



Chaplaincy Services

Holy Days, Celebrations and Observances of December 2019

December 1 Advent Begins Christian Advent is the period preceding the Christmas season. It begins on the Sunday nearest November 30, the feast day of St. Andrew the Apostle, and covers four Sundays. Because the day it begins changes from year to year, so does the length of each Advent season.

The word advent, from Latin, means "the coming." For centuries, Advent has been a time of spiritual reflection as well as cheer and anticipation. Even as the Christmas season has become more secular-with advertisers urging holiday gift-givers to buy and buy some more-Advent still brings joy and the observance of ancient customs. Christian families find quiet moments lighting candles in the Advent wreath, and children use Advent calendars to count the days until Christmas.

Advent has probably been observed since the fourth century. Originally, it was a time when converts to Christianity readied themselves for baptism.

During the Middle Ages, Advent became associated with preparation for the Second Coming. In early days Advent lasted from November 11, the feast of St. Martin, until Christmas Day. Advent was considered a pre-Christmas season of Lent when Christians devoted themselves to prayer and fasting. The Orthodox Eastern Church observes a similar Lenten season, from November 15 until Christmas, rather than Advent.

Many Christians still view Advent as a season to prepare for the Second Coming of Jesus. In the last fifty years, however, it has also come to be thought of as a time of anticipating the Nativity, on Christmas Day.

Advent wreaths have their origins in the folk traditions of northern Europe, where in the deep of winter people lit candles on wheel-shaped bundles of evergreen. Both the evergreen and the circular shape symbolized ongoing life. The candlelight gave comfort at this darkest time of the year, as people looked forward to the longer days of spring.

Later, Eastern European Christians adopted this practice. By the sixteenth century, they were making Advent wreaths much as we know them today. An advent wreath traditionally contains four candles-three purple and one rose. Purple dyes were one so rare and costly that they were associated with royalty. The three purple candles in the Advent wreath symbolize hope, peace, and love. These candles are lit on the first, second, and fourth Sundays of Advent. The rose candle, which symbolizes joy, is usually lit on the third Sunday.

Sometimes a fifth candle is placed inside the Advent wreath. This candle is lit on Christmas Day. It is white, the color associated with angels and the birth of Jesus.



December 6 St. Nicholas Christian The legendary figure of St. Nicholas is derived from Nicholas of Myra who officiated as a bishop in 4th century Greece. During his lifetime he developed a reputation for gift-giving by putting coins into other people's shoes, which accounts for many of today's Christmas traditions that involve leaving gifts in shoes or boots.



Some Europeans who immigrated to the United States brought with them beliefs, customs and practices associated with St Nicholas' Day. It has been recorded that celebrations associated with the observance took place in cities such as New York in the early 1800s.

St. Nicholas Day is a popular occasion for children in many parts of Europe because children usually receive gifts on this day. Some European cities such as Bari, Italy recognize St. Nicholas as the patron saint and celebrate with different activities such as gift-giving, parades, feasts and festivals.

St. Nicholas is referred to by many names throughout Europe such as Sinterklaas in the Netherlands or Nikolaus in Germany. In the days leading up to December 6, children throughout Europe put their shoes or a special St. Nicholas boot in front of the fireplace or the front door at night to find them filled with small presents the next morning. A larger amount of gifts is usually brought on the eve of St. Nicholas Day or December 5.

Having inspired both the figure of the North American Santa Claus and the British Father Christmas, St. Nicholas has in some countries been more recently joined on his visits to children's homes by an evil companion who punishes the naughty ones: in Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and northern Italy, this personification of evil is called Krampus, in Germany Knecht Ruprecht, and in the Netherlands Zwarte Piet.

December 8 Bodhi Day Buddhist The young Indian prince Siddhartha Gautama, 2500 years ago, sat beneath a fig tree with the purpose of finding enlightenment, he said that even though his flesh would fall from his bones and his bones crack, he would not get up until perfect enlightenment was achieved by him. He then began an inner journey that led him to face his demons, to tame temptations and distractions of restlessness, anger, doubt or greed.

He first achieved a state of calm awareness, his mind was like a clear and still pool reflecting his inner thoughts and feelings. He started to reflect on his past, thoughts, words and actions. In the middle of the night he reflects on all living animals and humans, life and death. As dawn approached he understood cause and effect, that everything and everyone are connected, and that each one's action creates their own destinies.

He understood how ignorance of truth is the cause of greed and selfishness, and ultimately suffering. As a morning star appeared in sky, Siddhartha then contemplated the Wonderful Dharma and he became the Buddha, the awakened one. Bodhi Day is a celebration of Siddhartha's efforts to attain Dharma, and his generosity and compassion to all as he shared the gift he received under the fig tree, 2500 years ago.

