on a golden rope along with his companions: an angel and a whip-carrying devil.

It is said that a girl can tell her marital future by putting a cherry twig in water on December 4th. If the twig blossoms before Christmas Eve, the girl will marry sometime during the year.

The famous King Wenceslas of the Christmas Carol was a real king in this country. His goodness and his beliefs in Christianity infuriated his mother, and his brother murdered him on the church steps. Before he died he asked for God's mercy for his brother's evil act. He became the patron saint of the Czech Republic.

Christmas is a quiet and peaceful religious time here. They fast for one day, and have baked carp for Christmas dinner. St Nicholas visits, and brings good children gifts, and for those children who are bad, the devil is said to come with switches. At midnight, most families go to Holy Mass or Pasterka as it is known. On Christmas Day, the churches are filled with evergreens and Christmas Trees. Celebrations go on for three days.

Czechs eat a soup made of cod roe and tempt each other with tales of a mythical golden pig.

Denmark: Santa is known as Julemanden and he arrives in a sleigh pulled by reindeer with a sack full of gifts. Danish children know the elves as Juul Nisse, and believe that they live in the attics of their homes. Instead of cookies and glasses of milk, they leave rice pudding and saucers of milk out for the elves.

Egypt: The Coptic Church is an Orthodox Church and Christmas is celebrated on the 7th of January. Advent is observed for forty days and during this period people are expected to fast eating no meat, poultry or dairy products. Some people only do this during the last week of Advent.

On the Eve of Christmas everyone goes to church wearing a completely new outfit. The Christmas service ends at midnight with the ringing of church bells, then people go home to eat a special Christmas meal known as fata, which consists of bread, rice, garlic and boiled meat.

On Christmas morning people in Egypt visit friends and neighbors. They take with them kaik (a type of shortbread), which they give to the people they visit and which is eaten with a drink known as shortbat. Christmas Day is a public holiday for Christians.

England: From England, North Americans have acquired several customs. The first is the use of Christmas trees. This was made popular during the reign of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. Prince Albert came from the country of Germany and missed his native practice of bringing in trees to place on the tables in the house, therefore, one Christmas, the royal couple brought a tree inside the palace and decorated it with apples and other pretty items.

The second custom is what is known as Boxing Day. It is celebrated the first weekday after Christmas. What this means is that small wrapped boxes with food and sweets, or small gifts, or coins are given to anyone who comes calling that day.

Santa is known as Father Christmas, wearing long red robes with sprigs of holly in his hair. Instead of mailing out their Christmas list, children throw it into the fireplace and Father Christmas reads the smoke. England is also where the tradition of hanging stockings by the chimney began, due to the fact that Father Christmas once accidentally dropped some gold coins on his way down the chimney which got caught in a drying stocking. Instead of opening up their gifts as soon as they wake up, English children wait until the afternoon.

France: Santa is known as Pere Noel. He is accompanied by Pre Fouettard who keep track of who has been good or bad for Pere Noel. In some parts of France, Pere Noel brings small gifts in the beginning of December (the 6th) and comes back to deliver more on Christmas. In France the children get to open their gifts on Christmas, but the parents and other adults have to wait until New Year's. Children place their shoes by the fire place in hopes that le Pere Noel/Father Christmas or le Petit Jesus/Little Jesus will place gifts for them. They also have Le Reveillon - dinner at midnight on December 24th. They have a cake called La Bûche de Noel that is served after the dinner.

Tiny clay figures are used in the Christmas Mangers. These figures are most unique as they are dressed in what is popular in provincial clothing that year. The figures are Mary, Joseph, Baby Jesus, the Wise Men, the Shepherds, and Angels.

Italy: In Italy, the main exchange of gifts doesn't occur until January 6th, the day traditionally believed to be when the Wise Men reached the baby Jesus. Italy has La Befana, who brings gifts to for the good and punishment for the bad. She is the same character as Russia's Babouschka, who refused to give the Wise Men food and shelter.

The nativity scene may have first been set up by Saint Francis of Assisi. This first one was set up in a cave outside of a village and the villagers were so impressed by the display that now many of the communities compete for the best nativity.

India: Houses are decorated with strings of mango leaves. Lights are placed on the window sills and walls, and a star is hung outside. A sweet holiday treat called thali is made and it is taken to neighbors and friends.

Japan: The Japanese decorate their stores and homes with greens. The only part of Christmas that they celebrate is the giving of gifts. The "hoteisha," the priest who is like our Santa Claus, brings the children their presents.

Mexico: The Spanish word for Christmas is Navidad. Mexicans celebrate Christmas for nine days, reenacting Mary and Joseph's search for shelter in La Posada. It is a time where people dress as Mary and Joseph, traveling from house to house asking if Mary may stay the night. They are told the home is full. After this, the door opens back up and all are invited in for a party with food, songs, and for the children a Piñata. The Piñata is made of paper mache and filled with all kinds of goodies. The object is to break it open with your eyes blindfolded. After which, the children all dive for all the goodies they can pick up. On the ninth night they are told that there is room for Mary in the stable and all come in for food. Afterwards, all go to Church to celebrate the birth of the Christ Child.

