



Children's National™

Holy Days of December 2016
Celebrations, Observances, and Information
Religious, Spiritual, and Cultural Occasions

Chaplaincy Services



December 6 St. Nicholas Day Christian/Catholic December 6 marks Saint Nicholas Day, and I thought I'd mark the beginning of the Christmas season by telling the story of Santa Claus's namesake. But before I do, I should remark that, historically speaking, there's not much we really know about Nicholas. Though he's one of the most popular saints in the Greek and Latin churches, his existence isn't attested by any historical document. All we can say is that he was probably the bishop of Myra (near modern Finike, Turkey) sometime in the 300s.

That said, there are of course many legends about Nicholas, and since these have influenced people throughout history, and they likely illustrate something about the historical man, they are fair game for a publication, like ours, devoted to Christian history.

Supposedly, Nicholas was born to a wealthy family in Patara, Lycia. His parents died, and he inherited a considerable sum of money, but he kept none of it. In the most famous story about his life, he threw bags of gold through the windows of three girls about to be forced into lives of prostitution. At least that's the most common version of the story; there are others, including an excessively grim one where the three girls are beheaded by an innkeeper and pickled in a tub of brine until Nicholas resurrects them.

After a couple of miracles (he's sometimes called Nicholas the Wonder-Worker) performed while he was still a boy, Nicholas was chosen by the people of Myra to be their new bishop. But it wasn't long before Diocletian and Maximian began their persecutions of Christians, and the new bishop was imprisoned.

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Office of InterFaith Pastoral and Spiritual Care

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Staff Chaplains

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*Catholic Mass: Thursday at 12:00 pm
(Main Chapel, room 3201, 3rd floor)
Saturday at 4:00 pm (Main Chapel, room 3201, 3rd floor)*

Rev. Matthew Schlageter
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*Friday: Jummah Prayer at 12:30 pm
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When Constantine became emperor, Nicholas was released with countless others and returned to his preaching only to find a new threat: Arianism. According to one biographer (writing five centuries after Nicholas's death), "Thanks to the teaching of St. Nicholas, the metropolis of Myra alone was untouched by the filth of the Arian heresy, which it firmly rejected as a death-dealing poison." Other biographers claim Nicholas attacked the heresy of Arius (who denied the full divinity of Christ) in a much more personal way—he traveled to the Council of Nicea and slapped Arius in the face! As the story goes (and this should be taken as fantasy because there are pretty good records of the council, and Nicholas isn't mentioned), the other bishops at Nicea were shocked at such rude behavior and relieved him as bishop. But then Jesus and Mary appeared next to him, and they quickly recanted.



That's the questionable legend of Nicholas. But not the end of the story. Even by the reign of Justinian (d. 565), Nicholas was famous, and the emperor dedicated a church in Constantinople to him. By the 900s, a Greek wrote, "The West as well as the East acclaims and glorifies him. Wherever there are people, his name is revered and churches are built in his honor. All Christians reverence his memory and call upon his protection." The West became even more interested when his "relics" were taken from Myra to Bari, Italy, on May 9, 1087. He's said to have been represented by medieval artists more frequently than any saint but Mary, and nearly 400 churches were dedicated in his honor in England alone during the late Middle Ages.

With such a popularity, his legends inevitably became intertwined with others. In Germanic countries, it sometimes became hard to tell where the legend of Nicholas began and that of *Woden* (or *Odin*) ended. Somewhere along the line, probably tied to the gold-giving story, people began giving presents in his name on his feast day. When the Reformation came along, his following disappeared in all the Protestant countries except Holland, where his legend continued as *Sinterklass*. Martin Luther, for example, replaced this bearer of gifts with the Christ Child, or, in German, *Christkindl*. Over the years, that became repronounced *Kriss Kringle*, and ironically is now considered another name for Santa Claus. *Photo: Netherlands-Czech Chamber of Commerce*

December 8 Bodhi Day Buddhist The enlightenment of the Buddha is among the most significant events in Buddhist history, and it's an event commemorated annually by many Buddhists. English speakers often call the observance Bodhi Day. The word *bodhi* in Sanskrit and Pali means "awakening" but is often translated into English as "enlightenment."

