

# STUDY GUIDE

# THE AMAZING HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

**KEY TERMS:** Christmas religion tradition  
New Testament redemption commerce

<b>NOTE-TAKING COLUMN:</b> Complete this section <u>during</u> the video. Include definitions and key terms.	<b>CUE COLUMN:</b> Complete this section <u>after</u> the video.
How many people follow Christianity?	How were the Christmas traditions started?
Who did Professor Moore write “Twas the Night Before Christmas” for?	Why is Christmas so important?
Who wrote the song “White Christmas?”	

## DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Towards the beginning of the video, Mr. Federer explains that, “Christmas is when Christians celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ. That in its self is a very big deal. Christianity, in all its many iterations, remains the most popular religion in the world. Two billion people follow it.” Why is the birth of Jesus Christ such a big deal? Why do you think that Christianity is the most popular religion in the world? Explain.
- Mr. Federer goes on to point out that, “...the first Christmas stands as the great divide for the recording of human history. Until recently, history was divided between BC (Before Christ) and AD (Anno Domini, which is Latin for ‘Year of Our Lord’). Now you’ll often see BCE (Before the Common Era) and CE (Common Era). No matter. The divide is still Jesus’ birth.” Why do you think that the birth of Jesus Christ was chosen as the great dividing line of human history? What does choosing the birth of Jesus to be the dividing line demonstrate about the importance and significance of that particular event? Explain.
- Later in the video, Mr. Federer shares with us that, “After Nicholas died and was declared a saint, his popularity and positive Christmas message spread across Europe, each nation adding its own distinct contribution.” What do you think Saint Nicholas’ positive Christmas message was, and why do you think that the message spread so far? Explain. Why do you think that each nation contributed to the story and to the traditions? Explain.
- After explaining how Professor Moore’s poem helped to grow the popularity of Christmas, Mr. Federer notes that, “The holiday got another push in 1843 when the great British writer, Charles Dickens published his short novel ‘A Christmas Carol.’ The redemption of Ebenezer Scrooge perfectly captured what we now refer to as the Christmas spirit- the idea that the holiday brings out the best in all of us.” What about the story of personal redemption do you think was so compelling to so many people that it helped to make Christmas even more popular? Do you believe that the notion of Christmas spirit is actually manifested each holiday season? Why or why not? Do you engage in Christmas spirit each year? Why or why not?
- Towards the end of the video, Mr. Federer concludes that, “Many complain today that the religious aspect of Christmas has been overwhelmed by commerce. Retail sales between Thanksgiving and Christmas are now \$1 trillion. This is not a new complaint. The Puritans refused to celebrate Christmas because they thought it trivialized the holiday’s religious message.” Do you agree that Christmas has come to be valued more for gifts rather than for meaningful religious celebration? Why or why not? Do you think that the Puritans have a valid complaint in that celebrating Christmas ‘belittles’ the importance and significance of the religious message? Why or why not?

## EXTEND THE LEARNING:

### CASE STUDY: Christmas Spirit

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “We Are Happier on the Holidays,” then answer the questions that follow.

- How many people did the author collect data from? What did the data reveal? By what margin was Christmas Day the happiest of the year? What is a robust predictor of happiness? What is one of the main reasons for being happier on Christmas Day? How did happiness during the weeks around Thanksgiving and Christmas Day compare?
- The author states that one of the main reasons we are generally happier around the holidays is because we are interacting with friends and family more. What might some of the other reasons for the higher levels of general happiness be? Explain. At the end of the article, the author states, “...if we used the holiday season as an excuse to routinely spend more time sharing meals, playing games and connecting with our friends and family, our happiness on a typical day in December might begin to look a lot like Christmas.” Do you agree with the author? Why or why not? Do you think that the same notion could extend to apply year-round? Why or why not? Do you agree with critics who state that people shouldn’t need a holiday to be nice to each other? Why or why not?
- At the end of the video, Mr. Federer states, “In a world that feels so divided, Christmas still unites us. For that we should all be grateful.” Why do you think that Mr. Federer characterizes the world as feeling divided? Do you agree with Mr. Federer that Christmas unites us and that we should be grateful? Why or why not?



# QUIZ

## THE AMAZING HISTORY OF CHRISTMAS

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1. Which religion is the most popular in the world?
  - a. Islam
  - b. Hindu
  - c. Christianity
  - d. Judaism
  
2. \_\_\_\_\_ follow Christianity.
  - a. One billion people
  - b. Two billion people
  - c. Three billion people
  - d. Four billion people
  
3. The first Christmas stands as the great divide for the recording of human history.
  - a. True
  - b. False
  
4. Which of the great kings of the first millennium were either baptized or had a coronation ceremony on December 25th?
  - a. Charlemagne
  - b. Alfred the Great
  - c. William the Conqueror
  - d. All of the above.
  
5. *'Twas the night before Christmas* was written by \_\_\_\_\_ for his children.
  - a. William Blake
  - b. Robert Burns
  - c. Clement Moore
  - d. Rudyard Kipling



# QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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<https://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/12/23/why-arent-people-happier-during-the-holidays/we-are-happier-on-the-holidays>

# We Are Happier on the Holidays

Matt Killingsworth is a Robert Wood Johnson Health and Society Scholar and the creator of Track Your Happiness.org.

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As part of my research, I've collected data from more than 20,000 people who report how happy they feel at randomly selected moments during daily life. These data reveal that we actually are happier than usual on holidays. In fact, Christmas Day, though not celebrated by everyone, is the happiest day of the year by a significant margin. Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve are not too far behind. While it's easy to call to mind spoiled children fighting over toys or distant relations making awkward conversation, the holidays are, relatively speaking, quite happy.

Spending time with our friends and family turns out to be a robustly positive predictor of our happiness.

Of course, this is not to say that everyone is happy on the holidays or that we are as happy as we could be, but holiday misery is the exception rather than the rule. Why is this the case? There are several reasons, but one of the main reasons is that we spend more time interacting with our friends and family on these holidays and, as it turns out, doing so is a robustly positive predictor of our happiness.

How could we be happier during the holidays? Although we are demonstrably happier on specific holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas and on a few of the immediately surrounding days (like Christmas Eve), our happiness during the weeks surrounding these holidays is merely average. We are neither overcome with stress nor bursting with holiday cheer. One drag on happiness is last-minute shopping. People are not pervasively unhappy when shopping during the holidays -- except on Dec. 23, 24 or 25, when shopping excursions are associated with significantly lower levels of happiness. More generally, if we used the holiday season as an excuse to routinely spend more time sharing meals, playing games and connecting with our friends and family, our happiness on a typical day in December might begin to look a lot like Christmas.