



## Roman Holiday

As an old carol reminds us, Christmas is “the most wonderful time of the year.” In ancient Rome, the weeklong festival of Saturnalia starting on December 17 was just as popular. The famed Roman poet Catullus went so far as to say that Saturnalia offered “the best of days.”

Saturn was the Roman god of agriculture, seed, sowing, and time. Saturnalia began as a farmer’s holiday to mark the end of the autumn planting season. Over time, the holiday evolved into a widely celebrated festival and moved later into the season, eventually coinciding with the winter solstice. The Temple of Saturn in Rome was the best place to celebrate Saturnalia. Rituals were performed to honor Saturn and ensure a good harvest. Some records indicate that the hollow statue of Saturn was filled to the brim with olive oil. The statue’s feet were bound with woolen ties, which were loosened on Saturnalia to symbolically free the god.



Romans also freed themselves. Slaves were permitted to wear the *pileus*, the red felt cap denoting freedom. Businesses and courts were closed. Banquets and feasts were held throughout the week, and gifts of candles were exchanged so they could be offered at the Temple of Saturn. Evergreen boughs were used as decorations, and tin ornaments were hung from trees and shrubs. Revelers wandered from door to door singing songs. Saturnalia was such a raucous affair that the author Pliny the Younger built a soundproof room to shield him from the noisy crowds.

Many cherished Christmas traditions were originally part of Saturnalia: gift-giving, decorating with evergreen boughs, lighting candles, and door-to-door caroling. Emperor Constantine may have converted to Christianity in AD 312, but Saturnalia celebrations continued into the next century. Slowly, as Christianity became the dominant religion, the traditions associated with Saturnalia were celebrated on Christmas Day, December 25, a date chosen nine months after Gabriel’s Annunciation to Mary on March 25.

## December Birthdays

In astrology, those born from December 1–21 are Archers of Sagittarius. The Archers are the travelers of the zodiac, curious and energetic, with open minds craving new experiences and challenges. Those born from December 22–31 are Capricorn’s Goats. Like goats that perch on mountain crags, Capricorns are masters of self-control and responsibility. Intense focus and fortitude help them reach their goals.

Dennis G. December 8<sup>th</sup>  
Dorothy S. December 16<sup>th</sup>  
Verna W. December 27<sup>th</sup>  
Paul S. December 31<sup>st</sup>  
Ardyce December 27th (HH)

Staff Birthdays  
Tracy S. 12/10  
Dawn M. 12/12  
Belit B. 12/14

**As we ready ourselves for Christmas this year, I know many of us will be thinking of those loved ones who have passed on, whether they passed yesterday or years ago. We will cherish our memories of them. As we all get really busy this time of year, if we could find a half hour out of our day to spend with our loved ones who are still with us today, to keep making memories, to cherish them now today, before their gone and become a memory, how Blessed they will feel!**

## Celebrating December

### Bingo’s Birthday Month

### Universal Human Rights Month

### Hanukkah Continues December 1–6

### Saint Nicholas Day December 6

### Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day December 7

### Poinsettia Day December 12

### Yaldā December 21

### Christmas December 25

### Kwanzaa December 26–January 1

### Boxing Day December 26

### New Year’s Eve December 31

## T was the night before Christmas,

when all thro’ the house  
Not a creature was stirring,  
not even a mouse;

The stockings were hung  
by the chimney with care,  
In hopes that St. Nicholas  
soon would be there;

The children were nestled  
all snug in their beds,  
While visions of sugar plums  
danc’d in their heads,

And Mama in her ‘kerchief,  
and I in my cap,  
Had just settled our brains  
for a long winter’s nap —

When out on the lawn  
there arose such a clatter,  
I sprang from the bed  
to see what was the matter.

Away to the window  
I flew like a flash,  
Tore open the shutters,  
and threw up the sash.

