

Christmas through the Ages

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Christmas is one of the most important holidays of the year in many parts of the world. It

traditionally celebrates Jesus Christ's birth more than 2,000 years ago. But there is a

stronger _____, or non-religious, tradition too. For example, family and friends often

exchange Christmas cards and gifts. Christmas trees, lights, and Santa are also big parts of

the holiday. In fact, through the years, many other customs and cultures have added to the

list of traditions that we now _____ with the Christmas holiday.

Christmas most likely _____ from two much older holidays in the Roman _____.

One of the holidays was called Saturnalia, which celebrated the god Saturn. The other

holiday was the Roman New Year. Many of the modern-day traditions come from these

festivals, such as giving gifts, merry making, lights, _____, ivy, and charity. The first

connection with Jesus, however, comes in the fourth century as a way to promote

Christianity in the Roman _____. Early Christians usually celebrated the birth of Christ with

another religious celebration called the Epiphany, which was much less festive.

But it wasn't until the 11th century that Christmas began to grow in _____. Several kings

of England were crowned on this day, and great feasts were regularly held.

Although it was

a _____ day, people _____ drank, danced, and gambled to the point of _____.

Perhaps these were holdovers from the older traditions of Rome's Saturnalia, which focused on a

week of eating, drinking, and _____. People in the middle ages exchanged gifts too.

However, it wasn't family and friends who exchanged gifts, but instead people with legal

relationships.

In the 17th and 18th centuries, Christmas celebrations in America and England almost died

out. In America, some _____ groups viewed the traditions as _____.

The holiday was

made illegal in Boston, for example. In addition, many people connected Christmas with the

English, and anti-English _____ just before and in the years following the

War was strong. Many Americans chose not to celebrate the holiday. In England, the

holiday became just an _____ to behave immorally, which was far different from the _____

celebrations of Jesus's birth.

In the 19th century, though, Christmas _____ much of the _____ and _____ that we see

today. Several writers wrote stories of ideal Christmases that focused on _____, family,

and goodwill. In England, A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens played a major role in

_____ and reinventing the holiday. In the US, the writers Washington Irving and Clement

Moore Clark published stories that were quite _____ too.

Christmas today has mostly become a _____ holiday. Although many people go to church

to celebrate Jesus's _____, many more people prefer to set up a

Christmas tree, exchange
gifts with family and friends, watch holiday programs on TV,
and eat a roast ham or turkey dinner. In fact, what first
comes to mind is based on traditions through the ages,
_____ trees, presents, and such.