

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.

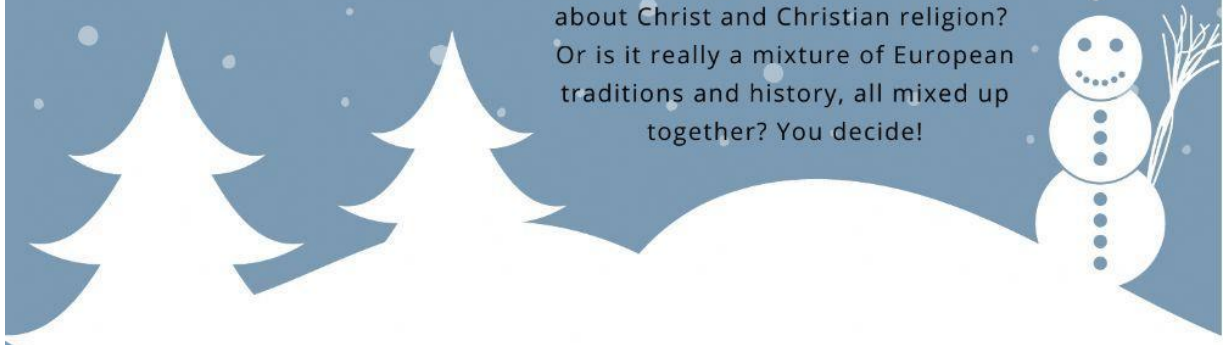
'Father Christmas'

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