The moon on the breast  
of the new fallen snow,  
Gave the lustre of mid-day  
to objects below;

When, what to my wondering  
eyes should appear,  
But a miniature sleigh,  
and eight tiny rein-deer,

With a little old driver,  
so lively and quick,  
I knew in a moment  
it must be St. Nick.

More rapid than eagles  
his coursers they came,

And he whistled, and shouted,  
and call’d them by name:

“Now! Dasher, now! Dancer,  
now! Prancer and Vixen,  
“On! Comet, on! Cupid,  
on! Donder and Blitzen;

“To the top of the porch!  
To the top of the wall!  
“Now dash away! Dash away!  
Dash away all!”

As dry leaves before the  
wild hurricane fly,  
When they meet with an obstacle,  
mount to the sky;

So up to the house-top  
the coursers they flew,  
With the sleigh full of toys —  
and St. Nicholas too:

And then in a twinkling,  
I heard on the roof  
The prancing and pawing  
of each little hoof.

As I drew in my head,  
and was turning around,  
Down the chimney St. Nicholas  
came with a bound:

He was dress’d all in fur,  
from his head to his foot,  
And his clothes were all tarnish’d  
with ashes and soot;

A bundle of toys  
was flung on his back,  
And he look’d like a peddler  
just opening his pack:

His eyes — how they twinkled!  
His dimples: how merry,

His cheeks were like roses,  
his nose like a cherry;  
His droll little mouth  
was drawn up like a bow,  
And the beard of his chin  
was as white as the snow;

The stump of a pipe  
he held tight in his teeth,  
And the smoke it encircled his head  
like a wreath.

He had a broad face,  
and a little round belly  
That shook when he laugh’d,  
like a bowl full of jelly:

He was chubby and plump,  
a right jolly old elf,  
And I laugh’d when I saw him  
in spite of myself;

A wink of his eye  
and a twist of his head  
Soon gave me to know  
I had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word,  
but went straight to his work,  
And fill’d all the stockings;  
then turn’d with a jerk,

And laying his finger  
aside of his nose  
And giving a nod,  
up the chimney he rose.

He sprang to his sleigh,  
to his team gave a whistle,  
And away they all flew,  
like the down of a thistle:

But I heard him exclaim,  
ere he drove out of sight —

**Happy Christmas to all,  
and to all a good night.**

—Clement Clark Moore

## From Saint to Santa

Illustrator Thomas Nast has been called the “Father of the American Cartoon” for the illustrations he featured in *Harper’s Weekly* magazine in the 19th century. It was Nast who first used a donkey and elephant to symbolize America’s political parties. He fought corruption with scathing political cartoons. But Nast’s most enduring contribution to popular culture might be his depictions of Santa Claus as a jolly, fat man from the North Pole dressed in red and white.

Long before he was Santa Claus, he was Saint Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra, a fourth-century holy man renowned for the miracle of resurrecting three young boys killed by a butcher. For this remarkable feat, Saint Nicholas became the patron saint of children. Over the centuries, veneration of Saint Nicholas would spread. The Dutch called him Sinterklaas, and when the Dutch set sail for the New World in the 17th century, they brought Sinterklaas with them.

Sinterklaas, or Santa Claus, and Christmas, were well-established in America by the 1800s. But in December of 1823, Clement Clark Moore published his poem *’Twas the Night Before Christmas*, and first described Santa Claus not as an austere bishop, but “chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf.” Charles Dickens then published *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, transforming Christmas from a religious holiday into a popular and commercial extravaganza. By January of 1863, with the United States plunged into Civil War, Thomas Nast had plenty of inspiration for his first cartoon depicting Santa Claus.



Nast’s first depictions of Santa portray him not just as a jolly old elf but as an ally of the Union Army, and he used his own long beard as inspiration for Santa’s flowing white one. Over the next 23 years, Nast would make 33 illustrations of Santa, none more influential than his 1881 image of “Merry Old Santa Claus,” complete with a white beard, rosy cheeks, red suit, and pack full of toys. This image, more than any other, has made Santa Claus who he is today.