The Netherlands: Santa is known as Sinterklaas, and he came to Sweden originally by boat, setting out on December 6th from Spain. He makes his gift deliveries by horseback. The children leave their shoes out, filled with hay and sugar for Sinterklaas' horse. In the morning they find their shoes filled with candy and nuts. When Sinterklaas appears to the children, he takes the form of their father or a favorite male relative.

North Pole: Santa and his helpers are getting ready to deliver gifts to the children of the world. Have you been good or bad?

Poland: From Christmas to New Years the streets are lined with lovely stalls called "joselki" and each one is carefully painted with scenes from the Christmas story. The booths are elaborately decorated in tinsel and lighted candles.

Spain: The children of Spain leave their shoes on the windowsills filled with straw, carrots, and barley for the horses of the Wise Men, who they believe reenact their journey to Bethlehem every year. One of the wise men is called Balthazar, who leaves the children gifts. They call Christmas Eve Nochebuena, and families gather together to rejoice and share a meal around the Nativity scene.

Sweden: Christmas begins in Sweden with the Saint Lucia ceremony. Before dawn on the morning of December 13th, the youngest daughter from each family puts on a white robe with a red sash. She wears a crown of evergreens with tall-lighted candles attached to it. She wakes her parents, and serves them with coffee and Lucia buns. The other children accompany her. The boys dressed as "star boys" in long white shirts and pointed hats. The custom goes back to Lucia, a Christian virgin martyred for her beliefs at Syracuse in the fourth century. The Saint Lucia ceremony is fairly recent, but it represents the traditional thanksgiving for the return of the sun. Candle-lit processions to Church feature Scandinavian Christmases, where, in the home, it is mother who always lights the candles on Christmas Eve.

Russia: Russia has someone named Babouschka, who brings gifts for the children. The tradition says that she failed to give food and shelter to the three wise men and so she now searches the countryside searching for the baby Jesus, visiting all children giving gifts as she goes. Santa was known as Saint Nicholas but today is called Grandfather Frost, wearing a blue outfit instead of red.

Switzerland: Santa Claus is called Christkind, the Christ Child, coming to bring gifts to the children dressed in all white with a golden crown. He is helped by Saint Nicholas.

What you've read is just a taste of what is on a variety of websites we researched for this program. Are you from one of these countries? If so, is what is presented accurate? Is it current? Please make sure to let us know in the comments!

Whatever your religious background, we hope the end of the year is a time when you reconnect with your family, recharge your batteries for the coming year, and remember those things that are most important in your lives. Things like Rotary!

Carol Anderson and Rushton Hurley
Rotary eClub of the Southwest USA



"Christmas Cats" by tuija2005 from Flickr.com

Saying "Merry Christmas" in:

Afrikaans: Geseënde Kersfees

Afrikander: Een Plesierige Kerfees

African/ Eritrean/ Tigrinja: Rehus-Beal-Ledeats

Albanian:Gezur Krislinjden

Arabic: Milad Majid

Argentine: Feliz Navidad

Armenian: Shenoraavor Nor Dari yev Pari Gaghand

Azeri: Tezze Iliniz Yahsi Olsun
Bahasa Malaysia: Selamat Hari Natal
Basque: Zorionak eta Urte Berri On!
Bengali: Shuvo Naba Barsha
Bohemian: Vesele Vanoce
Bosnian: (BOSANSKI) Cestit Bozic i Sretna Nova godina
Brazilian: Feliz Natal
Breton: Nedeleg laouen na bloavezh mat
Bulgarian: Tchestita Koleda; Tchestito Rojdestvo Hristovo
Catalan: Bon Nadal i un Bon Any Nou!
Chile: Feliz Navidad
Chinese: (Cantonese) Gun Tso Sun Tan'Gung Haw Sun
Chinese: (Mandarin) Kung His Hsin Nien bing Chu Shen Tan
Choctaw: Yukpa, Nitak Hollo Chito
Columbia: Feliz Navidad y Próspero Año Nuevo
Cornish: Nadelik looan na looan blethen noweth
Corsian: Pace e salute
Crazanian: Rot Yikji Dol La Roo
Cree: Mitho Makosi Kesikansi
Croatian: Sretan Bozic
Czech: Prejeme Vam Vesele Vanoce a stastny Novy Rok
Danish: Glædelig Jul
Duri: Christmas-e- Shoma Mobarak
Dutch: Vrolijk Kerstfeest en een Gelukkig Nieuwjaar! or Zalig Kerstfeest
English: Merry Christmas
Eskimo: (inupik) Jutdlime pivdluarit ukiortame pivdluaritlo!
Esperanto: Gajan Kristnaskon
Estonian: Rõõmsaid Jõulupühi
Ethiopian: (Amharic) Melkin Yelidet Beaal
Faeroese: Gledhilig jol og eydnurikt tryggjar!
Farsi: Cristmas-e-shoma mobarak bashad
Finnish: Hyvaa joulua
Flemish: Zalig Kerstfeest en Gelukkig nieuw jaar
French: Joyeux Noel
Frisian: Noflike Krystdagen en in protte Lok en Seine yn it Nije Jier!
Galician: Bo Nada