For Buddhists all over the world Bodhi Day is a day to remember Siddhartha and to meditate following his example. It is common to decorate houses with pictures or little statues of the Buddha under a fig tree to remember the day of his awakening. The decorations are full of colors, signifying that enlightenment has many ways to be attained.

Candles and lights are lightened on this day and kept burning, or turned on, for the next 30 days to symbolize enlightenment. Buddhists homes have a small ficus tree that is decorated with colored lights and beads united with a string, this is to symbolize that all things are united. There are also three hanging ornaments that are to represent the Three Jewels of Buddhism: Buddha, Dharma and Shanga.

It is traditional to eat one meal of rice and milk, this was the same meal that the Buddha ate after his awakening, offered by a girl named Sujata. The most common activity is for Buddhists to gather and stay in prayer during the night, as Siddhartha did and reflect as he did in the cycle of rebirth, the Eight-fold path and the four Noble Truths.

December 8 *Feast of the Immaculate Conception Catholic Christian* Roman Catholic dogma asserts that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was preserved free from the effects of the sin of Adam (usually referred to as "original sin") from the first instant of her conception. Although various texts in both the Old and the New Testaments have been cited in defense of the doctrine, it seems to have arisen from a general acceptance in the early church of Mary's holiness. Especially after Mary had been solemnly declared to be the mother of God at the Council of Ephesus in 431, most theologians doubted that one who had been so close to God could have actually experienced sinful acts.

The view that Mary had been spared also from the disposition to evil inherent in original sin was not clearly articulated until the 12th century, when considerable debate was centered on an English celebration of Mary's conception. The discussion was clouded by medieval views of the biological aspects of conception and by a concern that the belief in the universal redemption effected by Jesus should not be threatened. The latter concern (particularly associated with St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century) was countered not long after by the Franciscan theologian John Duns Scotus, who argued that Christ's redemptive grace was applied to Mary to prevent sin from reaching her soul and that this special intervention resulted in a more perfect redemption in her case. Mary's privilege, thus, was the result of God's grace and not of any intrinsic merit on her part.



A gradual acceptance of the Franciscan's views over the next several centuries was reflected in the teaching of various popes (especially Sixtus IV in the late 15th century) and the councils of Basel (1439) and Trent (1546). It was not, however, until December 8, 1854, that Pius IX, urged by the majority of Catholic bishops throughout the world, solemnly declared in the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* that the doctrine was revealed by God and hence was to be firmly believed as such by all Catholics. The feast of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated on December 8 and is usually a holy day of obligation (on which Catholics are required to attend mass).

December 12 *Feast of Guadalupe Catholic Christian/primarily Mexico and people of Mexican heritage* The Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe (*Día de la Virgen de Guadalupe*) is a popular Catholic feast that celebrates the belief that a man encountered the Virgin Mary, Mexico's patron saint, in Mexico City on December 9 and 12, 1531. Day of the Virgin of Guadalupe is a public holiday. It is a day off for the general population, and schools and most businesses are closed.

It is believed that a man named Juan Diego encountered the Virgin Mary twice in Mexico City, on December 9 and December 12 in 1531. According to legend, Mary told Juan to ask the bishop to build a church on Tepeyac Hill. However, the bishop needed proof of Juan's encounter and asked for a miracle. Juan returned to the hill to see roses in a spot where there were previously cacti. When Juan Diego returned, he showed the roses to the archbishop and also revealed an image on his cloak of the Lady of Guadalupe. The bishop was convinced of the miracle and built a church in honor of the event.

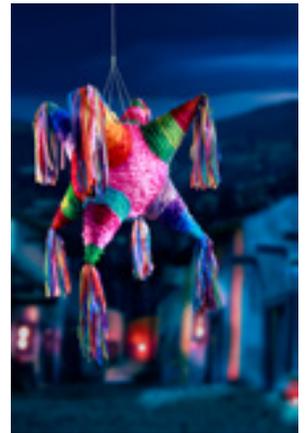
According to the story of the Lady of Guadalupe, Mary spoke in the Nahuatl language when she appeared to Diego. It is said that millions of indigenous people in Mexico were converted to Catholicism as a result of her appearance and miracle.

