

What is Christmas?

In many places in the world, Christmas is probably the most popular holiday in the year, especially for Christians. It is very nostalgic for many people—the sights, the sounds, the smells and time spent with family and friends.

Since Canada is in the Northern Hemisphere, Christmas comes in the winter season. Thus, we associate Christmas with the cold and snow, winter sports like skating, making a snowman, warming up by a fire and drinking hot chocolate. This is what we call “seasonal” Christmas.

Children have happy memories of Santa Claus bringing them presents. There are also family traditions such as putting up a tree and decorating it, putting up lights outside the house, getting together with family and friends and of course, eating a big dinner that includes turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes, gravy, salads, vegetables and for dessert pumpkin pie and whipped cream. Yummy! We like to watch Christmas movies such as, “It’s a Wonderful Life” All of these things are what we call “secular” Christmas.

Finally, there is what we call “sacred” Christmas. This means that we remember the very first Christmas when the baby Jesus was born. Anything about this event, such as Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, Bethlehem, the angels, the star, the shepherds, the wise men etc. is part of the very first Christmas and is sacred.

Sometimes it's confusing to newcomers because they see and hear so many things around Christmas time—lights, trees, bells, decorations, Santa Clauses in malls, presents, shopping, food, people singing carols and so on. They must wonder what it's all about. Christmas cards show pictures of seasonal, secular and sacred things and the many Christmas songs tell us about all these things too.

This booklet is meant to help you see the differences.

—created by Mary Cummins

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WINTER WONDERLAND

The famous Christmas song “Winter Wonderland” was first published in 1934. The composer was Felix Bernard (1897-1944) and the lyricist was Richard B. Smith (1901-1935).

The lyrics of “Winter Wonderland” have undoubtedly contributed to the magical vision of snow at Christmas together with the tradition of building snowmen and therefore turning fantasy into reality by creating a real Winter Wonderland.

Sleigh bells ring, are you listenin',
In the lane, snow is glistenin'
A beautiful sight,
We're happy tonight,
Walkin' in a winter wonderland.

Gone away is the bluebird,
Here to stay is a new bird
He sings a love song,
As we go along,
Walkin' in a winter wonderland.

In the meadow we can build a snowman,
And pretend that he is Parson Brown
He'll say, “Are you married?”
We'll say, “No man,
But you can do the job
While you're in town.”

Later on, we'll conspire,
As we dream by the fire
To face unafraid,
The plans that we've made,
Walking in a winter wonderland.

WHITE CHRISTMAS

The song White Christmas is undoubtedly the most famous and popular of all the secular Christmas songs. The music and lyrics for White Christmas were written by Irving Berlin in 1942 and originally featured in the movie “Holiday Inn” starring Bing Crosby. The lyrics of White Christmas struck a chord with the soldiers fighting in the Second World War and their families who were waiting for them back home.

I’m dreaming of a white Christmas
Just like the ones I used to know
Where the treetops glisten,
And children listen
To hear sleigh bells in the snow.

I’m dreaming of a white Christmas
With every Christmas card I write.
May your days be merry and bright,
And may all your Christmases be white.

Repeat both verses

JINGLE BELLS

Jingle bells, jingle bells,
Jingle all the way!
Oh, what fun it is to ride
In a one-horse open sleigh—HEY!

REPEAT

Dashing through the snow
In a one-horse open sleigh,
O'er the fields we go,
Laughing all the way!
Bells on Bob-tail ring,
Making spirits bright;
What fun it is to ride and sing
A sleighing song tonight!

Oh, jingle bells, jingle bells
Jingle all the way!
Oh, what fun it is to ride
In a one-horse open sleigh—HEY!

SECULAR CHRISTMAS

Is There Really A Santa Claus?

Many children think that Santa Claus will come to their house on Christmas Eve. He will land on their roof with his 8 reindeer and a sleigh full of toys. He will go down the chimney and leave toys for them under the Christmas tree. Then he will go back up the chimney and fly away in his sleigh back to the North Pole where he lives. This is all impossible.

There is no real Santa Claus but the idea started with a real man. Long ago in 280-343AD there was a priest in Patara in Greece by the name of Saint Nicholas. (Now this area is on the Southern coast of Turkey) He was very kind and liked to help poor people. He became famous in the Eastern Church and December 6th is known as St. Nicholas' Day.

In the 1500's, settlers from Holland immigrated to New Amsterdam in the United States. They brought their tradition of St. Nicholas with them but they called him "Sinter Klass". Over time the name changed to "Santa Claus."

There is a famous book called "'Twas the Night Before Christmas". It describes what the imaginary Santa looks like. If you go to any mall, you will probably see a man dressed like Santa Claus. Children go and sit on his lap and tell him what they want for Christmas.

