

Christmas Traditions for ESL Class

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Christmas is one of the most important holidays in the English speaking world. There are many Christmas traditions in these countries. The traditions are both religious and secular in nature. Here is a short guide to the most common Christmas traditions.

What Does the Word Christmas Mean?

The word Christmas is taken from Christ's Mass or, in the original Latin, *Cristes maesse*. Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus on this day.

Is Christmas Only a Religious Holiday?

Certainly, for practicing Christians around the world, Christmas is one the most important holiday of the year. However, in modern times, traditional Christmas festivities have become much less related to the Christ story. Examples of these other traditions include Santa Claus, Rudolf the Red Nose Reindeer, and others.

Why Is Christmas so Important?

There are two reasons:

1. There are approximately 1.8 billion Christians in a total world population of 5.5 billion, making it the largest religion worldwide.
2. And, some think more importantly, Christmas is the most important shopping event of the year. It is claimed that up to 70 percent of many merchants' annual revenue is made during the Christmas season. It is interesting to note that this emphasis on spending is relatively modern. Christmas was a relatively quiet holiday in the USA until the 1860s.

Why Do People Give Gifts on Christmas Day?

This tradition most probably is based on the story of the three wise men (the Magi) giving gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh following the birth of Jesus.

However, it is important to note that gift giving has only become popular in the last 100 years as figures such as Santa Claus have come to be more important, and emphasis has been shifted to giving gifts to children.

Why Is There a Christmas Tree?

This tradition was begun in Germany. German immigrants moving to England and the USA brought this popular tradition with them and it has since become a much-loved tradition for all.

Where Does the Nativity Scene Come From?

The Nativity Scene is accredited to Saint Francis of Assisi in order to teach people about the Christmas story. Nativity Scenes are popular around the world, especially in Naples, Italy that is famous for its beautiful Nativity Scenes.

Is Santa Claus Really St. Nicholas?

Modern day Santa Claus has very little to do with St. Nicholas, though there are certainly similarities in the style of dressing. Today, Santa Claus is all about the presents, whereas St. Nicholas was a Catholic saint. Apparently, the story "[Twas the Night before Christmas](#)" has a lot to do with changing "St. Nick" into modern day Santa Claus.