December 16 - 25 Las Posadas Christian/ Mexico and Central America

Las Posadas, (Spanish: "The Inns") religious festival celebrated in Mexico and some parts of the United States between December 16 and 24. Las Posadas commemorates the journey that Joseph and Mary made from Nazareth to Bethlehem in search of a safe refuge where Mary could give birth to the baby Jesus. When they were unable to find lodging in Bethlehem, Joseph and Mary were forced to seek shelter in a stable, where the Christ Child was born.

Las Posadas is celebrated in cities and towns across Mexico. Each evening during the festival, a small child dressed as an angel leads a procession through the streets of the town. The procession is primarily made up of children dressed in silver and gold robes carrying lit candles and images of Mary and Joseph riding a donkey. Adults, including musicians, follow the procession, which visits selected homes and asks for lodging for Joseph and Mary. Traditionally, the procession is always refused lodging, though the hosts often provide refreshments. At each stop, passages of scripture are read and Christmas carols are sung.

Mass is held each day after the procession, and, at the conclusion of the service, children break open piñatas filled with candy, toys, and, occasionally, money. The piñatas are usually crafted in the form of a star, which is said to have guided the three wise men of biblical tradition to the newborn Jesus.



December 21 Yule Pagan/Wicca Yule, (pronounced EWE-elle) is when the dark half of the year relinquishes to the light half. Starting the next morning at sunrise, the sun climbs just a little higher and stays a little longer in the sky each day. Known as Solstice Night, or the longest night of the year, the sun's "rebirth" was celebrated with much joy. On this night, our ancestors celebrated the rebirth of the Oak King, the Sun King, the Giver of Life that warmed the frozen Earth. From this day forward, the days would become longer.

Bonfires were lit in the fields, and crops and trees were "wassailed" with toasts of spiced cider. Children were escorted from house to house with gifts of clove spiked apples and oranges which were laid in baskets of evergreen boughs and wheat stalks dusted with flour. The apples and oranges represented the sun. The boughs were symbolic of immortality (evergreens were sacred to the Celts because they did not "die" thereby representing the eternal aspect of the Divine). The wheat stalks portrayed the harvest, and the flour was accomplishment of triumph, light, and life. Holly and ivy not only decorated the outside, but also the inside of homes, in hopes Nature Sprites would come and join the celebration. A sprig of Holly was kept near the door all year long as a constant invitation for good fortune to visit the residents. Mistletoe was also hung as decoration. It represented the seed of the Divine, and at Midwinter, the Druids would travel deep into the forest to harvest it.



The ceremonial Yule log was the highlight of the Solstice festival. In accordance to tradition, the log must either have been harvested from the householder's land, or given as a gift... it must never have been bought. Once dragged into the house and placed in the fireplace it was decorated in seasonal greenery, doused with cider or ale, and dusted with flour before set ablaze by a piece of last years log, (held onto for just this purpose). The log would burn throughout the night, then smolder for 12 days after before being ceremonially put out. Ash is the traditional wood of the Yule log. It is the sacred world tree of the Teutons, known as Yggdrasil. An herb of the Sun, Ash brings light into the hearth at the Solstice.

A different type of Yule log, and perhaps one more suitable for modern practitioners would be the type that is used as a base to hold three candles. Find a smaller branch of oak or pine, and flatten one side so it sets upright. Drill three holes in the top side to hold red, green, and white (season), green, gold, and black (the Sun God), or white, red, and black (the Great Goddess). Continue to decorate with greenery, red and gold bows, rosebuds, cloves, and dust with flour.

December 22 Soyoluna Hopi The Hopi Indians traditionally believed that at the time of the Winter Solstice, the sun had traveled as far from the earth as he ever did. Only the most powerful humans could persuade the sun to turn around and come back to the pueblo. The purpose of Soyoluna, which is still held among the Hopi who live on the mesas of Arizona, is to prevent the disappearance of the sun at the time of year when the days are at their shortest.

The main ceremony takes place in the kiva, a large, circular underground room that can only be entered by climbing down a ladder through a hole in the ceiling. Hopi priests prepare the kiva by scattering cornmeal around the floor. On the west wall of the kiva, a stack of corn serves as an altar, surrounded by stalks and husks. Each family has given some corn to make the altar. At the solstice, everyone assembles in the kiva for rituals designed to bring the sun back for another agricultural year.

The actual Soyol ceremonies are not general public knowledge. One informant describes a particular ceremony starting with a Hopi leader wearing a headdress decorated with images symbolizing rain clouds overseeing the main celebration taking place in the kiva. He will also carry a shield that has a star, antelope, and other symbolic objects. Someone will also carry an effigy of Palulukonuh, also called the Plumed Snake, carved from the woody stalk of an agave plant.



