

352: Dec. 22: Christ Mass (New Testament Week 51)

November: \$1200

To December 14: \$740

$\frac{2}{3}$  of the way there!

Call this unwrapping Christmas and go through all the different layers of meaning and symbolism.

Merry Christmas! Also, “Happy Holidays” is a warm, wonderful, and inclusive greeting worth celebrating. Deseret News reports 14 holidays believers celebrate in December.

<https://www.deseret.com/2018/11/27/20577947/these-are-the-14-religious-holidays-believers-celebrate-in-december>

“Light in the midst of darkness” is a good way to connect Christmas and Revelation for those taking that route.

My goal is that we can cultivate meaning in all the levels of Christmas. Here they are in brief:

\$-Mas: Mid-1800s (Advertising)

Christmas holiday: Declared Federal Holiday in US in 1870

X-Mas: Late 1700s/1800s

Christ-mas: 4th century CE

Yule: Earlier than 4th century CE, so as far back as we have record. Likely a very ancient winter solstice festival.

Nativity: Jesus was probably born around 4-5 BCE (yes that’s funny, but Herod the Great died in 4 BCE. Most likely he was born in Nazareth, and no one noticed.

Saturnalia: 2nd century BCE, building on far older winter solstice festivals (Birthday of Mithras, god of the unconquerable Sun, Sol Invictus, December 25)

Winter Solstice: In the beginning was the sun. Or lack of it. "Remember the reason for the season: Axial tilt at specific longitudes"

Some suggestions to honor each level:

Christmas goal: Spend time gratefully nurturing relationships (admit difficulty post divorce)

**\$-Mas:** Write personalized cards. Share your favorite thing about each person. Get fewer, more thoughtful and personalized gifts. My oldest is especially good at this (a pen and small notebook, beautiful mug)

Sponsor a family and have members pick out personal gifts.

Donate to those in need.

**Santa:** Focus on the "Spirit of Santa and giving"

**Christmas holiday:** Spend quality time with your loved ones. Listen to your favorite Christmas music (mine: What Child is This, O Holy Night, O Come Emanuel). Spend an evening without electronics. Tell family or personal stories. Have a discussion of favorite Christmas traditions wherever you are discussing this.

**Christ-mas:** Attend a Christmas Mass or musical event (some of my favorite adult memories). Read and discuss the Nativity story.

**Yule:** Spend time around a fire if possible. Reflect on the turn of seasons, patterns of life and death, decline and renewal.

**Nativity:** Watch the Church's Nativity video. Talk about the situation of babies and children in the world, and how we can honor the unknown baby Jesus.

**Saturnalia:** Enjoy a Christmas dinner. Sing together. Do a fun activity together.

**Winter Solstice:** Take an evening walk in the woods if possible. Watch a winter sunset. Sit in the darkness. Have a talk by candlelight.

## Unrapping Christmas: A History

Overview: <https://www.history.com/topics/christmas/history-of-christmas>

\$-Mas:

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/december-web-only/which-came-first-christmas-or-consumerism.html>

Judith Flanders (*Christmas: A Biography*) challenges the notion that the Christmas customs of the past were primarily religious. She does not deny their spiritual significance for the believer, but she does contest the idea “that Christmas was once religious, and only in our debased, commercial age has been reduced to its current shabby, market-driven modern form.” In other words, she disputes the presumption that the holiday was in the beginning primarily or even exclusively observed by devout Christians and that only in the last 200 years has its “real” significance been displaced by the forces of secularism and consumerism.

“If anything,” Flanders insists, “religion was grafted on to consumerism, rather than consumerism grafted on to religion.” Take Christmas cards, for example. An invention of the mid-19th century, the first card printed in the United States illustrated Santa Claus with a family opening gifts. The holiday message read, *Pease’s Great Variety [sic] Store in the Temple of Fancy*. The card was nothing more than a commercial advertisement. A survey of the more than 100,000 cards in circulation before 1890 reveals that religious images, such as the Nativity scene, appeared on extremely few. The majority featured “holly, mistletoe and Christmas pudding, Father Christmas or Santa, Christmas trees, bells and robins, food and festivity.” Biblical or religious themes on holiday cards were numerically “insignificant.”

