

Holiday greetings

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Holiday greetings are a selection of greetings that are often spoken with good intentions to strangers, family, or friends, in nations around the world, during the months of December and January.

Holidays with greetings include Christmas, New Year's Day, Chinese New Year, Thanksgiving (United States), and Hanukkah. Some greetings are more prevalent than others, depending on the cultural and religious status of any given area.

Typically, a greeting consists of the word "Happy" followed by the holiday, such as "Happy Eid", "Happy Hanukkah", or "Happy New Year", although the phrase "Merry Christmas" is a notable exception. In the United States, the collective phrase "Happy Holidays" is often used as a generic cover-all greeting for all of the Winter holidays, Thanksgiving, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. Controversy has arisen in the U.S regarding its usage of the phrase "Happy Holidays", as an alleged attempt to diminish the Christian elements of Christmas, although its use promotes other holidays commonly celebrated there.

Contents

- 1 Merry/Happy Christmas
 - 1.1 History of the phrase
- 2 Happy Holidays
- 3 Season's Greetings
- 4 Christmas and Holiday Greetings
 - 4.1 Christmas Wishes (Non-English)
 - 4.2 Non-English, Non-Christmas
 - 4.3 English
 - 4.4 Other
- 5 See also
- 6 References
- 7 External links

Merry/Happy Christmas

The greetings and farewells "Merry Christmas" and "Happy Christmas" are traditionally used in North America, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Australia, commencing a few weeks prior to Christmas (December 25) of every year.

The phrase is often preferred when it is known that the receiver is a Christian or celebrates Christmas. The



A Christmas cake with a "Merry Christmas" greeting.

nonreligious often use the greeting as well, however in this case its meaning focuses more on the secular aspects of Christmas, rather than the Nativity of Jesus.

Its meanings and variations are:

- As "Merry Christmas," the traditionally used greeting for those from America and the UK, composed of merry (*jolly, happy*) and Christmas (Old English: *Cristes masse*, for *Christ's Mass*).
- As "Merry Xmas," usually used to avoid the length of "*Merry Christmas*," with the "X" (sometimes controversially) replacing "Christ." (*see Xmas*)
- As "Happy Christmas," an equivalent that is commonly used in the United Kingdom and Ireland, as well as "Merry Christmas."

As of 2005, "Merry Christmas" remains popular among countries with large Christian populations, including: the United States; Canada; the United Kingdom; Ireland; Australia; South Africa; Mexico; and Western Europe not affiliated with the Eastern Orthodox rites.

It remains popular in the largely non-Christian nations of People's Republic of China and Japan, where Christmas is celebrated primarily due to Western cultural influences. Though it has somewhat decreased in popularity in the United States and Canada over the past decades, polls from 2005 indicate that it remains more popular than "Happy Holidays" or other alternatives.^[1]

History of the phrase

"Merry," derived from the Old English *myrige*, originally meant merely "pleasant, and agreeable" rather than joyous or jolly (as in the phrase "merry month of May").^[2]

Though Christmas has been observed since the 4th century AD, the first known usage of any Christmastime greeting, dates back to 1565, when it appeared in *The Hereford Municipal Manuscript*: "And thus I comytt you to God, who send you a mery Christmas."^[2] "*Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year*" (thus incorporating two greetings) was in an informal letter written by an English admiral in 1699. The same phrase is contained in the sixteenth century secular English carol "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," and the first Christmas card, produced in England in 1843.



A Christmas tree inside a home.

Also in 1843, Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* was published, during the mid Victorian revival of the holiday. The word Merry was then beginning to take on its current meaning of "jovial, cheerful, jolly and outgoing."^[2] "*Merry Christmas*" in this new context figured prominently in *A Christmas Carol*. The cynical Ebenezer Scrooge rudely deflects the friendly greeting: "If I could work my will.. every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips should be boiled with his own pudding."^[3] After the visit from the Ghosts of Christmas affect his transformation, Scrooge exclaims; "I am

as merry as a school-boy. A merry Christmas to everybody!" and heartily exchanges the wish to all he meets.^[4] The instant popularity of *A Christmas Carol*, the Victorian era Christmas traditions it typifies, and the term's new meaning appearing in the book, Dickens' tale popularized the phrase "Merry Christmas."^{[5][6]}

The alternative "Happy Christmas" gained usage in the late 19th century, and is still common in the U.K and Ireland alongside "Merry Christmas." One reason may be the Methodist Victorian middle-class influence in attempting to separate their construct of wholesome celebration of the Christmas season from that of common lower-class public insobriety and associated asocial behaviour, in a time where "merry" was also understood to mean: "tipsy" or "drunk." Queen Elizabeth II is said to prefer "Happy Christmas" for this reason.^[2] In the American poet Clement Moore's "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (1823), the final line, originally written as "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good night," has been changed in many later editions to "Merry Christmas to all," perhaps indicating the relative popularity of the phrases in the U.S.