According to early Buddhist scripture, the historical Buddha was a prince named Siddhartha Gautama who was disturbed by thoughts of sickness, old age and death. He gave up his privileged life to become a homeless mendicant, seeking peace of mind. After six years of frustration he sat under a fig tree (a variety known ever after as a "*bodhi tree*") and vowed to remain in meditation until he had fulfilled his quest. During this meditation he realized enlightenment and became the Buddha, or "the one who is awake."

Theravada Buddhists have folded the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death into one holy day, called *Vesak*, which is observed according to a lunar calendar. So the precise date of *Vesak* changes from year to year, but it usually falls in May.

Tibetan Buddhism also observes the Buddha's birth, death and enlightenment all at once, but according to a different lunar calendar. The Tibetan holy day equivalent to *Vesak*, *Saga Dawa Duchen*, usually falls a month after *Vesak*.

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Mahayana Buddhists of east Asia -- primarily China, Japan, Korea and Vietnam -- split the three big events commemorated in Vesak into three different holy days. Going by the Chinese lunar calendar, the Buddha's birthday falls on the eighth day of the fourth lunar month, which usually coincides with Vesak. His passing into final nirvana is observed on the 15th day of the second lunar month, and his enlightenment is commemorated on the 8th day of the 12th lunar month. The precise dates vary from year to year.

However, when Japan adopted the Gregorian calendar in the 19th century, many traditional Buddhist holy days were assigned fixed dates. In Japan, Buddha's birthday is always on April 8 -- the eighth day of the fourth month. Likewise, in Japan Bodhi Day always falls on December 8 -- the eighth day of the twelfth month. According to the Chinese lunar calendar, the eighth day of the twelfth month often falls in January, so the December 8 date isn't that close. But at least it's consistent. And it appears that many Mahayana Buddhists outside of Asia, and who are not accustomed to lunar calendars, are adopting the December 8 date as well.

Perhaps because of the austere nature of the Buddha's quest for enlightenment, Bodhi Day generally is observed quietly, without parades or fanfare. Meditation or chanting practices may be extended. More informal commemoration might involve *bodhi* tree decorations or simple tea and cookies.

In Japanese Zen, Bodhi Day is *Rohatsu*, which means "eighth day of the twelfth month." *Rohatsu* is the last day of a week-long *sesshin*, or intensive meditation retreat. In a *Rohatsu Sesshin*, it is traditional for each evening's meditation period to be longer than the previous evening's. On the last night, those with enough stamina sit in meditation through the night.

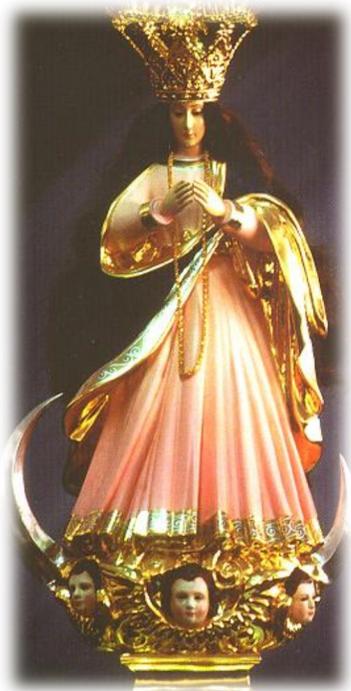


December 8 Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Many Christians around the world, particularly those of the Catholic faith, mark the Feast of the Immaculate Conception in their diaries and calendars. Church services (or masses) to honor this observance are held on or around December 8. The Feast of the Immaculate Conception is a public holiday in some places, such as Guam and Malta, so many people in these areas have a day off work or school.

Theological controversy surrounded the Feast of the Immaculate Conception for centuries. However popular celebration of this holiday dates back to at least the eighth century. The argument related to the meaning of the word "immaculate", which in this context refers to the belief that Jesus' mother Mary was conceived without original sin, according to Christian belief.

Many theologians throughout Christian history, including St Thomas Aquinas, questioned the Immaculate Conception. It remained open for debate for many years until Pope Pius IX proclaimed it to be an essential dogma in the Catholic Church on December 8, 1854. The written document on this is known as the *Ineffabilis Deus*. Since then, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception celebrates the belief that Mary was born without sin and that God chose her to be Jesus' mother. Many Anglicans in the world also hold this belief.

