

Each Week for a Year

Readings for ESL Students on Everyday Life in the USA

By Jane Wangersky



Christmas

Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. Christians believe he was God, born as a human being. For them, his birth is a happy, important event.

In Western countries, most people celebrate Christmas, even if they are not strict Christians. Some non-Christians also celebrate it. To them, it's a time to get together with their families and friends, send cards, eat good food and give gifts.

Many Christmas customs are older than the Christian religion. They come from winter festivals pagans celebrated in ancient times. When the pagans became Christian, they used these customs to celebrate the birth of Christ.



Gifts are a large part of Christmas celebrations. Most children in North America believe Santa Claus brings them gifts on Christmas Eve. He flies from the North Pole in a sleigh pulled by reindeer. He leaves the gifts under the family Christmas tree.



The words "Santa Claus" come from "Saint Nicholas". Saint Nicholas was a holy man in the fourth century who gave things to the poor. Stories about him grew into the Santa Claus story.

The Christmas tree is always an evergreen. It is a symbol of never-ending life. It was also used at winter festivals in pagan times. This was a German custom that was taken to England by Queen Victoria's German husband, Albert. It spread to other English-speaking countries.



“Christmas carols” are special songs, sung only around Christmas.

Some are very old. “Silent Night”, “The Twelve Days of Christmas”, and “Joy to the World” are a few popular carols.

Food is important at Christmas. Children usually eat lots of candy.

Candy canes – mint candies shaped in hooks – are seen only at Christmas. Many people bake cookies shaped like Christmas trees, snowmen, and other Christmas symbols. Some people make or buy fruitcake, a heavy cake made with dried fruit. Fruitcake is a Christmas tradition, but not many people like it.

As a religious celebration or just as a winter holiday, Christmas is important to many people.