Shield bearers enter the kiva and take turns stomping on the sipapu (a shallow hole covered by a board that symbolizes the entrance to the underworld). Then they arrange themselves into two groups, on the north side, another in the south. Then they sing as the bearer of the sun shield rushes to one side, then the other. He is driven back by the shield bearers on both sides. The movements symbolize the attack of hostile powers on the sun (drought, fire, darkness, cold) that influence whether it will shine and bless the crops.

On the west all of the kiva, they construct an altar with two or more ears of corn contributed from each family, surrounded by husks and stalks. It also has a large gourd with an effigy of the Plumed Snake's head sticking out, operated like a puppet, rising and made to roar. The shield bearers then throw a meal to the snake effigy, answered by more roaring noises. This persuades him not to swallow the sun, like he does in an eclipse. When the Sun God's footprints appear in the sand, everyone knows he has been persuaded to return.

December 23 - 30 Hannukah Jewish Hanukkah or Chanukah is the Jewish Festival of Lights. It dates back to two centuries before the beginning of Christianity. The festival begins on the 25th day of Kislev and is celebrated for eight days. In the western calendar Hanukkah is celebrated in November or December. The word Hanukkah means rededication and commemorates the Jews' struggle for religious freedom.

The festival marks the phenomenal victory of a group of Jews called the Maccabees over the Syrian Greeks, the most powerful army of the ancient world. At the end of the three-year war, the Maccabees recaptured Jerusalem and rededicated the temple. When the Maccabees rededicated the temple, they discovered a single cruse of oil with the seal of the High Priest still intact. When they came to light the eight-branched temple candelabrum, the menorah, they had enough oil to last only a day. But the menorah miraculously stayed alight for eight days. This became known as the miracle of the oil.

It is because of this miracle that candles are lit from right to left during Hanukkah. On day one, the first candle is lit; on the second night Jews light two candles, and the pattern continues. By the eighth night, all eight candles are alight. They are lit from a separate candle, the Shamash or servant candle.

During Hanukkah Jews follow simple religious rituals in addition to their regular daily prayers from the Siddur, the Jewish prayer book. They recite three blessings during the eight-day festival. On the first night, they recite three and on subsequent nights they say the first two. The blessings are said before the candles are lit. After the candles are lit, they recite the Hanerot Halalu prayer and then sing a hymn.

Potato pancakes and deep-fried doughnuts are traditional Hanukkah treats. Fried food in particular reminds Jews of the miracle of the oil and the candles that burned for eight days after the Maccabees won back the temple in Jerusalem. Dairy products are often eaten during Hanukkah. The tradition has its roots in the story of Judith (Yehudit) who saved her village from the Syrians by making an offering of cheese and wine to the governor of the enemy troops. Judith encouraged the governor to get drunk. After he collapsed on the floor, she beheaded him with his own sword and took his head back to the village in a basket. When the Syrian troops discovered their governor had been beheaded, they fled.

It is customary to play games at Hanukkah. The most common game uses a dreidel and is a popular way of helping children to remember the great miracle. A dreidel is a spinning top with a different Hebrew letter inscribed on each of its four sides. The four letters form an acronym that means: 'A great miracle happened here.' The stakes are usually chocolate coins but sometimes pennies, peanuts or raisins are also used. Each player puts a coin in the pot and takes it in turns to spin the dreidel. The letter on which the dreidel stops determines each player's score.

The exchange of gifts or gelt is another old and cherished Hanukkah custom that dates back to at least the Middle Ages, possibly earlier.



December 24 Christmas Eve Christian Christmas Eve is the evening or entire day before Christmas Day, the festival commemorating the birth of Jesus. Christmas Day is observed around the world, and Christmas Eve is widely observed as a full or partial holiday in anticipation of Christmas Day. Together, both days are considered one of the most culturally significant celebrations in Christendom and Western society.

Since tradition holds that Jesus was born at night (based in Luke 2:6-8), Midnight Mass is celebrated on Christmas Eve, traditionally at midnight, in commemoration of his birth. The idea of Jesus being born at night is reflected in the fact that Christmas Eve is referred to as Heilige Nacht (Holy Night) in German, Nochebuena (the Good Night) in Spanish and similarly in other expressions of Christmas spirituality, such as the song "Silent Night, Holy Night".

Many other varying cultural traditions and experiences are also associated with Christmas Eve around the world, including the gathering of family and friends, the singing of Christmas carols, the illumination and enjoyment of Christmas lights, trees, and other decorations, the wrapping, exchange and opening of gifts, and general preparation for Christmas Day.



