

Four thousand years of festivity

Mid winter has long been a time of celebration. Ancient Egyptians and early Europeans marked the winter solstice – the rebirth of the sun – and the Romans held **Saturnalia**, to honour the pagan god of plenty

Gift-giving:
Custom traced back to Roman **Saturnalia**

Evergreens:
Venerated in northern Europe by Druids and Vikings as symbol of everlasting life. Christmas trees were common in pagan Rome – modern tradition began in Germany in 15th century

Jultomte/Julenisse:
Gnome delivers gifts in goat-drawn sleigh in Scandinavia

Babushka: Elderly Russian woman who refused chance to join wise men seeking Jesus, delivers presents on January 6 – **Three Kings Day**

La Befana: In Italy, gift-giver is wandering woman similar to Babushka

St. Nicholas:
Born around 280 AD near Myra in modern-day Turkey. Much admired for his piety and kindness. Patron saint of children and sailors

Dutch settlers introduced St. Nicholas to America as **Sinterklaas**, which later became **Santa Claus**. Also known as **Father Christmas**, **Père Noël** in France, and **Papa Noel** in Spanish-speaking world

Three Kings: Twelve days of Christmas end with **Feast of Epiphany**. Legend says wise men, or Magi, followed bright star to Bethlehem to present infant Christ with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. **Orthodox Church and Hispanic world celebrate by exchanging gifts on January 6**