Various paintings, statues and other forms of artwork have been made depicting the Immaculate Conception. They usually show Mary as a young woman dressed in white and blue. She is often standing on a hill or raised area and has a halo of stars around her head. The pieces of art may also include images of clouds, golden lights, cherubs, lilies or roses. One well-known example associated with the Immaculate Conception is a statue known as Our Lady of Camarin (Santa Marian Kamalen), which was found on the shores of Merizo in Guam more than 300 years ago. *Photo: ns.gov.gu (read more at this site also)*



December 12 Our Lady of Guadalupe Roman Catholic (Mexico and Central America) The feast in honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe goes back to the 16th century. Chronicles of that period tell us the story.

A poor Indian named *Cuauhtlatohuac* was baptized and given the name Juan Diego. He was a 57-year-old widower and lived in a small village near Mexico City. On Saturday morning, December 9, 1531, he was on his way to a nearby barrio to attend Mass in honor of Our Lady.

He was walking by a hill called *Tepeyac* when he heard beautiful music like the warbling of birds. A radiant cloud appeared and within it stood a young Native American maiden dressed like an Aztec princess. The lady spoke to him in his own language and sent him to the bishop of Mexico, a Franciscan named *Juan de Zumarraga*. The bishop was to build a chapel in the place where the lady appeared.

Eventually the bishop told Juan Diego to have the lady give him a sign. About this same time Juan Diego's uncle became seriously ill. This led poor Diego to try to avoid the lady. The lady found Diego, nevertheless, assured him that his uncle would recover and provided roses for Juan to carry to the bishop in his cape or *tilma*.

When Juan Diego opened his *tilma* in the bishop's presence, the roses fell to the ground and the bishop sank to his knees. On Juan Diego's *tilma* appeared an image of Mary exactly as she had appeared at the hill of *Tepeyac*. It was December 12, 1531.



December 12 Mawlid an Nabe Islam On the twelfth day of the third month, Rabi' al-Awwal, many Muslims commemorate the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. In many predominantly Muslim countries, Mawlid al-Nabi is a major public holiday. Some Muslims refuse to participate in this observance, feeling it is an innovation which places too much emphasis on the human Prophet and distracts from the true divine source of revelation. Other Muslims view this festival as a means to teach their communities about the Prophet Muhammad's way of life, which all Muslims seek to emulate.

Throughout the world, there are a variety of expressions for the observance of the birth of the Prophet: some celebrations take place simply in private homes; other Muslims decorate their local masjid with lights and hold large festive gatherings. Celebrations of Mawlid al-Nabi include sharing food, attending lectures, participating in marches, and reading the Qur'an and devotional poetry. In some countries, such as Pakistan, the entire month of Rabi' al-Awwal is observed as the Prophet's "birth month." In Singapore, the observance of Mawlid al-Nabi is a one-day festival which often includes special "birthday parties" for poor children and orphans in addition to the regular prayers and lectures in local masajid. Azhar Square in Cairo is the site of one of the largest celebrations, with over two million Muslims in attendance.

The various ethnic groups in the American Muslim community bring their distinct customs to this festival observance. Some Islamic centers hold special programs for children, where they learn about the character and life of the Prophet, examine the way he dealt with important moral issues and with political and military affairs, how he handled challenges, and how he responded to his enemies and his friends. Children often prepare essays or skits that present important teachings or events in Muhammad's life. Many Muslims feel that the celebration of the Prophet's birthday is particularly important in the American context.

