

Christmas Special

Christmas as a Multi-Faith Festival



BBC WORLD SERVICE LEARNING ENGLISH



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Yvonne: This is a BBC Learning English Christmas Special - and I'm Yvonne Archer.
Hello!
Of course, Christmas is one of the most important times of the year for Christians; it's the time when they celebrate the birth of Jesus, the son of God.

So why do non-Christians celebrate Christmas? We asked a few of our friends around the office for some answers. Khalid is from Sudan where Christmas is an official holiday – but what does that mean and are most people there Christians?

Khalid

Well I come from Sudan which is predominantly a Muslim country. But I do have a few friends who are Christians and we do get Christmas as an official holiday in Sudan.

Yvonne: If a country or a company has an official holiday, such as Christmas, most people don't work on that day. And everyone gets Christmas day off in Sudan. But did you notice the rather formal word that Khalid used to talk about the main religion in Sudan? Yes, he said 'predominantly'... Sudan is 'predominantly' a Muslim country.

Khalid

Well I come from Sudan which is predominantly a Muslim country.

Yvonne: You could also use 'predominantly' to talk about things like the country where most people in a group come from or the language they speak ['My class is predominantly Polish'; 'The dancers are predominantly Swahili speakers.'] After today's programme, listen out for the word 'predominantly' in BBC news stories.

So Khalid has a few Christian friends at home in Sudan, but what does he do on Christmas day - and why? Let's find out...

Khalid

I go 'round to their places and sort of, you know, have fun with them and participate in the activities – which is really good because it means, you know, we're interacting although we have different religions.

Yvonne: Did you catch the reason why Khalid joins in with his friends' Christmas activities, although he's a Muslim? Yes, he believes it's good for people of different religions to 'interact'. Do you agree?

Khalid

You know, we're interacting although we have different religions.

Yvonne: Next, our friend Shuhub from Baghdad in Iraq. Like Khalid, she's also from a predominantly Muslim country. But Shuhub's husband has a Catholic mother and a Muslim father – and they happily celebrate the religious festivals from both faiths. Shuhub particularly enjoyed celebrating Christmas in Baghdad when she was there. But what three things did she enjoy most about Christmas when she was still in Bahdad? Try to find out...

Shuhub

I used to enjoy that part, whether it's the dishes, or the way they put the tree and the decorations on the tree or the sermons before and after.

Yvonne: So Shuhub enjoyed the Christmas dishes – the special food they ate on that day. She enjoyed the Christmas tree, traditionally a pine tree, with all its decorations. And she also mentioned listening to the Christmas ‘sermons’ – the religious, moral talks that are made by priests especially for Christmas time.

Shuhub

I used to enjoy that part, whether it’s the dishes, or the way they put the tree and the decorations on the tree or the sermons before and after.

Yvonne: Helen is a Buddhist from China who celebrates Christmas because she’s been living in England for fifteen years now. Helen doesn’t celebrate Christmas as a religious festival but she did tell me that Christmas is like her own Spring Festival in China. That’s because it’s a good time for people to meet up again when they haven’t seen each other for a long time. But why else does Helen think that Christmas is important? As you listen, try to catch the phrasal verb ‘to make which she uses...

Helen A – from China

Sometimes you don’t see someone for maybe a year and this is the time for people to get together and find out what’s been going on. And also, I think if you have got into arguments or disagreements with someone, this is the perfect time to make up - to make peace with them.

Yvonne: Christmas is a chance for people ‘to make up’ – to become friends again if they’ve argued in the past – and to make peace.

Helen A – from China

This is the perfect time to make up - to make peace with them.

Yvonne: Well, whether you decide to celebrate Christmas or not – we wish you a very peaceful time.