## Bah, Humbug!

Maybe it’s the long lines at shopping centers, or maybe it’s the incessant drone of holiday music, but some people just don’t enjoy the holiday season. Luckily, December 21 is Humbug Day, a day to unapologetically embrace your inner Scrooge.



No one knows where the word *humbug* came from. Some think it came into use during the 18th century as the word *Hamburg* during a time when England was flooded with counterfeit coins from that German city. Others think that it comes from a humming bug, something small, but incredibly irritating. Either way, the word denotes something that is a hoax or nonsense. When Scrooge utters, “Bah! Humbug,” he is declaring Christmas to be a fraud.



## Comforting Thoughts

The Danes have the perfect antidote for the long, dark nights of December—hygge. Pronounced *HOO-guh*, hygge has been described as everything from a lifestyle choice to the very essence of the Danish soul. Simply put, hygge is coziness, but it is far more than that.



The word *hygge* comes from the old Norwegian word *hugga*, roughly translated to mean “to comfort” or “well-being.” It was used to describe refuge or shelter from the harsh Arctic elements. These days, hygge is about creating a warm atmosphere where you, your friends, and your family can enjoy coziness and happiness. Put on your most comfortable clothes. Enjoy the flickering glow of candlelight. Prepare some good homecooked food and eat it with your fingers if you want to. Pour a cup of tea and snuggle up under your favorite blanket to read a good book. All these things are hygge.

Hygge is also about creating a space free of tension or conflict. For this reason, people do not discuss politics, the news, work, or anything that may cause disagreement or debate. Cell phones and laptops often distract people from listening to each other. For this reason, screens are a no-no (unless you are all watching your favorite movie). Ultimately, hygge means that you can enjoy being yourself in the company of others.

Hygge has enjoyed much commercial success lately. Articles, books, and documentaries all tout steps to creating the perfect hygge home or throwing the ultimate hygge party. If you are skeptical about trying hygge, there is some evidence that the hygge lifestyle works. The World Happiness Index consistently ranks Denmark among the happiest nations in the world. Other Scandinavian countries where hygge is common practice also often rank in the top 10. So, does hygge create happiness? Or do the values and policies of these Scandinavian countries make people more likely to enjoy hygge? Why don’t you put on your coziest sweatpants and find out?



## A Christmas Parade

Men dressed like toy soldiers; Stand tightly in a row. Holding forth their trumpets; To start evening show.	Mary holds the Christ child; While Joseph stands beside. A little cow so shy; Patters by wants to hide.	The final song is sung; For the Christmas parade. All the people go home; All instruments fade.
People gather together; For the festivity. While children dress in costume; For the nativity.	There's hundreds of people; A bright candlelight sea. Quiet moments of prayer; A Christ filled Christmas Eve	Memories with family; And funds raised for the poor. A fantastic parade; A blest Christmas for sure.
Christmas trees are lit up; Twinkling lights dance with song. Violins are playing; All strings play along.	Then way up the roadway; The floats start to appear. Carolers are singing; Is that Santa I hear?	The children are sleepy; And at home in their beds. They're left with fond memories; And sweet songs in their heads.
Five beautiful white sleighs; With all the bells ringing. With decorated horses; fun, romance and singing.	A sleigh filled with goodies; A jolly Ho Ho Ho. All the children cheering; And Santa's rosy glow.	Merry Christmas by: Susan y Nikitenko November 29th 2010
All for just ten dollars; Romance, laughter and smiles. Husbands, wives and sweethearts; Line up, for nearly two miles.	Then the marching bands play; With their horns and their drums. "The Little Drummer Boy"; "Bur rum Pa Pa Pum".	
Garlands, wreaths and tinsel; Decorate all the streets. While holiday vendors; Sell hot cocoa and treats.	"Away in the Manger"; And then "Joy to the World". Joyful Christmas Songs play; To celebrate our Lord.	
The soldiers blow their horns; The angels start to sing. They prance across the stage; With tinsel on their wings.		