Gaelic: Nollaig chridheil agus Bliadhna mhath ùr!
German: Fröhliche Weihnachten
Greek: Kala Christouyenna!
Haiti: (Creole) Jwaye Nowel or to Jesus Edo Bri'cho o Rish D'Shato
Brichto
Hausa: Barka da Kirsimatikuma Barka da Sabuwar Shekara!
Hawaiian: Mele Kalikimaka
Hebrew: Mo'adim Lesimkha. Chena tova
Hindi: Shub Naya Baras (good New Year not Merry Christmas)
Hungarian: Kellemes Karacsonyi unnepeket
Icelandic: Gledileg Jol
Indonesian: Selamat Hari Natal
Iraqi: Idah Saidan Wa Sanah Jadidah
Irish: Nollaig Shona Dhuit, or Nodlaig mhaith chugnat
Iroquois: Ojenyunyat Sungwiyadeson honungradon nagwutut. Ojenyunyat
osrasay.
Italian: Buone Feste Natalizie
Japanese: Shinnen omedeto. Kurisumasu Omedeto
Jiberish: Mithag Crithagsigathmithags
Korean: Sung Tan Chuk Ha
Lao: souksan van Christmas
Latin: Natale hilare et Annum Faustum!
Latvian: Prieci'gus Ziemsvētkus un Laimi'gu Jauno Gadu!
Lausitzian: Wjesole hody a strowe nowe leto
Lettish: Priecigus Ziemassvetkus
Lithuanian: Linksmu Kaledu
Low Saxon: Heughliche Winachten un 'n moi Nijaar
Luxembourgish: Schëine Chreschtdaag an e gudde Rutsch
Macedonian: Sreken Bozhik
Maltese: IL-Milied It-tajjeb
Manx: Nollick ghennal as blein vie noa
Maori: Meri Kirihimete
Marathi: Shub Naya Varsh (good New Year not Merry Christmas)
Navajo: Merry Keshmish
Norwegian: God Jul, or Gledelig Jul
Occitan: Pulit nadal e bona annado

Papiamentu: Bon Pasco

Papua New Guinea: Bikpela hamamas blong dispela Krismas na Nupela yia
i go long yu

Pennsylvania German: En frehlicher Grischtdaag un en hallich Nei Yaahr!

Peru: Feliz Navidad y un Venturoso Año Nuevo

Philippines: Maligayang Pasko!

Polish: Wesolych Swiat Bozego Narodzenia or Boze Narodzenie

Portuguese: Feliz Natal

Pushto: Christmas Aao Ne-way Kaal Mo Mobarak Sha

Rapa-Nui (Easter Island): Mata-Ki-Te-Rangi. Te-Pito-O-Te-Henua

Rhetian: Bellas festas da nadal e bun onn

Romanche: (sursilvan dialect): Legreivlas fiastas da Nadal e bien niev onn!

Rumanian: Sarbatori vesele or Craciun fericit

Russian: Pozdrevlyayu s prazdnikom Rozhdestva is Novim Godom

Sami: Buorrit Juovllat

Samoan: La Maunia Le Kilisimasi Ma Le Tausaga Fou

Sardinian: Bonu nadale e prosperu annu nou

Scots Gaelic: Nollaig chridheil huibh

Serbian: Hristos se rodi.

Singhalese: Subha nath thalak Vewa. Subha Aluth Awrudhak Vewa

Slovak: Vesele Vianoce. A stastlivy Novy Rok

Slovene: Vesele Bozicne Praznike Srecno Novo Leto or Vesel Bozic in
srecno Novo leto

Spanish: Feliz Navidad

Swedish: God Jul and (Och) Ett Gott Nytt År

Tagalog: Maligayang Pasko. Masaganang Bagong Taon

Tamil: (Tamizh) Nathar Puthu Varuda Valthukkal (good New Year not
Merry Christmas)

Trukeese: (Micronesian) Neekiriisimas annim oo iyer seefe feyiyeech!

Thai: Sawadee Pee Mai or souksan wan Christmas

Turkish: Noeliniz Ve Yeni Yiliniz Kutlu Olsun

Ukrainian: Srozhdestvom Kristovym or Z RIZDVOM HRYSTOVYM

Urdu: Naya Saal Mubarak Ho (good New Year not Merry Christmas)

Vietnamese: Chuc Mung Giang Sinh

Welsh: Nadolig Llawen

Yoruba: E ku odun, e ku iye'dun!