

# Happy **Holidays**

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# Happy Holidays

## Introduction

'Tis the season for "Happy Holidays." We hear it in the stores as we are doing our "holiday" shopping. From November to January, we often hear this phrase and others like it, including "Happy New Year," "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Christmas," and have nativity scenes (Christ in a manger scene) and Christkind/Christkindl (meaning Christ child)<sup>1</sup> celebrations, and so on.

But in today's Western culture, people are pressured to stray away from "Merry Christmas" and gravitate toward "Happy Holidays." Christian elements associated with Christmas are disappearing and so is the terminology.

We're often told that it is safer to say "Happy Holidays" or write "X-mas" instead of "Merry Christmas" so you don't offend those who oppose Christ and Christmas. In other words, the

society is now quickly catering to an anti-Christ position—“so what!” if it offends Christians.

But does “Happy Holidays” really help the anti-Christian position? How should Christians react? Let’s evaluate these questions in more detail.

What Holidays Are in Reference When We Say “Happy Holidays”?

I’m often surprised how many people fail to name even a few of the holidays that are part of the Christmas season (which runs from the fourth Sunday before Christmas until January 6—more on this in a moment). Would you have answered: Boxing Day, St. Nicholas’ Day, Feast of Epiphany, or Advent? Some do, some say . . . “Whaaaat?”

These days are just some of the holidays within the Christmas season. The Christmas season is broken into three parts:

1. Advent Season
2. Christmas
3. The Twelve Days of Christmas

## **Advent Season of Christmas**

The first part is the anticipation and preparation of Christmas and is sometimes called penitential season of Christmas, but normally the Advent season. Advent means “arrival” or “dawning” of an event. For instance, when Jesus Christ became a man and stepped into history, this is called the “first advent.” When Jesus comes again, as he promised he would, that is called the “second advent” or the second coming.

The Advent season celebrates Jesus’ first advent and begins with the first Advent Sunday and continues for the next three Sundays prior to Christmas. Because it is always four weeks prior to Christmas, it moves around on our modern Gregorian calendar (the calendar most of us use today). But it typically begins in late November or very early December. It tends to be near the US holiday that always falls on the fourth Thursday of November called “Thanksgiving.”<sup>2</sup>

Each Sunday leading up to Christmas is respectively the First Advent Sunday, Second Advent Sunday, Third Advent Sunday, and Fourth or Final Advent Sunday. The Advent or penitential

season of Christmas draws to a close on Christmas Eve—the evening before Christmas.

Commonly, we tend to mark the beginning of the Christmas season with the close of Thanksgiving in the US and businesses mark it with an incredible shopping day that has morphed into Black Friday<sup>3</sup> (in some cases, stores start the evening before and call it Black Thursday).<sup>4</sup>

The Advent Season is also close to St. Andrew's Day, which is always celebrated on November 30. So, this holiday is sometimes part of the Advent season and sometimes immediately precedes it. Traditionally, St. Andrew's Day (not at the conclusion of Thanksgiving) had been used as the marker to indicate the Advent season was upon us.

Falling on December 6 is St. Nicholas' Day. St. Nicholas of Myra was a bishop (minister/pastor) in the AD 300s. He died on December 6, hence the day that is used to celebrate his life. He was an orphan who became a wealthy man living in a nation we call Turkey today, traditionally known as Asia Minor (the town of Myra was later called Kale and is now called Demre).

St. Nicholas used his wealth to help the less fortunate (for example, he kept some poor, young girls out of forced prostitution by paying their debt). He was said to have hung stockings of coins for the poor on windowsills and so on. For his faith in Christianity, he was persecuted by Roman Emperor Diocletian and put in jail for a time. He was released by Emperor Constantine about AD 325.

Because St. Nicholas' Day always falls in the Christmas season, it makes sense why Christmas today has a corrupted version of him during the Christmas season. Saint Nickolas is corrupted into Santa Claus (think *Sainta niclaus*).

Sadly, attributes of God are applied to St. Nicholas. This paganized version of St. Nicholas sees all, judges between naughty and nice, blessings (gifts) comes from him, can be everywhere at the same time, etc. It's better to leave St. Nicholas as St. Nicholas—and as a result, many Christians avoid using Santa Claus as a deceptive tool on children.

## Christmas Day

The second part of the Christmas season is of course Christmas Day (also called The Nativity of Our Lord), celebrated on December 25.

Christmas has been widely celebrated by underground Christians and documented by Christians since about AD 200. Christmas became very popular when Christianity was allowed to be out in the open after the Edicts of Toleration and Milan in AD 311 and 313 respectively.

Popular early church father Sextus Julius Africanus wrote the *Chronographiai* around AD 221 which put the conception of Christ at March 25—nine months prior to December 25, the date being used for Christmas. For context, this is about 125 years since the last of Jesus' apostles died. Some Christians still celebrate an ancient feast on March 25 called the Feast of Annunciation (also called *Conceptio Christi*, Solemnity of the Annunciation, Lady Day, or Feast of the Incarnation) celebrating the immaculate conception of Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Is December 25 the actual day of Christ's birth? That is a great question with mixed