

Christmas

Christmas is celebrated each year on December 25th, to remember the birthday of Jesus of Nazareth. It is a religious holiday for Christians, but non-Christians also celebrate the Christmas season. Though it isn't clear exactly when Christmas was first celebrated, most people who study history believe it was some time during the fourth century. The early Christians most likely chose late December for Christmas to substitute for pagan festivals that took place around the same time to celebrate the winter solstice.

Christmas is celebrated throughout the world in many different ways. The celebration often begins the night before Christmas, or Christmas Eve. People gather together to share meals and exchange gifts in a spirit of good cheer. Christians often put nativity figures in their homes to show the birth of Jesus in a stable surrounded by animals, shepherds and three magi (or wise kings). Other symbols of Christmas include lights, Christmas trees and, of course, Santa Claus. The story of Santa Claus is based on a real Christian saint called Nicholas who lived from 270 to 343. The story of Santa Claus that we know today may have started in America around 1823 when a New York newspaper published a poem called "A Visit from Saint Nicholas." The poem was a story about a generous saint who flew over rooftops on a sled pulled by reindeer. The writer made up the story to entertain his young daughter.

The Christmas tradition of bringing trees indoors to decorate began in Germany in the mid-1800s. It is said to have started with the Protestant minister Martin Luther, who saw a beautiful fir tree while walking in the woods one Christmas Eve. According to the story, he brought the fir tree home and decorated it with candles to remind his children of God's creation. The custom spread, and people began to decorate trees with ornaments, paper chains, sugarplums and tin angels.

People also send cards to family and friends during the Christmas season. This tradition began centuries ago in Europe when people would make woodprints with religious pictures and give them to others at Christmas. The first modern Christmas card was made in the mid 1800's in England by an illustrator named John Callcott Horsley. The card was a picture of a family celebrating the holiday with the words, "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You" written under it.

Christmas Questions

1. Christmas is celebrated
 - a. only in North America.
 - b. on the first day of the winter solstice.
 - c. only by Christians.
 - d. by Christians and non-Christians.

2. Christmas was probably first celebrated in December
 - a. the same year that Jesus of Nazareth was born.
 - b. in the fourth century.
 - c. in the fourteenth century.
 - d. in the mid-1800's.

3. Santa Claus
 - a. lived from 275 to 340.
 - b. is based on a Christian Saint named Nicholas.
 - c. Both of these
 - d. Neither of these

4. Nativity figures usually include all of the following except
 - a. shepherds
 - b. Jesus
 - c. Santa Claus
 - d. animals

5. "A Visit From Saint Nicolas" was
 - a. the book that contains the famous story "The Night Before Christmas."
 - b. a poem originally published in a New York newspaper.
 - c. the first television Christmas special.
 - d. a song written by a newspaper reporter to entertain his daughter.

Name _____

Date _____

Christmas Questions (Cont'd)

6. Who is credited with being the first to bring a tree indoors to decorate for Christmas?

7. In what country did the Christmas tree tradition begin?

8. Why was the first Christmas tree brought indoors?

9. Who probably created the first Christmas card?

10. What was written on the first Christmas card?

Name _____

Date _____

Christmas Answers

1. d
2. b
3. b
4. c
5. b
6. Martin Luther
7. Germany
8. Martin Luther brought the tree indoors to remind his children of God's creation
9. John Callcott Horsley
10. A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to You