Happy Holidays

Some social conservatives in the United States and Canada have charged that "Happy Holidays" is a neologism deliberately coined to be an all-inclusive, generic greeting for the holiday season, which not only includes Christmas, but other (Northern hemisphere) winter holidays like Hanukkah and New Year's. They claim that the term is a bland and politically correct maxim, that is part of an alleged secular "War on Christmas," with the intent of deliberately diminishing the centrality of Christianity ^[7]

Advocates, on the other hand, maintain that "Happy Holidays" is an inoffensive and all-inclusive greeting that is not intended as an attack against Christianity or other religions, but rather a response to a growing and increasingly diverse population.

However, some Jewish and Muslim people in the United States have noted that "Happy Holidays" is used exclusively in December, when there are no major Jewish or (usually) Islamic holidays; it is not used at the other times of year when major non-Christian holidays occur.^[8]

It is unclear whether "Happy Holidays" is indeed a recent or politically-motivated coinage. Widespread commercial use of the term "Happy Holidays" dates back at least to the 1970s. Use of the term may have begun with the Irving Berlin song "Happy Holiday" (released in 1942 and included in the film "White Christmas") or the term may predate that song.

In the United States, it can have several variations and meanings:

- As "Happy Holiday", an English translation of the Hebrew *Hag Sameach* greeting on Passover, Sukkot, and Shavuot.
- As "Happy Holiday", a substitution for "Merry Christmas"
- As "Happy Holidays", a collective and inclusive wish for the period encompassing Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, the Winter solstice, Christmas, and the New Year

The phrase "Happy Holidays" also considers the fact that New Year's Day

and Boxing Day (Or St. Stephen's Day in Ireland) occurs shortly after Christmas. Hence, "Happy Holidays" is effectively a short form for the greeting "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year."

In the United States, "Happy Holidays" (along with the similarly generalized "Season's Greetings") has become the common greeting in the public sphere within the past decade, such as department stores, public schools and greeting cards.

Some Christians, concerned that the 20th-century conflation of St. Nicholas Day (December 8), Christmas (December 25), and Epiphany (January 6) subsumed the meaning of Christmas itself, have taken to using "Happy Holidays" and "Season's Greetings" throughout the season, reserving "Merry Christmas" for December 25.

Season's Greetings

"Season's Greetings" is a greeting more commonly used as a motto on winter season greeting cards than as a spoken phrase. In addition to "Merry Christmas", Victorian Christmas cards bore a variety of salutations, including "Compliments of the Season" and "Christmas Greetings." By the late 19th century, "With the Season's Greetings" or simply "The Season's Greetings" began appearing. By the 1920s it had been shortened to "Season's Greetings,"^[9] and has been a greeting card fixture ever since. Several White House Christmas cards, including U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1955 card, have featured the phrase.^[10]

Some believe that the "Season" in "Season's Greetings" is referring to the Christmas season. Consequently, some consider the replacement of "Merry Christmas" with "Season's Greetings" as an attack on the Christian elements of the Christmas holy day. Others claim it is commercially-motivated pandering to a greater consumer base hoping that avoiding overtly Christian or Christmas messages will spur shoppers to spend, regardless of any religious overtones. (*see also: Christmas controversy*)

A differing opinion claims the phrase "Season's Greetings" is more neutral and avoids any implication of one "holy" day's dominance over another. It may be used to be more inclusive of other winter holidays (such as Kwanzaa or Hanukkah), or to acknowledge the possibility that the reader may be non-religious.

Christmas and Holiday Greetings

Christmas Wishes (Non-English)

- *Gëzuar Krishtlindjen dhe Vitin e Ri* - Albanian, "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year"
- *Milād Majīd* ميلاد مجيد - Arabic for "Merry Christmas" as used in Lebanon and several other countries
- *Shenoraavor Nor Dari yev Pari Gaghand* Eastern Armenian
- *"Shenoraavor Nor Dari yev Soorp Dzuhnoont"* Western Armenian
- *Zorionak eta Urte Berri On!* Basque for Merry Christmas
- *Nedeleg laouen ha bloavezh mat* in Breton
- *Честито Рождество Христово* (*Chestito Rozhdestvo Hristovo*, Happy Nativity of Jesus) or *Весела Коледа* (*Vesela Koleda*, Merry