Commerce hovers like the ghost of Christmas present over the narrative. The cultural importance of Christmas grew exponentially in the 20th century, largely because of consumerism, not in spite of it. Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer offers the perfect illustration. In 1939, as a giveaway to children, the retail store Montgomery Ward printed 2.5 million copies of Robert L. May's narrative poem about the misfit reindeer. Ten years later, May's brother-in-law, Johnny Marks, added music which Gene Autry sang. The song shot to No. 1 in the charts, selling millions in the process. In the wink of an eye, a likable red-nosed reindeer was added to the pantheon of Christmas characters—on account of a department store's marketing strategy.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/nguyenjames/2016/12/09/holiday-marketing-demystified-5-psychological-principles-to-create-a-winning-campaign/#46d8b38ef9ce>

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**1. Appeal To Holiday Emotions.** The festive season is a happy time of year. People are known to report on social media that they feel more uplifted and excited in the [lead up to the holidays](#). No surprise there. But tellingly, when customers are happy, they are more inclined to purchase more. Although it seems obvious, brands need to position their campaigns as festive to capitalize on this swelling consumer sentiment. This elicits a cheerful nostalgia from customers who view this [period with positivity](#). Take online Australian book retailer [Booktopia](#), for example, who launched a campaign selling elf-themed toys to attract seasonal traffic. It encourages customers to think of the holidays while viewing their brand. This warm association increases the proclivity for consumers to purchase from Booktopia.

**2. Build Up Anticipation.** Remember the Advent Calendar? It gave people something to look forward to on each day of December. It builds excitement about what form of chocolatey goodness will be behind the next day's door. This builds anticipation. When our brains anticipate a reward, we feel greater pleasure than receiving the [reward itself](#). Because of this, we are subconsciously drawn to whatever is building those positive emotions. Make your brand that source of anticipation. By building up to a holiday related announcement, offering discounts on mystery products or giving customers a "TBC" (To Be Confirmed) present, your brand will create excitement about the unknown. Google's [Santa Tracker](#) is a great example. It releases new Santa-related content on each day of December in the lead up to the 25th. This is *buzz*. And it psychologically encourages consumers to [notice a brand](#). Getting customers to pay attention is half the battle.

**3. Make Campaigns Finite.** The worst part of the holiday season? It eventually ends. Marketing campaigns, festive sales or giveaway opportunities should be framed with a similar expiry date. It appeals to our cognitive bias called Loss Aversion. When we feel a sense of ownership over something — in this case our entitlement to a sale — we feel disenfranchised when it is [taken away](#). Because we tend to avoid losing it in the first place, we will likely engage with a campaign that is positioned as finite. By showing the number of days, minutes or even seconds before a campaign ends, it encourages a call to action. Customers don't want to miss the opportunity for a *holiday only* deal. So in order to assuage their psychological fear of missing out, they [take action](#). [Kogan](#), an Australian e-commerce platform, integrates this with real time countdown for its deals. When there are consequences for not buying, it creates an urgency to buy.

**4. Personalize Products And Messages.** It's a season for sharing. Not only gifts, but content as well. People want to share things that they think will add value to their network. We place a greater sense of value on things that are

**personalized.** The personal relevance appeals to our sense of self-identity and increases our emotional bond **with the product.** Enabling customers to customize a message or product to send to their loved ones will increase their emotional response to the brand. The brand becomes personal and relevant to a customer. Two great examples are Coke's *Share A Coke* campaign and Oreo's *Design A Pack* campaign in 2015. Both of these exemplify an appeal to personalization and they give customers a reason to share the brand.

**Appeal To Reciprocity.** Holidays come with the tradition of presents. But behind these gestures of generosity and affection, there is a psychological principle at work. It's called reciprocity. And it suggests that when we receive a gift we feel compelled to return the gesture in **some form.** Customers return this gesture through making a purchase from a brand that has given them value. Successful marketing campaigns will offer their customers a gift. This gift could be a discount, an additional product or free content. By offering value to customers first it demonstrates that reciprocation isn't *expected* and is therefore authentic. A daily deals platform from Australia, **Scoopon**, show this through their *12 Days Of Christmas* campaign. This appeals to the psychology of reciprocity and encourages customers to return the generosity often by purchasing from **the brand.**

Customers are spoiled for choice during the holidays. They are also overwhelmed by fuzzy feelings of festive excitement. But brands shouldn't be intimidated by emotional behaviors, they should seek to understand it. Customers are people. And people behave in similar psychological ways. By creating campaigns that appeal to the cognitive tendencies of a consumer, brands are able to stay top mind.

