

<p><b>Father Christmas</b></p> <p>Based on the 4<sup>th</sup> Century Greek Christian: St Nicholas. Regularly gave gifts to the poor to help them live more dignified lives. Children in the Middle Ages were given gifts on his Saint's day (6<sup>th</sup> December). England stopped celebrating Saints' days after the Reformation so gifts given in his honour were moved to December 25<sup>th</sup>, Christmas Day.</p> <p>Before Christianity Europeans celebrated the midwinter festival of Yule. During this time, the God Woden, a white-bearded man pulled by horses in a sleigh, crossed the sky, giving gifts to children.</p>	<p><b>Yule log</b></p> <p>Ancient Germanic tribes, including Anglo-Saxons and Nordic people, celebrated a winter festival called Yule.</p> <p>The Yule Log was a huge tree felled and stripped and burnt over the 12 days of the festival. At the end of the festival, a small piece was retained to light the next year's log.</p> <p>The Yule log possibly represents the earlier Celtic practices of sacrificing animals and even humans at the winter feast.</p>	<p><b>Baby Jesus/ Nativity scene</b></p> <p>Reflects Jesus being born as a real human baby to real human parents, although he was God.</p> <p>Jesus was probably not born in a stable, but an outer room in the family complex. Mary would have certainly been attended by women when she gave birth.</p> <p>The Egyptian god Horus, son of the goddess Isis, was celebrated in mid-winter. This would have been known to the early Christians who were Middle eastern. The symbolism of a goddess nursing an infant god would have been well-known.</p>
<p><b>Presents</b></p> <p>Presents seem to stem from the Saturnalia- an ancient Roman celebration of the god Saturn. The Saturnalia occurred from mid to late December.</p> <p>At the Saturnalia there was feasting, drinking, gift-giving and a sense of social disorder. Rules were ignored, masters served their slaves, representing the lost mythical age of Saturn.</p> <p>In the Middle ages drinking, eating, partying and disorder was unrestrained- and was often seen as un-Christian or unbiblical. Puritan groups at various times tried to ban this.</p>	<p><b>Feasting and lights</b></p> <p>The Midwinter festival (Winter Solstice) occurs on the longest night of the year. This period is also called Yule. It has been marked since Neolithic times.</p> <p>Cattle would be slaughtered before deep winter, as there would not be enough feed for them in coming months, so people feasted on meat. Wine or beer distilled in the summer would also be ready at this time.</p> <p>Candles, fire or torches would be lit to represent hope that the sun would return, often in the form of sun gods or goddesses. The Iranian sun god, later adopted by the Roman Emperor as the high God, Sol Invictus, was celebrated on 25<sup>th</sup> December.</p>	<p><b>Christingle</b></p> <p>First designed by Bishop Johannes de Watteville in Germany in 1747, the original Christingle was a red ribbon tied around a candle. The ribbon represents Jesus' blood and the candle presents Jesus as the light of the world.</p> <p>In 1968 the Christingle was made popular in the UK by John Penson, in an attempt to raise money for The Children's Society. Today around a million pounds is raised each year raised at Christingle services for this charity.</p>