- Christmas) or **Честита Коледа** (*Chestita Koleda*, Happy Christmas) in Bulgarian
- Bon Nadal i un Bon Any Nou! in Catalan
 - *Bon Nadal* - Catalan for Happy Christmas
 - *Nadelik looan na looan blethen noweth* Happy Christmas and Happy New Year in Cornish
 - *Sretan Božić* - Croatian for Happy Christmas
 - *Veselé Vánoce a šťastný nový rok* - Czech language, "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year"
 - *Glædelig jul* - Danish
 - *God jul* - Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, lit. "Good Yule"
 - *Gleðilig Jól og gott Nýggjár* - Faroese - Merry Christmas and happy New Year
 - *Vrolijk Kerstfeest* or *Zalig Kerstfeest* with *en een Gelukkig Nieuwjaar* - Dutch, "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year"
 - *Gajan Kristnaskon* "Merry Christmas" in Esperanto
 - *Häid jõule* - Estonian
 - *Maligayang Pasko* - Filipino word, a Common Christmas Greeting in the Philippines which was Merry Christmas in English Translation.
 - *Hyvää joulua* - Finnish
 - *Joyeux Noël* - French for "Happy Christmas" used in France, French Canada, Belgium, Luxembourg, Louisiana, Switzerland, the Lebanon and Francophone Africa
 - *Noflike Krystdagen en in protte Lok en Seine yn it Nije Jier!* in Frisian
 - *Frohe Weihnachten/Fröhliche Weihnachten und ein glückliches/gutes Neues Jahr* - German for Merry Christmas/Merry Christmas and a Happy/Good New Year
 - **Καλά Χριστούγεννα** (*Kala Christougenna*) - Greek for Merry Christmas.
 - *Mele Kalikimaka* - Hawaiian
 - *Boldog karácsonyt/Kellemes karácsonyi ünnepeket* : *Merry Christmas/Pleasant Christmas Holidays* in Hungarian
 - *Selamat Natal*: "Christmas best wishes" Indonesian
 - *Idah Saidan Wa Sanah Jadidah* in Iraq
 - *Nollaig Shona Duit* - Ireland, (Irish Language), Gaeilge, lit. "Happy Christmas to you".
 - *Buon Natale* - Italian for Happy Christmas
 - *Natale hilare et Annum Faustum!* in Latin
 - *Priecīgus Ziemassvētkus* - in Latvian
 - *Linksmų Šv. Kalėdų ir Laimingų Naujųjų Metų* - Lithuanian "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year"
 - *Schëine Chreschtdaag an e gudde Rutsch* in Luxembourg dialect
 - **Среќен Божиќ**, (*Sreќen Božić*) - Macedonian for Happy Christmas
 - *Il-Milied u s-Sena t-Tajba* - Malta - "Happy Christmas and a Happy New Year"
 - *Nollick ghennal as blein vie noa* in Manx Gallic
 - *Meri Kirihimete* in Māori
 - **کریسمس مبارک** - Persian "Merry Christmas"
 - *Wesołych Świąt Bożego Narodzenia* in Polish
 - *Feliz Natal* in Portuguese
 - *Crăciun Fericit!* Romanian for Merry Christmas
 - **С РОЖДЕСТВОМ ХРИСТОВЫМ!** (*S'Rozhdestvóm Khristóvym!*) or, more commonly, simply **С РОЖДЕСТВОМ** (*S Rozhdestvóm!*) for the informal Christmas greeting, while the traditional religious greeting is *Khristós rozhdayetsya!* (Χριστός γεννιέται, meaning "Christ is born!") and the traditional response is *Slávite!* (Σλαβίτε!, meaning "Let us glorify Him!"); **С НОВЫМ ГОДОМ!** (*S*

- Nóvym gódom!) - Happy New Year! in Russian.
- *Heughliche Winachten un 'n moi Nijaar* in Low Saxon
- *Nollaig chridheil huibh* in Scottish Gaelic
- "**Христос се роди!**" *answer: "Ваистину се роди!"* ("Christ is Born!" "Indeed He's Born!") or: "*Srećan Božić*" (Serbian) "Merry Christmas" also Hristos se rodi.
- *Veselé Vianoce a Šťastný Nový rok* - Slovak language, "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year"
- *Vesele Božične Praznike Srečno Novo Leto* or *Vesel Božič in srečno Novo leto* in Slovene
- *Feliz Navidad y próspero Año Nuevo* - Spanish lit. "Happy Nativity and prosperous New Year"
- *God Jul and (Och) Ett Gott Nytt År* in Sweden
- *Geseënde Kersfees en 'n voorspoedige nuwe jaar* - Blessed Christmas and a prosperous New Year - Afrikaans speaking South Africans
- **สุขสันต์วันคริสต์มาส และสวัสดีปีใหม่**="Souksan wan Christmas lae Sawadi Pee Mai" in Thai
- *Mutlu Noeller* - Turkish - "Happy Christmas"
- **З Різдвом Христовим** (*Z Rizdvoм Khrystovym*) or, when meeting in person, **Христос народився! - Славимо Його!** ("Khrystos narodyvnya! - Slavimo yoho!", lit. "Christ was born! - Praise be with Him!") in Ukrainian.
- *Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Dda* - Wales (by Welsh speakers), "Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year"
- 聖誕節快樂 / 圣诞节快乐 (Shèngdānjié kuàilè) - Merry Christmas!, 新年快樂 / 新年快乐 (Xīnnián kuàilè) - Happy New Year! in Chinese^[11]
- メリークリスマス (Merii Kurisumasu, often with a raised dot between the two words) - Merry Christmas!, よいお年を (Yoi o-toshi-o) (before), 明けましておめでとう (after) - Happy New Year! in Japanese^[12]
- 메리 크리스마스 (*meri keuriseumaseu*) - Korean

