

How much do you know?

'CHRISTMAS' TRADITIONS

You all know that typical traditions at this time of year include singing songs called 'carols' to friends and neighbours and giving **presents** to others on December 25th, but do you know how these **traditions** started?

• December 25th

The Ancient Romans celebrated the winter **solstice** as early as the 8th Century (800 years before records of Christ). The winter solstice is the longest night and shortest day of the year. Romans celebrated the solstice with a **feast** called 'Saturnalia'. In preparation, they decorated their houses and **lit** candles. On the day of the feast, they exchanged **gifts** and sang songs.

Christmas Trees

Throughout history, trees have been used as a symbol for life. **Evergreen** trees such as pine trees- like a typical Christmas tree- have been displayed in cold winter months for centuries. Evergreen trees signified the return of life after cold, dark months when very little food grows. Some people **hung** red apples on their trees, much like the shiny **baubles** we hang on our trees today.

Mistletoe

This winter plant with its small white **berries** was used by Druids more than 5000 years ago. It was from the sacred (sagrado) oak tree and Pagans believed mistletoe was 'lucky' (afortunado). If you **met** a person in the forest, you would give them a piece of **mistletoe** as a sign of peace and luck. Many people put mistletoe over doorways in their homes. It was such a powerful symbol of **Pagan** beliefs that the Christian church prohibited people from using it in England. In modern society, we **kiss** people under mistletoe.

'Father Christmas'

The earliest record of a man leaving presents for children in December is from Turkey in the 4th century (2,200 years ago!) There **was** a famous **monk** called *Saint Nicholas* who **took** care of children, leaving **coins** and sweet treats in their shoes. As people began travelling more, stories **were** passed to other countries and the **Dutch** began using *Sinterklaas* (Saint Nicholas in Dutch). When Northern Europeans moved to America, *Sinterklass* became *Santa Claus*, like we use today.

Carol singing

The tradition of singing songs for **neighbours** is a little more modern. In Europe, poor people **went** to rich homes in the cold winter months and **sang** in exchange for money and food. In the Victorian era, from 1837-1901, people began singing popular songs in the streets and in churches at Christmas time.

• So, do you still think Christmas is all about Christ and Christian religion? Or is it really a mixture of European traditions and history, all mixed up together? You decide!



What do you remember?

1. Match these **Past Simple** irregular verbs from the text to the correct infinitive:

lit hung met sang took went was/were

to hang _____

to sing _____

to take _____

to be _____

to go _____

to light _____

to meet _____

2. Move the words to complete the sentences.

a) An action that is repeated every year is called a _____.

b) Your _____ are the people who live next to or close to you.

c) A _____ is a member of a religious community of men.

d) A flat piece of metal with a design and a value is called a _____.

e) _____ is a sacred Pagan plant people hang over doors at Christmas.

f) An _____ plant is a plant that stays green all year.

g) Small rounded fruits can also be called _____.

h) People hang shiny glass balls called _____ on evergreen trees.

i) The tradition of giving people _____ started with Saint Nicholas.

j) The longest night and shortest day of winter is called the winter _____.

j) A _____ is a big meal, typically a celebration of something.

k) _____ people believed mistletoe was lucky.

l) To touch someone with your mouth is called a _____.

m) The _____ took the name 'Sinterklaas' to America, where the name Santa Claus started.

tradition
solstice
feast
presents
evergreen
baubles
berries
mistletoe
Pagan
kiss
monk
coin
Dutch
neighbours