December 16—24 Posadas Christian/Mexico Christmas in Mexico is a religious holiday, honoring the 'nativity' or birth of the savior. As part of the Christmas celebration, traditional fiestas called Mexican posadas (inns) are held for family, friends, and neighbors. A posada is the reenactment of the Census pilgrimage to Bethlehem by Mary and Joseph (los peregrinos) in search of a room. From December 16th through December 24th, Mexican families customarily hold a posada party one evening in each of their homes. (continued)

During the reenactment, the posada hosts act as the inn keepers while their guests act as the pilgrims (los peregrinos). Holding lighted candles, each group takes turns singing verses to each other, for example: (Pilgrims, outside)

*"Mi nombre es José,
Mi esposa es María.
y madre va ser,
del Divino Verbo."*
**"My name is Joseph,
My wife is Mary.
and mother to be
of the Divine Word."**

(Inn keepers, inside)
*"Posada os brindo,
Santos Peregrinos,
y disculpa os pido,
no os reconocía."*
**"The inn I give you,
pilgrim saints,
and offer an apology,
for not recognizing you."**



Then the inn keeper hosts open the door and welcome the pilgrims inside.

Villancicos Mexican Traditions Although primarily a religious holiday including attendance at Christmas Eve mass (Misa de Aguinaldo or Misa de Gallo), Mexican holidays always offer an opportunity to enjoy a fiesta in true Mexican fashion. Posada parties are not only marked by traditional rituals but are also filled with cheerful socializing, authentic food, and fun for the entire family, including a special Christmas drink and a piñata filled with candy. *Photo: Xcarat.com*

December 21 Yule Wicca/Pagan The Pagan celebration of Winter Solstice (also known as Yule) is one of the oldest winter celebrations in the world.

Ancient people were hunters and spent most of their time outdoors. The seasons and weather played a very important part in their lives. Because of this many ancient people had a great reverence for, and even worshipped the sun. The Norsemen of Northern Europe saw the sun as a wheel that changed the seasons. It was from the word for this wheel, houl, that the word yule is thought to have come. At mid-winter the Norsemen lit bonfires, told stories and drank sweet ale.

The ancient Romans also held a festival to celebrate the rebirth of the year. Saturnalia ran for seven days from the 17th of December. It was a time when the ordinary rules were turned upside down. Men dressed as women and masters dressed as servants. The festival also involved decorating houses with greenery, lighting candles, holding processions and giving presents.

The Winter Solstice falls on the shortest day of the year (21st December) and was celebrated in Britain long before the arrival of Christianity. The Druids (Celtic priests) would cut the mistletoe that grew on the oak tree and give it as a blessing. Oaks were seen as sacred and the winter fruit of the mistletoe was a symbol of life in the dark winter months.

It was also the Druids who began the tradition of the yule log. The Celts thought that the sun stood still for twelve days in the middle of winter and during this time a log was lit to conquer the darkness, banish evil spirits and bring luck for the coming year.

Many of these customs are still followed today. They have been incorporated into the Christian and secular celebrations of Christmas.

History of the Yule Log: Though few Americans still bother with it, the burning of the yule log was at one time one of the most firmly entrenched customs of Christmas. Everything to do with them Fireplace was fraught with ritual — certain formulas had to be followed very carefully lest disaster befall the household in the upcoming year. It was unlucky to buy a yule log. Lucky ones were obtained from one's own land or from a neighbor's wood. Often a stump or a root (not necessarily a proper log at all), it was brought home on Christmas Eve and laid in the hearth.

The first step towards lighting the yule log was fetching the carefully-preserved scrap of the previous year's log from under the homeowner's bed. Having done its job of keeping the house safe from fire and lightning since the last festive season, it was now used to light the new log. The new log had to catch fire during the first attempt at lighting it; its failure to do so was a sign of misfortune coming to the family. Such an important duty had to be handled gravely. And clean hands only, please — to attempt to light the log with dirty hands would have been an unforgiveable sign of disrespect.

Once lit, the log had to be kept burning for twelve hours. This was not always an easy task, as special caution was given against stirring the embers during the lengthy Christmas Eve supper. The log could not be tended as long as any scrap of the dinner remained on the table, or while anyone was still eating.

As the log burned, people told ghost stories and tales of olden times whilst drinking cider. Shadows cast upon the wall were carefully scrutinized, for it was well known that a "headless" shadow foretold the death of the person casting it within the year.

Similar to the yule log was the Christmas candle. It too was lit on Christmas Eve, usually just at dusk. Care was taken to keep it burning at least as long as the hosts were still up (if not all night, depending on regional custom). Like the yule log, a proper Christmas candle could not be bought, so grocers made a practice of handing them out to customers. A bit of the burnt-down candle was also preserved from one year to the next as a lucky charm for the household.



