

Christmas - 25th December

Christmas

Christmas is celebrated on the **25 December** (**7 January** for Orthodox Christians).

Christmas is a Christian holy day that marks the birth of Jesus who Christians believe to be the Son of God.

Advent

Advent is the period which leads up to Christmas. It starts on the Sunday nearest to November 30th.

Many Advent customs involve counting the days until Christmas begins.

Some churches have an advent wreath with five candles, one for each of the four Sundays leading up to Christmas Day and one for the day itself.



Christmas story

The full story of Jesus' birth and the events surrounding it can be found in the Bible in the book of Matthew, Chapters 1 and 2, with a slightly different account in Luke, Chapters 1 and 2.

These two gospels tell slightly different accounts because they each wrote for a different audience. Matthew wrote for the Jews, Luke wrote for the non-Jews (Gentiles), so they emphasized different things.

'Nativity' is the word often used for the story of Jesus' birth. Both gospel accounts are used to piece the story together. This is a summary of the nativity story:



- Jesus was born to a woman called Mary who was engaged to Joseph, a carpenter, in the town of Bethlehem.
- Before Jesus was born, Mary was visited by an angel who told her that she would give birth to a baby and that the baby would be called Jesus, also sometimes known as Emmanuel, which means 'God with us'
- Jesus was born in Bethlehem because Joseph and Mary had gone there to take part in a census as this was Joseph's home town.
- According to tradition when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem the local inn was already full with people

returning for the census. The innkeeper let them stay in the rock cave below his house which was used as a stable for his animals. It was here, with the animals, that Mary gave birth to her son and laid him in a manger.

- Luke and Matthew both tell of visitors to the baby Jesus. In Matthew's account, wise men visit Jesus. They had followed a star that led them to Jesus and they presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. These were signs of kingship and holiness. Luke tells how humble and poor shepherds were led to Jesus by an angel. For Christians this shows that Jesus came for all people of all races and backgrounds.
- Matthew's account goes on to tell of Joseph being warned in a dream to escape to Egypt with Jesus and Mary as King Herod was going to be looking for the child to kill him. So during the night, they left Israel and started out on the journey to Egypt where they remained until after Herod's death.

How Christians celebrate Christmas

The story of Jesus' birth (the nativity) is often retold by children through 'Nativity Plays'

Church services often include carol singing - these are happy songs which tell the Christmas story.

Some Christians start Christmas Day with a midnight communion service (midnight mass).

The celebration of Christmas is often accompanied by the giving and receiving of presents and cards. This reminds Christians of the gift of Jesus, the son of God, beginning his earthly life.