

Faith Festivals December 2017

1st December The Prophet Muhammad's Birthday/Milad Un Nabi (12th Rabi'ul-Awwal) is observed by Sunni Muslims on 12th Rabi' Al-Awwal, and by the majority of Shi'a Muslims five days later on 17th Rabi' Al-Awwal (though Nizari Ismaili Shi'a Muslims who are followers of the Aga Khan celebrate this on the same date as Sunnis, whereas Dawoodi Bohra Ismailis celebrate at the same time as other Shi'a). The day is widely celebrated within the Muslim world and is a public holiday in a number of Muslim countries. In the sub-continent of India and certain Arab countries like Egypt, the celebration starts with reading from the Qur'an, followed by poetry and songs in praise of the Prophet. There are also lectures and story telling. In some big cities of the Muslim world the day is marked with processions and flag waving under a huge decoration of lights. In the UK many Muslims celebrate at the mosque, but some refuse to celebrate the Prophet's birthday, claiming it is a non-Islamic innovation introduced more than 600 years after the life of the Prophet. Tradition is not clear as to the exact date of the Prophet's birth.

3rd December Advent Sunday Christian (Western Churches)

The start of the Christian year, four Sundays before Christmas. It is often celebrated by lighting the first candle in the advent crown – a circular wreath of greenery. A further three candles are lit on subsequent Sundays, culminating with the Christmas candle on the 25th December. This signifies the transition from darkness to light.

8th December marks the Feast of the **Immaculate Conception of Mary** for our Catholic Christian friends. For more see <http://www.fisheaters.com/customsadvnt5.html> and <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07674d.htm>

8th December Bodhi Day. On this day, our Buddhist friends celebrate Bodhi Day or Rohatsu (Japanese). Bodhi Day honours the enlightenment of Siddhartha Gautama -- the historic first Buddha. After years of trying to find the source of suffering through various religious practices, including for the latter part of his life, asceticism, Siddhartha Gautama, decided to let go of these practices which had proven fruitless, and just to look for the key inside by going into deep meditation under a bodhi (banyan) tree. This led to his enlightenment or full realisation, making him the first Buddha. Buddhists observe the importance of this event by celebrating Bodhi Day in many ways, including prayer, meditation and teachings, but also by the use of symbol e.g. the bodhi leaf and lights around the home. To learn more http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/pbs2_unit03.htm (children's story) or <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/buddhism/lifebuddha/index.htm> (adult's story) or <http://www.doityourself.com/stry/bodhi-day>

10th December (Sunday) Human Right's Day (National)

In 1948 The United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 'All human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms.'

13th December to 20th December Hanukah Jewish Celebrates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after it was recaptured from the Syrian Greeks by the Maccabee brothers in 165 BCE. For the eight evenings of the festival, candles are lit from right to left in a hanukiah, a nine-branched menorah – one() candle for each evening. The ninth candle is the shamash (the servant candle) from which the other candles are lit. Foods cooked with oil - such as doughnuts and latkes (potato cakes) – are traditional to remember the miracle with oil that happened at this time. A game of dreidel, a special small spinning top, is popular with children to commemorate 'the great miracle that happened there'. More: <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/2016-religious-festivals/december>

24th December is **Christmas Eve** for our Christian friends. Christmas Eve, also known as the Vigil of Christmas, is perceived as the culmination of the Advent season. Christmas Eve is the day before Christmas Day and is associated with celebrating Jesus Christ's birth, although his actual birth date has been disputed among many scholars. However, many Christmas traditions that are around today have their roots in pre-Christian winter festivals. These include the importance of candles and decorations made from evergreen bushes and trees, symbolizing everlasting light and life. Hence, services in church often include popular Christmas customs such as candlelight vigils, plays re-enacting the Nativity from the Gospel of Luke, and hymns sung by children. Many churches are

decorated with candles, greenery, and nativity scenes. More <http://www.sharefaith.com/guide/Christian-Holidays/whats-the-true-meaning-of-christmas.html> and <http://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/common/christmas-eve>

25th December is **Christmas**, the day on which our Christian friends celebrate Christmas to celebrate the birth of Jesus, son of God. Although now a secular festival celebrated by people of all faith and none, it is at its heart a Christian festival. For more, see <http://www.whychristmas.com/customs/25th.shtml>. We owe much of the way we celebrate Christmas as a society to the Victorian who were inspired by the tale A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens to popularise such traditions as singing carols, sending cards and decorating a tree. For more http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/holydays/christmas_1.shtml or for Dicken's role in shaping our modern concept of Christmas see <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/xmas/pva63.html>

26th December is **Zarathosht Diso**. On that day, our Zoroastrian friends commemorate **Zarathosht Diso** or Death of Prophet Zarathustra. The Zoroastrian holiday of Zarathust No Diso is celebrated in Iran on December 26 and by the Parsi in May. It commemorates the death of Zoroaster, founder and prophet of the Zoroastrian religion. The holiday is considered a day of mourning, and it is often marked with prayers and studies on the life of Zoroaster. For more <http://altrigion.about.com/od/holidaysfestivalsevents/p/zarathust-no-diso.htm>

31st December is **St Sylvester's night AKA Watch Night** for our Christian friends and particularly, our Black American Christian friends. In the Roman Catholic Church, January 1 is a solemnity honouring the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of Jesus; it is a Holy Day of Obligation in most countries (Australia being a notable exception), thus the Church requires the attendance of all Catholics in such countries for Mass that day. However a vigil Mass may be held on the evening before a Holy Day; thus it has become customary to celebrate Mass on the evening of New Year's Eve. (New Year's Eve is a feast day honouring Pope Sylvester I in the Roman Catholic calendar.) Many Christian congregations have New Year's Eve Watch Night services. Some, especially Lutherans and Methodists and those in the African American community, have a tradition known as "Watch Night", in which the faithful congregate in services continuing past midnight, giving thanks for the blessings of the outgoing year and praying for divine favour during the upcoming year. In the English-speaking world, Watch Night can be traced back to John Wesley, the founder of Methodism,[19] who learned the custom from the Moravian Brethren who came to England in the 1730s. Moravian congregations still observe the Watch Night service on New Year's Eve. Watch Night took on special significance to African Americans on New Year's Eve 1862, as slaves anticipated the arrival of January 1, 1863, when Lincoln had announced he would sign the Emancipation Proclamation. Source http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Year%27s_Eve

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