

Christian Holidays, Festivals & Holy Days

Holidays, feasts and fasts are a significant part of Christian religious practice. The feast days celebrate joyous historical events, such as the birth and resurrection of Christ, while the fast days provide a special opportunity to focus on self-reflection, self-discipline, and repentance. Some Christian holidays have come to have a considerable impact on western culture and traditions.



Brief History

Holidays have been a part of Christianity from the beginning, with Easter being the oldest.



Mardi Gras

Celebrated on the last day before Lent, this is a day to enjoy one last feast before the 40-day fast.



Advent

The season of Advent (*adventus*, "coming") marks the beginning of the church year and the approach of Christmas.



Palm Sunday

Palm Sunday is the sixth Sunday of Lent and the last Sunday before Easter. It commemorates the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.



Ash Wednesday

The first day of Lent, a period of fasting that leads up to Easter. Its central ritual is placing of ashes on the forehead.



St. Andrew's Day

St. Andrew's Day marks the martyrdom of the apostle Andrew, brother to Saint Peter, and is especially associated with Scottish identity.



Boxing Day

Celebrated in Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, this was when servants and the poor were traditionally given gifts.



St. Patrick's Day

The Catholic feast day that honors St. Patrick, the patron saint of Ireland, is celebrated worldwide by the Irish, those of Irish descent, or "Irish for a day."



Christmas

The celebration of the birth of Jesus. The English word "Christmas" derives from the old English *Christes maesse*, or "Christ's mass."



Sunday

In Christianity, the day of the week devoted to rest and worship is Sunday, or the "Lord's Day."



Easter

Easter is a spring festival that celebrates the resurrection of Christ. It is the oldest Christian holiday and the most important day of the church year.



Thanksgiving

Celebrates a shared meal between Christian Pilgrims and Native Americans. It is not a religious holiday, but has an interesting, semi-religious history.



Epiphany

The celebration of Epiphany (*epiphaneia*, "manifestation") recalls the visit of the Magi, symbolizing Christ's manifestation to Gentiles.



Twelfth Night

Made famous by the Shakespearean play, this marks the end of the Christmas season.



Lent

Lent is a 40-day period of fasting and repentance in preparation for Easter.



Valentine's Day

Valentine's Day is a celebration of romantic love. Although associated with a saint, modern Valentine's Day is a non-religious holiday.