Apply the five principles above and create a festive campaign that will last all the way until next holiday season.

Christmas holiday:

History of Santa:

## **From St. Nicholas to Santa Claus: the surprising origins of Kris Kringle**

BY BRIAN HANDWERK

PUBLISHED DECEMBER 25, 2018

ANY KID CAN tell you where Santa Claus is from—the North Pole. But his historical journey is even longer and more fantastic than his annual, one-night circumnavigation of the globe.

The progenitor of the modern American Santa was born in the Mediterranean during the Roman Empire, his legend evolved across northern Europe, and he finally assumed his now-familiar form on the shores of the New World. Who is this ancestor of Santa, and how did he change over time? (See "Christmas in July—Inside a Santa Summer Camp.")

Jolly Old St. Nicholas?

Every December 6, the faithful celebrate St. Nicholas Day in cities all over the world, with the largest ones taking place in Europe. Images of St. Nicholas vary considerably, but none of them look much like the red-cheeked, white-bearded old man seen everywhere today. ...

Caroline Wilkinson, a facial anthropologist at the University of Manchester (England), used these data and modern software simulations to create a modern reconstruction of the long-dead man. Wilkinson put a human face on Santa's original namesake—one with a badly broken nose, possibly suffered during the persecution of Christians under the Roman Emperor Diocletian.

...Digital artists added details that were based on best guesses, including the olive-toned skin most common among Greek Mediterraneans like Nicholas, brown eyes, and the gray hair of a 60-year-old man...

How did this St. Nicholas turn into the North Pole-dwelling bringer of Christmas gifts? The original saint was a Greek born in the late third century, around 280 A.D. He became bishop of Myra, a small Roman town in modern Turkey. Nicholas was neither fat nor jolly but developed a reputation as a fiery, wiry, and defiant defender of church doctrine during the Great Persecution in 303, when Bibles were burned and priests made to renounce Christianity or face execution.

Nicholas defied these edicts and spent years in prison before the Roman emperor Constantine ended Christian persecution in 313 with the Edict of Milan. Nicholas's fame lived long after his death (on December 6 in the mid-fourth century, around 343) because he was associated with many miracles, and reverence for him continues to this day independent of his Christmas connection. He is the protector of many types of people, from orphans to sailors to prisoners.

Nicholas rose to prominence among the saints because he was the patron of so many groups. By about 1200, explained University of Manitoba historian Gerry Bowler, author of *Santa Claus: A Biography*, he became known as a patron of children and magical gift bringer because of two great stories from his life.

In the better-known tale, three young girls are saved from a life of prostitution when young Bishop Nicholas secretly delivers three bags of gold to their indebted father, which can be used for their dowries.

"The other story is not so well known now but was enormously well known in the Middle Ages," Bowler said. Nicholas entered an inn whose keeper had just murdered three boys and pickled their dismembered bodies in



basement barrels. The bishop not only sensed the crime, but resurrected the victims as well. "That's one of the things that made him the patron saint of children."

For several hundred years, circa 1200 to 1500, St. Nicholas was the unchallenged bringer of gifts and the toast of celebrations centered around his feast day, December 6. The strict saint took on some aspects of earlier European deities, like the Roman Saturn or the Norse Odin, who appeared as white-bearded men and had magical powers like flight. He also ensured that kids toed the line by saying their prayers and practicing good behavior.

But after the Protestant Reformation began in the 1500s, saints like Nicholas fell out of favor across much of northern Europe. "That was problematic," Bowler said. "You still love your kids, but now who is going to bring them the gifts?"

Bowler said that, in many cases, that job fell to baby Jesus, and the date was moved to Christmas rather than December 6. "But the infant's carrying capacity is very limited, and he's not very scary either," Bowler said. "So the Christ child was often given a scary helper to do the lugging of presents and the threatening of kids that doesn't seem appropriate coming from the baby Jesus."

Some of these scary Germanic figures again were based on Nicholas, no longer as a saint but as a threatening sidekick like Ru-klaus (Rough Nicholas), Aschenklas (Ashy Nicholas), and Pelznickel (Furry Nicholas). These figures expected good behavior or forced children to suffer consequences like whippings or kidnappings. Dissimilar as they seem to the jolly man in red, these colorful characters would later figure in the development of Santa himself.

