

Christmas



It is **estimated** that Christmas has been celebrated since around 300 AD. However, many of the **customs** connected to Christmas as we celebrate it today may actually **have roots** in December celebrations which were **held** as much as 4000 years ago around the winter **solstice** – the Romans had Saturnalia and the Germanic peoples honoured the god Odin. As the Bible does not give enough clues as to when Jesus Christ was born, many believe that the date was borrowed from the earlier **pagan** festivals.

Today, the Christmas tree and presents are probably the two most **recognisable** elements of Christmas. But both of these haven't really been around for that long. In Britain, the tradition of decorating the Christmas tree was introduced in the early 19th century. In America, it became **common** in the second half of the century. It seems that gift-giving is **relatively** new, too – presents entered Christmas celebrations more or less at the same time as Christmas trees.

Nowadays, Christmas is celebrated in many countries of the world, including those whose populations are mostly non-Christian. As Christmas became more and more **secular**, its economic importance grew as well – today the 'Christmas shopping season' may start as early as October.

Quiz

1. The date of Christmas comes from

- a) the Bible.
- b) the Roman people.
- c) old pagan festivals.

2. Decorating the Christmas tree is a tradition

- a) which is as old as Christmas.
- b) which started at the same time as gift-giving.
- c) which is the newest Christmas custom of all.

3. Christmas is celebrated

- a) only in the countries where most people are Christian.
- b) everywhere in the world.
- c) in many non-Christian places in the world.