December 24 Christmas Eve Christian Christmas Eve, also known as the Vigil of Christmas, is perceived as the culmination of the Advent season. Christmas Eve is the day before Christmas Day and is associated with celebrating Jesus Christ's birth, although his actual birth date has been disputed among many scholars. However, many Christmas traditions that are around today have their roots in pre-Christian winter festivals. These include the importance of candles and decorations made from evergreen bushes and trees, symbolizing everlasting light and life.

Christmas Eve is the evening or entire day preceding Christmas Day, the festival commemorating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. 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.

Christmas celebrations in the denominations of Western Christianity have long begun on the night of the 24th, due in part to the Christian liturgical day starting at sunset, a practice inherited from Jewish tradition and based on the story of Creation in the Book of Genesis: "And there was evening, and there was morning – the first day." Many churches still ring their church bells and hold prayers in the evening; for example, the Nordic Lutheran churches. 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".

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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. Legendary Christmas gift-bearing figures including Santa Claus, Father Christmas, *Christkind*, and Saint Nicholas are also often said to depart for their annual journey to deliver presents to children around the world on Christmas Eve, although until the Protestant introduction of *Christkind* in 16th-century Europe, such figures were said to instead deliver presents on the eve of Saint Nicholas' feast day (December 6).

Photo : warrenrovegarden.com



December 25 Christmas Christian Christmas or Christmas Day (Old English: *Crīstesmæsse*, meaning "Christ's Mass") is an annual festival commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ, observed most commonly 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 prepared for 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; in some traditions, Christmastide includes an Octave. Christmas Day is a public holiday in many of the world's nations, is celebrated culturally by a large number of non-Christian people, and is an integral part of the holiday season, while some Christian groups reject the celebration. In several countries, celebrating Christmas Eve on December 24 has the main focus rather than December 25, with gift-giving and sharing a traditional meal with the family.

While the month and date of Jesus' birth are unknown, by the early-to-mid 4th century, the Western Christian Church had placed Christmas on December 25, a date later adopted in the East. Today, most Christians celebrate Christmas on the date of December 25 in the Gregorian calendar, which has been adopted almost universally in the civil calendars used in countries throughout the world. However, some Eastern churches celebrate Christmas on the December 25 of the older Julian calendar, which currently corresponds to January 7 in the Gregorian calendar, the day after the Western Christian Church celebrates the Epiphany. This is not a disagreement over the date of Christmas as such, but rather a preference of which calendar should be used to determine the day that is December 25. In the Council of Tours of 567, the Church "declared the twelve days between Christmas and Epiphany to be one unified festal cycle", thus giving significance to both December 25 and January 6.

The date of Christmas may have initially been chosen to correspond with the day exactly nine months after the day on which early Christians believed that Jesus was conceived, or with one or more ancient polytheistic festivals that occurred near the Roman winter solstice; a further solar connection has been suggested because of a biblical verse identifying Jesus as the "Sun of righteousness".

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, an exchange of Christmas cards, church services, a special meal, 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. Photo: pinterest.com

December 25 Feast of the Nativity Orthodox Christian The Feast of the Nativity of Jesus is one of the most joyful days of the Orthodox Church. It ranks next to the greatest holiday, the Resurrection of Jesus. The Feast of the Birth of Jesus is also known as the "Incarnation of Christ." This means that Jesus became a man and came into the world to save us. We also refer to this joyous feast as Christmas.

At right is the icon of the nativity. To read more about the meaning of the icon go to http://www.goarch.org/special/listen_learn_share/nativity/index.html



December 25—January 1 Hanukkah Jewish Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday commemorating the rededication of the Holy Temple (the Second Temple) in Jerusalem at the time of the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire. Hanukkah is observed for eight nights and days, starting on the 25th day of Kislev according to the Hebrew calendar, which may occur at any time from late November to late December in the Gregorian calendar. It is also known as the Festival of Lights and the Feast of Dedication.