In the Netherlands, kids and families simply refused to give up St. Nicholas as a gift bringer. They brought Sinterklaas with them to New World

colonies, where the legends of the shaggy and scary Germanic gift bringers also endured.

But in early America Christmas wasn't much like the modern holiday. The holiday was shunned in New England, and elsewhere it had become a bit like the pagan Saturnalia that once occupied its place on the calendar. "It was celebrated as a kind of outdoor, alcohol-fueled, rowdy community blowout," Bowler said. "That's what it had become in England as well. And there was no particular, magical gift bringer."

Then, during the early decades of the 19th century, all that changed thanks to a series of poets and writers who strove to make Christmas a family celebration—by reviving and remaking St. Nicholas.

Washington Irving's 1809 book *Knickerbocker's History of New York* first portrayed a pipe-smoking Nicholas soaring over the rooftops in a flying wagon, delivering presents to good girls and boys and switches to bad ones.

In 1821 an anonymous illustrated poem entitled "The Children's Friend" went much further in shaping the modern Santa and associating him with Christmas. "Here we finally have the appearance of a Santa Claus," Bowler said. "They've taken the magical gift-bringing of St. Nicholas, stripped him of any religious characteristics, and dressed this Santa in the furs of those shaggy Germanic gift bringers."

That figure brought gifts to good girls and boys, but he also sported a birch rod, the poem noted, that "directs a Parent's hand to use when virtue's path his sons refuse." Santa's thin wagon was pulled by a single reindeer—but both driver and team would get a major makeover the next year.

In 1822 Clement Clarke Moore wrote "A Visit From St. Nicholas," better known today as "The Night Before Christmas," for his six children, with no

intention of adding to the fledgling Santa Claus phenomenon. It was published anonymously the next year, and to this day the plump, jolly Santa described therein rides a sleigh driven by eight familiar reindeer.

"It went viral," Bowler said. But familiar as the poem is, it still leaves much to the imagination, and the 19th century saw Santa appear in different-colored clothing, in sizes from miniature to massive, and in a variety of different guises. "I have a wonderful picture of him that looks exactly like George Washington riding a broomstick," Bowler said.

It wasn't until the late 19th century, he added, that the image of Santa became standardized as a full-size adult, dressed in red with white fur trim, venturing out from the North Pole in a reindeer-driven sleigh and keeping an eye on children's behavior.

The jolly, chubby, grandfatherly face of this Santa was largely created by Thomas Nast, the great political cartoonist in an era that featured many. "However, Nast did leave him half-sized," Bowler added, "and in what I think are rather indecent long johns."

Once firmly established, North America's Santa then underwent a kind of reverse migration to Europe, replacing the scary gift bringers and adopting local names like Père Noël (France) or Father Christmas (Great Britain). "What he's done is pretty much tame these Grimm's Fairy Tales-type characters from the late medieval days," Bowler said.

Though he undoubtedly means well, Santa has certainly stirred up, and continues to create, more than his fair share of controversy.

In Russia, Santa Claus fell afoul of Josef Stalin. Before the Russian Revolution, Grandfather Frost (Ded Moroz) was a favored figure of Christmas who had adopted characteristics of proto-Santas like the Dutch

Sinterklaas. "When the Soviet Union was formed, the communists abolished the celebration of Christmas and gift bringers," Bowler said.

"Then in the 1930s, when Stalin needed to build support, he allowed the reemergence of Grandfather Frost not as a Christmas gift bringer but as a New Year's gift bringer," Bowler added. Attempts to displace Christmas in Russia were ultimately unsuccessful, as were Soviet attempts to spread a secular version of Grandfather Frost, complete with blue coat to avoid Santa confusion, across Europe.

"Everywhere they went after World War II, the Soviets tried to replace the native gift bringers in places like Poland or Bulgaria," Bowler explained. "But local people just sort of held their noses until the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989 and returned to their own traditions."

Santa remains a politicized figure around the world. American troops spread their version of the jolly man around the world in the years immediately following World War II, and he was generally welcomed, Bowler said, as a symbol of American generosity in rebuilding war-ravaged lands.

Nowadays, however, people in many nations have Santa on their own naughty list, either because he represents the secular side of Christmas at the expense of the religious. Sometimes Santa is rejected because he's not a local. "In places like the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Austria, and Latin America, they all have very strong anti-Santa movements because they are trying to preserve their native Christmas gift bringers and customs, and protect them from the North American Santa," he said.

