

## 11

## Christmas

Then December comes, and children begin to get excited because of Christmas. About two thousand years ago, Jesus was born in the town of Bethlehem. At Christmas, people remember that special time. Today, Christmas is a very important time in the Christian year, but it is also very important to people who do not go to church. It is a time for presents, parties, and time with the family.

People start to get ready for Christmas in late October or early November. They decorate their shops with lights, trees, and other decorations. Shops get very busy and stay open later. People with family and friends in other



A Christmas play at school

countries often send them cards and presents, and everyone begins to make plans for the coming holiday. Some people begin to look for presents too.

In the middle of December, most families buy Christmas trees, put them inside the house, and put colourful decorations on them. They also send cards to friends and family. The cards say things like 'Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year' or 'Season's Greetings'. These two traditions (the trees and the cards) both started in the nineteenth century.

Many children learn about the baby Jesus at school. Sometimes they do a play about the story and sing Christmas songs, called carols, for their mothers and fathers. A lot of schools have parties for the children, and many adults have parties at work in December. Most people do not have to work on 25 and 26 December, and many have a week's holiday, from 25 December to 1 January. They usually spend this time at home with their family, or perhaps they visit friends or family who live far away.

The Christmas holiday begins on 24 December: Christmas Eve. People often stop work early and have a drink together, or finish their Christmas shopping. They put special Christmas paper on the presents and leave them under the tree.

Children leave a stocking for Santa Claus (called Father Christmas in Britain) when they go to bed. Santa is a big man with white hair and red clothes who brings presents for children during the night. Mothers and fathers tell their children that Santa only comes when they are sleeping. They also tell them that Santa leaves presents



Pulling crackers



for good children – but for bad children he only leaves a piece of black coal! The children are excited, of course, so often they do not sleep very well. Some children leave a drink and a mince pie for Santa and some vegetables for his animals.

Many people go to church at midnight on Christmas



Christmas pudding and mince pies

---

Eve. They listen to the Christmas story and sing carols. Next morning it is Christmas Day – 25 December. Children usually wake up very early. They look in their stockings to see the presents that Santa put there for them. After breakfast they open their other presents around the tree.

Christmas dinner is in the afternoon and is the biggest meal of the day. Before they start to eat, people pull crackers. The crackers make a loud noise, and have a small game and a paper hat inside. Dinner is usually turkey with lots of winter vegetables and then a Christmas pudding. Often there are hot mince pies too.

At three o'clock many people in Britain turn on their televisions because the Queen says 'Happy Christmas' to everyone. A lot of people go for a walk in the afternoon or play with their new games.

In the evening, people eat cold meat, and Christmas cake (a kind of fruit cake) but they are usually not very hungry because of their big dinner.

26 December is called Boxing Day (Saint Stephen's Day in Ireland). It is a holiday for many people, but a lot of shops open on this day. In the nineteenth century, rich people gave boxes of presents to their workers on Boxing Day. Now people enjoy eating, drinking, and watching television at home, or going out to watch some sport.

Another British Christmas tradition is the pantomime. A pantomime is a kind of play with a children's story (like *Cinderella* or *Aladdin*) and lots of music and songs. There is usually a man who wears women's clothes and plays an old woman. 'She' is not very beautiful, but she is



usually very funny. Children like pantomimes because they can laugh, sing, shout, and make lots of noise. They often go with their school or family.

The Christmas season ends on the twelfth day after 25 December, which is 6 January. Most people take down their Christmas trees and decorations by this date, and some people think that it is unlucky to do this after 6 January.

But after Christmas the next festival comes very quickly. Soon it is 31 December. It is New Year's Eve – and then a new year of seasons and celebrations begins.



A pantomime at Christmas