

Lots of people celebrate Christmas, whether or not they are Christians themselves. Read this page to find out more about how Christmas is celebrated in the UK. Think about what things are Christian, and what are also secular (non-religious).

Christmas at church

There are many different types of church in the UK and most of them celebrate Christmas. They do not all celebrate in exactly the same way. Here are some of the things that may happen:

Advent: *advent* means 'arrival of something important'. At Christmas, many Christians remember the arrival on earth of Jesus. From four Sundays before Christmas Day, people begin to prepare for Christmas – the day when Jesus' arrival is celebrated. An advent wreath is often lit in church. It has four candles on the outside (one is lit on each Sunday leading up to Christmas), and one in the middle that will be lit on Christmas Day.

Reading from the Bible: parts of the Bible that are read in church at this time of year will often talk about the birth of Jesus.

Midnight Mass: some churches hold a service after sunset or near to midnight on Christmas Eve so that everyone can look forward to Christmas and celebrate together.



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Christmas at home



Nativity plays: many families will have children who take part in nativity plays in the weeks before Christmas. These plays tell the story of the birth of Jesus.

Dinner: lots of people really enjoy a big Christmas dinner!

Gifts: there are many reasons why gifts are given at Christmas. In the Bible, the wise men give gifts to the baby Jesus. Christians often describe Jesus as 'God's gift to the world', so his birth is remembered by the giving and receiving of gifts.

Christmas message: for about the last 100 years, a speech from the King or Queen has been given on Christmas Day. It talks about the main things that have happened since last Christmas, and important ideas for everyone to think about. Lots of people in the UK, whether Christian or not, watch these speeches on television on the afternoon of Christmas Day.



Nativity or crib services

Many churches have nativity or crib services to tell the story of Jesus' birth. As lots of children attend these services, they are often quite imaginative and fun so that everyone can enjoy and take part.

They might include:

- dressing up as characters from the nativity story
- acting out the story
- singing songs about Jesus' birth
- watching a figure of Jesus being placed into a crib
- prayers
- wishing everyone a happy Christmas ... and much more!



Carols

Carols are songs sung at Christmas. Their lyrics are about the birth of Jesus and often show Christian beliefs about it, just like these:

Joy to the World; the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King!
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room.
And Heaven and nature sing. (Isaac Watts)

Although you might think that carols are often sung in church, when Christmas carols were first popular they were more likely to be sung in homes.



**What are your favourite things about Christmas?
Do you do any of the things on this page?**

Christmas food

There are lots of special foods that are only eaten around Christmas time. Do you eat any of these in your house:

- mince pies?
- Christmas pudding?
- pigs in blankets?
- chocolate Yule log?

Mince pies have spices in them which some say are a reminder of the wise men or magi, who came from the same area of the world as the spices. Yule logs are named after an old festival that was celebrated before Christians began to celebrate Christmas.

These foods don't have much to do with the birth of Jesus, but lots of people enjoy eating them at Christmas.



Seeing friends and family

For many people, the most important thing about Christmas is that it is a time to stop work and to spend time playing games, watching TV and having fun with family and friends.

For lots of people there are meals at the houses of friends or relatives, or visits to see grandparents or Father Christmas.



Decorating the tree

Green branches were hung on people's doors and windows before Christmas was celebrated. Bringing trees into the house and decorating them started over 400 years ago in Germany, when Christians began putting candles on trees in their houses.

Now lots of people have real or artificial trees in their homes, decorated with light and baubles. Trees are also found in churches, schools and town centres.

Do you have a tree in your house or school? What do you like about it?



Advent calendars and candles

These are special calendars used to count down the 24 days in December until Christmas Day. Originally these calendars showed Bible verses and pictures of the nativity story.

Over the years these calendars have changed, with some still showing pictures from the nativity story but others focusing more on Father Christmas, decorations and other Christmas traditions. Advent calendars now often contain a chocolate or gift for each door opened.

Some Christian families have an advent candle that they light each day of advent as they read part of the nativity story or pray.

Do you have a candle or calendar at Christmas? What is it like?