The festival is observed by the kindling of the lights of a unique candelabrum, the nine-branched menorah (also called a *Chanukiah/Hanukiah*), one additional light on each night of the holiday, progressing to eight on the final night. The typical menorah consists of eight branches with an additional visually distinct branch. The extra light, with which the others are lit, is called a *shamash* (Hebrew: שמש "attendant") and is given a distinct location, usually above or below the rest. Other Hanukkah festivities include playing dreidel and eating oil-based foods such as doughnuts and latkes. When the Second Temple in Jerusalem was looted and services stopped, Judaism was outlawed. In 167 BCE Antiochus ordered an altar to Zeus erected in the Temple. He banned *brit milah* (circumcision) and ordered pigs to be sacrificed at the altar of the temple.

Antiochus's actions provoked a large-scale revolt. Mattathias (Mattityahu), a Jewish priest, and his five sons Jochanan, Simeon, Eleazar, Jonathan, and Judah led a rebellion against Antiochus starting with Mattathias killing first a Jew who wanted to comply with Antiochus's order to sacrifice to Zeus and then a Greek official who was to enforce the government's behest. Judah became known as Yehuda HaMakabi ("Judah the Hammer"). By 166 BCE Mattathias had died, and Judah took his place as leader. By 165 BCE the Jewish revolt against the Seleucid monarchy was successful. The Temple was liberated and rededicated. The festival of Hanukkah was instituted to celebrate this event. Judah ordered the Temple to be cleansed, a new altar to be built in place of the polluted one and new holy vessels to be made.

According to the Talmud, unadulterated and undefiled pure olive oil with the seal of the *kohen gadol* (high priest) was needed for the menorah in the Temple, which was required to burn throughout the night every night. The story goes that one flask was found with only enough oil to burn for one day, yet it burned for eight days, the time needed to prepare a fresh supply of kosher oil for the menorah. An eight-day festival was declared by the Jewish sages to commemorate this miracle.



The version of the story in 1 Maccabees states that an eight-day celebration of songs and sacrifices was proclaimed upon re-dedication of the altar, and makes no specific mention of the miracle of the oil.

December 26 Death of Prophet Zarathustra Zoroastrian Zarathustra, also spelled Zarathushtra, Greek Zoroaster (born traditionally c. 628 BCE, possibly Rhages, Iran—died c. 551 BCE) Iranian religious reformer and prophet, traditionally regarded as the founder of Zoroastrianism.

According to the sources, Zarathustra probably was a priest. Having received a vision from Ahura Mazdā, who appointed him to preach the truth, Zarathustra apparently was opposed in his teachings by the civil and religious authorities in the area in which he preached. Confident in the truth revealed to him by Ahura Mazdā, Zarathustra apparently did not try to overthrow belief in the older Iranian religion, which was polytheistic. He did, however, place Ahura Mazdā at the center of a kingdom of justice that promised immortality and bliss. Though he attempted to reform ancient Iranian religion on the basis of existing social and economic values, his teachings at first aroused opposition from those whom he called the followers of the Lie (*dregvant*). [Read more at: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zarathustra](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Zarathustra).

December 26—January 1 Kwanzaa African American Dr. Maulana Karenga, professor and chairman of Black Studies at California State University, Long Beach, created Kwanzaa in 1966. After the Watts riots in Los Angeles, Dr. Karenga searched for ways to bring African-Americans together as a community. He founded US, a cultural organization, and started to research African “first fruit” (harvest) celebrations. Karenga combined aspects of several different harvest celebrations, such as those of the Ashanti and those of the Zulu, to form the basis of Kwanzaa.

The name Kwanzaa is derived from the phrase “matunda ya kwanza” which means “first fruits” in Swahili. Each family celebrates Kwanzaa in its own way, but celebrations often include songs and dances, African drums, storytelling, poetry reading, and a large traditional meal. On each of the seven nights, the family gathers and a child lights one of the candles on the Kinara (candleholder), then one of the seven principles is discussed. The principles, called the Nguzo Saba (seven principles in Swahili) are values of African culture which contribute to building and reinforcing community among African-Americans. Kwanzaa also has seven basic symbols which represent values and concepts reflective of African culture. An African feast, called a Karamu, is held on December 31. [Read more at: http://www.history.com/topics/holidays/kwanzaa-history](http://www.history.com/topics/holidays/kwanzaa-history)