December 25 Christmas Christian Christmas is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, observed primarily on December 25 as a religious and cultural celebration among billions of people around the world. A feast central to the Christian liturgical year, it is preceded by the season of Advent or the Nativity Fast and initiates the season of Christmastide, which historically in the West lasts twelve days and culminates on Twelfth Night.

The celebratory customs associated in various countries with Christmas have a mix of pre-Christian, Christian, and secular themes and origins. Popular modern customs of the holiday include gift giving, completing an Advent calendar or Advent wreath, Christmas music and caroling, lighting a Christingle, viewing a Nativity play, an exchange of Christmas cards, church services, a special meal, pulling Christmas crackers and the display of various Christmas decorations, including Christmas trees, Christmas lights, nativity scenes, garlands, wreaths, mistletoe, and holly. In addition, several closely related and often interchangeable figures, known as Santa Claus, Father Christmas, Saint Nicholas, and Christkind, are associated with bringing gifts to children during the Christmas season and have their own body of traditions and lore.

December 26 Death of Prophet Zarathustra Zoroastrian Marking the death of Zoroaster, founder of Zoroastrianism, this holiday is considered a day of mourning, and it is often marked with prayers and studies on the life of Zoroaster.

December 26 Feast of St. Stephen Christian In many countries December 26 commemorates the life of St. Stephen, a Christian deacon in Jerusalem who was known for his service to the poor and his status as the first Christian martyr (he was stoned to death in AD 36). In Hungary August 20 is observed in honor of King Stephen of Hungary, who united the country under Christianity in AD 1000 and was canonized in 1083 for his accomplishment.

December 26 - January 1 Kwanzaa African American Kwanzaa is a week-long holiday honoring African culture and traditions. It falls between December 26 and January 1 each year. Maulana Karenga, an African-American leader, proposed this observance and it was first celebrated between December 1966 and January 1967.

Kwanzaa is a holiday honoring the culture and traditions of people of African origin. It is celebrated by people from a range of African countries and their descendants. Kwanzaa consists of a week of celebrations, which ends with a feast and the exchange of gifts. During the celebrations, candles are lit and libations are poured. A libation is the name given to a ritual pouring of a drink as an offering to a god. During Kwanzaa, a wooden unity cup is used to pour the libations.

A Kwanzaa ceremony often also includes performance of music and drumming, a reflection on the Pan-African colors of red, green and black and a discussion of some aspect of African history. Women often wear brightly colored traditional clothing. Some cultural organizations hold special exhibitions of African influenced art or performances during the period of the celebrations.

The main symbols of Kwanzaa are a mat, on which to put the things needed for the celebration, the unity cup used to pour libations, a candle stick holding seven candles, the seven candles, ears of corn, the Kwanzaa flag and a poster depicting the seven principles of Kwanzaa. The seven principles of Kwanzaa are: unity; self-determination; collective work and responsibility; co-operative economics; purpose; creativity; and earth.



December 28 and 29 Feast of the Holy Innocents and Feast of the Holy Family Catholic Christian The Holy Innocents are the children mentioned in the gospel of Matthew, chapter 2:16-18. Herod, perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceedingly angry, and sent his soldiers to kill all male children ages two and under that were in Bethlehem and on the borders. The Feast of the Holy Family commemorates the life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph together, and the celebration focuses on religious family life.

December 31 Watchnight Christian The tradition of Watch Night may be traced to the early 18th century in Moravian churches, when churchgoers began marking the occasion with a vigil to reflect upon the year past and to contemplate the one to come. John Wesley adopted the practice for his Methodist followers. It was given new significance among African Americans on December 31, 1862, when, according to tradition, slaves in the Confederate states gathered in churches and private homes on the night before President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was expected to go into effect, pending his signing of the document. The soon-to-be-free slaves stayed awake all night and watched the night turn into a new dawn while waiting for news that the Emancipation Proclamation had been issued, thus making all the slaves legally free.

Church services on Watch Night generally begin sometime between 7:00 and 10:00 PM and end at midnight. The services tend to be attended by family groups. Many attendees go on to New Year's Eve parties afterward.

Sources: infoplease.com, timeanddate.com, aglobalworld.com, britannica.com, wicca.com, wilderutopia.com, bbc.co.uk, wikipedia.com, learnreligions.com, catholic newsagency.com. All pictures are from the subscription service, Shutterstock, unless otherwise noted.

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Catholic Mass is held Thursday at noon and Saturday at 4 p.m. in the Main Chapel, third floor Main, room 3201.

Jumma Prayer is held Friday at 12:15 p.m. in the Main Chapel, third floor Main, room 3201