Even though there isn't really a Santa Claus, the idea of giving is a very important part of Christmas.

'Twas the Night Before Christmas
By Clement Moore

Listen to it at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qUzIF4eYRkg>

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house

Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse;

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care,

In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there;

The children were nestled all snug in their beds,

While visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads;

And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my cap,

Had just settled down for a long winter's nap,

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,

I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,

Tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow

Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below,

When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,

But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer,

With a little old driver, so lively and quick,

I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles his coursers they came,

And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;

"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!

On, Comet! on Cupid! on, Donder and Blitzen!

To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!

Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,

When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,

So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,

With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.

And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof

The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

As I drew in my head, and was turning around,

Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,

And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;

A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,

And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.

His eyes -- how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!

His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!

His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,

And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,
And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook, when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;
He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;
He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight,

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."

SANTA CLAUS IS COMING TO TOWN

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWv72L4wgCc>

You better watch out
You better not cry
You better not pout
I'm telling you why,
Santa Claus is coming to town

He's making a list
And checking it twice;
Gonna find out who's naughty or nice,
Santa Claus is coming to town

He sees you when you are sleeping.
He knows when you're awake.
He knows if you've been bad or good
So be good for goodness sake!

You better watch out!
You better not cry
Better not pout
I'm telling you why
Santa Claus is coming to town
Santa Claus is coming to town

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

Go to you tube and choose: The Red-Nosed Reindeer Song (Best Version)

**You know Dasher and Dancer and Prancer and Vixen
Comet and Cupid and Donner and Blitzen
But do you know the most famous reindeer of all?**

**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!**

**Listen to it the second time and see if you can catch the extra words
the children sing.**

THE SACRED FIRST CHRISTMAS

When you hear “Christmas,” you might think of Santa Claus and Christmas cake. But that is not what Christmas is really about.

The word “Christmas” comes from the word “Christ.” This is a title given to Jesus and it means “anointed one.” Long ago Christmas was called “the mass of Christ” which means the celebration of Christ’s birth. Christmas is one of the two most important Christian holidays in the year and is celebrated by most people on December 25th. However, many Orthodox Christians in Canada celebrate Christmas Day on or near January 7 in the Gregorian calendar. This date works to be December 25 in the Julian calendar, which pre-dates the Gregorian calendar.

Here’s the story of the first Christmas:

Long, long ago Jewish prophets wrote about the coming of “the anointed one”. They called him the “Messiah.” They waited for him for hundreds and hundreds of years.

This is how it finally happened...

God chose a young Jewish woman named Mary to be the mother of this Messiah. Mary was planning to marry a Jewish man named Joseph.

One day an angel named Gabriel told Mary that she was going to become pregnant by the power of the Holy Spirit. Her baby would be the Son of God, and his name was to be “Jesus” which means “The Lord saves.”

Soon after this, the Emperor of the country ordered all the people to go back to their family hometowns to be counted. Mary and Joseph went to their hometown which was Bethlehem. There was no room for them to

stay in an inn (hotel), so they had to stay in a stable where many animals were. While they were there, Mary gave birth to Jesus.

On that same night an angel appeared to some shepherds who were watching their sheep. The angel told them that Jesus, the Saviour, was born in Bethlehem. The angel also told them where they would find baby Jesus in a manger. Then many, many angels appeared and praised God. The shepherds went to find Jesus.

Later, maybe even two years later, wise men came from the East looking for Jesus. God sent a bright star to guide them to Bethlehem. By the time they came, Mary and Joseph and Jesus were living in a house. The wise men brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to give to Jesus. This is where the idea of giving gifts started.

This was the very first Christmas. Since then, many countries have made many customs for celebrating Christmas. They are interesting and fun but the main point about Christmas is the celebration of Christ's birth over 2000 years ago.

SILENT NIGHT

This song is probably the most popular of sacred Christmas songs (called carols). It was written in 1818 in a village near Salzburg, Austria. It was originally written in German and later translated to many languages.

Many singers sing this song & you can find them on you tube. I like the one by Susan Boyle.

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon virgin mother and Child
Holy Infant, so tender and mild.
Sleep in heavenly peace
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night, holy night
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glory streams from Heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Hallelujah
Christ the Saviour is born,
Christ the Saviour is born.

(I haven't given you all the verses here)

Joy to the World

The lyrics for this popular carol were written in 1719 by Isaac Watts (1674-1748). The music was composed by George Fredrick Handel (1685-1759). He is the same Handel who wrote the famous "Handel's Messiah" that is always sung at Christmas time.

Joy to the world , the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven and nature sing,
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing.

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders of His love,
And wonders, wonders, of His love.