



# Christmas Traditions

## Christmas Present

Do you celebrate Christmas? If not, is there a different religious or non-religious festival that you celebrate in the winter?

- Where do you normally spend Christmas?
- What are your family's Christmas traditions? Are they typical in your country?
  - What kind of decorations do you have?
  - What do you eat for Christmas dinner?

## Christmas Past

The pictures below all depict Christmas traditions that are common in Britain. What do you know about these Christmas traditions and how they started?

- Where did these traditions come from and how long do you think they have existed?
- What different Christmas traditions do you know about from other countries?
- For 6 of the pictures below make a sentence using the Past Simple and Past Continuous with 'when' or 'while'.



## Christmas Future

What do you predict for Christmas Future? Use **Present Continuous**, **Will**, or **Going to**.

- What plans do you and your family have? What predictions can you make?
- What do you think Christmas will be like in 2050? What will be the same? What do you think might change?

## Christmas Present Perfect

You are Father Christmas and you want to make sure all the preparations are ready for Christmas. You ask the Elves questions using the **Present Perfect**.

Match the verbs with a noun from the lists below to make the questions with 'yet':

<i>Feed</i>	<i>Messages</i>
<i>Drink</i>	<i>Christmas Suit</i>
<i>Wrap</i>	<i>Pudding</i>
<i>Wash</i>	<i>Sleigh</i>
<i>Check</i>	<i>Mulled wine</i>
<i>Eat</i>	<i>Presents</i>
<i>Write</i>	<i>Reindeer</i>
<i>Polish</i>	<i>Sacks</i>
<i>Fill</i>	<i>Christmas Wish Lists</i>
<i>Prepare</i>	<i>My boots</i>



## Before you read the text...

Look at the headings below and match them with one of the pictures above.

## The origins of Christmas traditions

For many people, Christmas represents a time of joy, giving gifts, and family. Though the word "Christmas" comes from the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, in fact we don't know the exact date, or even the year of his birth.

Christmas as a mid-winter festival actually started with the Roman tradition of Saturnalia, a festival for their god of agriculture, Saturn, on the winter solstice.

With this big pagan festival already taking place the Christians decided to adopt the festival to celebrate the birth of Christ on the same date. Many Roman writers the date of December 25th Christianity between the 2nd and 3rd centuries, and it is believed that the holiday was widely celebrated by Christians by the turn of the 4th century.

## The Christmas Tree

While Christmas trees have been around for a millennium in northern Europe, the first one did not appear in the UK until the 1830s. When Prince Albert put up a Christmas tree at Windsor Castle in 1841, he started what became an evergreen trend.

## Stockings

Leaving stockings out at Christmas goes back to the legend of St Nicholas. Known as the gift giver, on one occasion he sent bags of gold down a chimney at the home of a poor man who had no dowry for his unmarried daughters. The gold fell into stockings left hanging to dry. St Nicholas was later referred to by the Dutch as Sinterklaas and eventually, by English-speakers, as Santa Claus.

## Holly and Ivy

These plants are used as Christmas decorations and are the subject of a traditional British folk carol. Holly and ivy were originally used in pre-Christian times to celebrate the winter solstice. As they provide a rare splash of colour in the darkest month of the year, their popularity has lasted.

## Crackers

London sweet-maker Tom Smith invented Christmas crackers in the late 1840s, inspired by traditional, paper-wrapped French bonbons. Even though he included mottos or riddles inside each, it was not until he found a way to make them “crack” when pulled apart that sales took off. His sons Tom, Walter and Henry later added hats and novelty gifts.

## Turkey

Turkeys originated in Mexico and were first brought to Britain in 1526 by William Strickland. Henry VIII enjoyed turkey and although the bird became fashionable in high society in the late 19th century it was Edward VII who made it the first-choice dinner at Christmas for the middle classes.

Even by 1930, however, it took a week's wages to buy one and turkey remained a luxury until the 1950s.

## Mistletoe

Hanging mistletoe in the home is an ancient pagan practice adopted by early Christians. The word itself is Anglo-Saxon and the tradition of kissing under the mistletoe originated in England. Each kiss required a berry to be plucked until none remained.

## Christmas carols

Carols were songs and dances of praise and joy in pagan times and the practice of carol singing carried over into the Christian era. Carols have been written through the centuries but the most familiar date from Victorian times.

## The image of Father Christmas

The legend goes that Santa's suit is red because of a successful advertising campaign for Coca-Cola. However, the red and white actually derive from the colours of Saint Nicholas. Historians argue that bishops' robes appeared in many different colours but the red one came to be linked to Father Christmas during the 19th century.

Saint Nicholas was drawn throughout history in various forms: thin, intellectual and even frightening. It was Coca-Cola's adverts that created the image of the rotund, jolly, white-haired man we're all familiar with today.