December 26 St. Stephen’s Day Christian St. Stephen’s Day, also called Boxing Day, Wren Day, or Constitution Day, one of two holidays widely observed in honor of a Christian saint. 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 the United Kingdom and some Commonwealth countries, the December 26 holiday is commonly known as Boxing Day, which takes its name from the practice of giving small gifts to household servants on that day for their work throughout the year. In Ireland the holiday is sometimes called Wren Day, because in the past a wren would be killed and taken door-to-door by children asking for money in exchange for a wren’s feather, which people believed brought good luck. The tradition of going house-to-house on St. Stephen’s Day survives in many countries, especially in Scandinavia, where the day is observed by visiting friends and going to parties.

December 28 Holy Innocents Christian Herod “the Great,” king of Judea, was unpopular with his people because of his connections with the Romans and his religious indifference.

Matthew 2:1-18 tells this story: Herod was “greatly troubled” when astrologers from the east came asking the whereabouts of “the newborn king of the Jews,” whose star they had seen. They were told that the Jewish Scriptures named Bethlehem as the place where the Messiah would be born. Herod cunningly told them to report back to him so that he could also “do him homage.” They found Jesus, offered him their gifts and, warned by an angel, avoided Herod on their way home. Jesus escaped to Egypt.

Herod became furious and “ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under.” The horror of the massacre and the devastation of the mothers and fathers led Matthew to quote Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children...” (Matthew 2:18).

December 30 (sometimes moved to the Sunday after Christmas) Holy Family Christian Feast of the Holy Family, Roman Catholic religious festival falling on the first Sunday after Christmas. Although major feast days dedicated to each member of the Holy Family—Jesus, Mary, and Joseph—also exist, the Feast of the Holy Family commemorates their life together and the celebration focuses on religious family life. Because of the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt, a feast for the Holy Family has been observed by the Copts from early times. In Western Christianity, however, a cult of veneration for the Holy Family as a group, rather than as individuals, did not arise until the 17th century and was not officially recognized until the feast day was instituted in 1921. Originally celebrated on the Sunday after Epiphany (January 6), the Feast of the Holy Family was moved to the Sunday after Christmas in 1969, bringing it within the Christmas season.

December 31 Watchnight Christian A watchnight service is a late-night Christian church service. In many different Christian traditions, a watchnight service is held late on New Year's Eve, and ends after midnight. This provides the opportunity for Christians to review the year that has passed and make confession, and then prepare for the year ahead by praying and resolving. The services often include singing, praying, exhorting, and preaching.



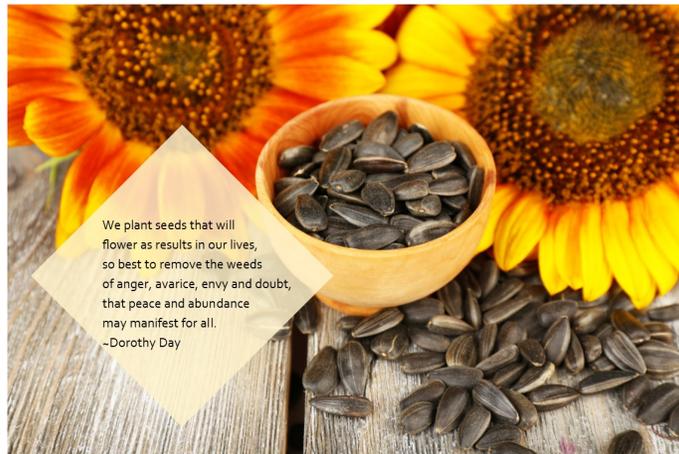
On This date in 1862 the first Watch Night Services were celebrated in Black communities in America.

On that night, Black slaves and free blacks came together in churches and private homes all across the nation awaiting news that the Emancipation Proclamation actually had become law. At the stroke of midnight, it was January 1, 1863; all slaves in the Confederate States were declared legally free. When the news was received, there were prayers, shouts and songs of joy as many people fell to their knees and thanked God. *Photo: emergingcivil-war.com*

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We plant seeds that will flower as results in our lives, so best to remove the weeds of anger, avarice, envy and doubt, that peace and abundance may manifest for all.
-Dorothy Day