X-Mas: (19th Century revival)

Christ-mas:

Yule:

The middle of winter has long been a time of celebration around the world. Centuries before the arrival of the man called Jesus, early Europeans celebrated light and birth in the darkest days of winter. Many peoples rejoiced during the winter solstice, when the worst of the winter was behind them and they could look forward to longer days and extended hours of sunlight.

In Scandinavia, the Norse celebrated Yule from December 21, the winter solstice, through January. In recognition of the return of the sun, fathers and sons would bring home large logs, which they would set on fire. The people would feast until the log burned out, which could take as many as 12 days. The Norse believed that each spark from the fire represented a new pig or calf that would be born during the coming year.

The end of December was a perfect time for celebration in most areas of Europe. At that time of year, most cattle were slaughtered so they would not have to be fed during the winter. For many, it was the only time of year when they had a supply of fresh meat. In addition, most wine and beer made during the year was finally fermented and ready for drinking. (The slaughtering of livestock before winter makes so much sense, but I had never heard it before)

In Germany, people honored the pagan god Oden during the mid-winter holiday. Germans were terrified of Oden, as they believed he made nocturnal flights through the sky to observe his people, and then decide who would prosper or perish. Because of his presence, many people chose to stay inside.

Saturnalia:

Nativity:

<https://bookofmormoncentral.org/blog/7-more-details-you-may-not-have-noticed-in-the-church-s-new-christmas-nativity-video>

Translation of the Aramaic in the video (done by a friend of mine I team taught Biblical Hebrew with at BYU!)

What was Jesus' birth most likely like? Completely forgettable. Ordinary, humble. And there is power in that.

Winter Solstice: In the beginning was the sun. Or lack of it. "Remember the reason for the season: Axial tilt at specific longitudes"

<https://www.history.com/topics/natural-disasters-and-environment/winter-solstice>

History.com was the most helpful for this episode.

Conclusion: I think more than anything, Christmas means light in darkness, hope in challenge, and looking forward to the return of life.

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas/>

- \*Our current consumerist Christmas
- \*History of Christmas in the United States
- \*History of Christmas globally
- \*History of Christian Christmas
- \*History of Santa Claus (older than Christmas in some sense!)
- \*Saturnalia
- \*The Nativity
- \*Winter Solstice festivals

Celebration ideas for each level:

Worship recommendations:

Consumerism:

Solstice: I think more than anything, Christmas means light in darkness, hope in challenge, and looking forward to the return of life. Go on an evening hike if you can.

Nativity:

Santa Claus:

Problem of Santodicy: (wrote this way back when I first discovered the internet)

<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/faithpromotingrumor/2010/12/the-problem-of-santodicy/>

Discuss the Nativity

Translation of the video:

Historical Jesus: What was Jesus' birth like? Forgettable (dig into the power of this)

Talk about how we can cultivate meaning at every level

Favorite Christmas songs

What Child is This

O Holy Night

O Come Emanuel

I was so moved to log in to my email and see the donations! You heard and responded, and we are closer to keeping the podcast going.

Go through the layers of meaning for Christmas and the different things that it has meant find a way to re-claim center as well as talk about the problems with it make suggestions about how to add ritual and service.

[https://bookofmormoncentral.org/blog/7-more-details-you-may-not-have-noticed-in-the-church-s-new-christmas-nativity-video?fbclid=IwAR3\\_Xxx3cCBo7\\_9eo-DTsYZiAO1tlxTfXRLr2E-\\_ZT8e0FBwc0gEGYw3G64](https://bookofmormoncentral.org/blog/7-more-details-you-may-not-have-noticed-in-the-church-s-new-christmas-nativity-video?fbclid=IwAR3_Xxx3cCBo7_9eo-DTsYZiAO1tlxTfXRLr2E-_ZT8e0FBwc0gEGYw3G64)

Schedule to the end of the year!

11/24: James 47

**12/1\***: 1-2 Peter 48

**12/1\***: 1-2 Peter

12/8: 1-3 John; Jude 49

**12/15\***: Rev. 1-11 50

12/29: Rev. 12-22 52



12/22: Christmas 51

Santa:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2018/12/131219-santa-claus-origin-history-christmas-facts-st-nicholas/>

CULTURE