Non-English, Non-Christmas

- *Kull 'am wa 'antum bikhair* كل عام وأنتم بخير - Arabic for "May every year find you (plural) in good health"
- *'A'yād Sa'īdah* أعياد سعيدة - Arabic for "Happy Holidays"
- *Īd mubāarak* عيد مبارك - Arabic for "Blessed Eid" is used to greet at the end of Ramadan on Eid ul-Fitr
- *Taqabbala Allāhu minnā wa minkum* تقبل الله منا ومنكم - Arabic for "May God accept from us, and from you"
- *'Īd sa'īd* عيد سعيد - Arabic for "Happy Eid" or "Happy Holiday"
- *Ramaḍān Karīm* رمضان كريم - Arabic for "Blessed Ramadan" is used to greet at the beginning of Ramadan
- **Весели празници** (*Veseli praznitsi*, Happy Holidays), **Честита нова година** (*Chestita nova godina*, Happy New Year) in Bulgarian
- *Bon Carnaval* - A French, Creole, or Cajun carnival greeting often used for Mardi Gras.
- *Prettige Kerstdagen en een gelukkig nieuwjaar* - Dutch
- *Jour de l'An* - French for Happy New Year used in French Canada
- *Joyeuses Fêtes* - French for Happy Holidays used in French Canada
- *Boas Festas* - Galician for Happy Holidays
- **Καλές Γιορτές** Greek for Happy Holidays or **Χρόνια Πολλά**

Greek literally "Many Years"

- *Mele Kalikimaka* - Hawaiian, is preferred over the traditional American "Merry Christmas" in the U.S. state of Hawaii; made popular worldwide by Bing Crosby and the Andrews Sisters in 1950 in song
- *Gmar Chatimah Tovah* גמר חתימה טובה ("May you be sealed for good") or *Tzom Kal* קל צום ("Have an easy fast") - solemn greetings for Yom Kippur.
- *Mo-ād-īm L'sim-chā* מועדים לשמחה - Hebrew language for "Happy Holidays" is the proper greeting for the Jewish Pilgrimage Festivals (Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot). The response is "Chāg-īm Uz'mān-īm L'sā-son" חגים ומנים לששון. These phrases also appear liturgically.
- *L'Shanah Tovah* לשנה טובה Hebrew, Lit. "for a good year". Common greeting during Rosh Hashanah and Days of Awe. It is derived from *L'shanah tovah tikatev v'tikhatem*, לשנה טובה תכתב ותחתם, lit. "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year". Alternatively one may wish someone a *Shanah tovah u'metukah* שנה טובה ומתוקה "A good and sweet year".
- *Chag Sameach* חג שמח - Hebrew for "Joyous festival", used for most Jewish festivals.
- *Deepavali ki Shubhkamnaye*: Diwali greeting in Hindi
- *Nav varsh ki Shubhkamnaye*: New Year greeting in Hindi
- *Naya Saal Mubarak*: New Year greeting in Urdu
- *Mohon maaf lahir dan batin*: Please forgive my trespasses (sins) Indonesian
- *Selamat Tahun Baru*: "Happy New Year" Indonesian
- *Selamat Hari Raya, Selamat Idul Fitri* or *Salam Aidilfitri* - Indonesia and Malaysia
- *Buone Feste* - Italian for Happy Holidays
- 明けましておめでとうございます。 (*Akemashite Omedetō-gozaimasu.*), in Japanese, literally: "Opening congratulations." but is used as "Happy New Year."
- 새해 복 많이 받으세요. (*Saehae Bok Mani Baduseyo* - Korean "Happy New Year"
- *Kellemes húsvéti ünnepek* - *Pleasant Easter Holidays* in Hungarian (Magyar)
- *Schéi Feierdeeg* - Luxembourgish for Happy Holidays
- *maaf zahir dan batin* - Malaysian Lit. "Forgive my physical and emotional (wrongdoings)"
- 恭喜發財 / 恭喜发财 (*gōng xǐ fā cái*) - Chinese (Mandarin), "Congratulations and Prosperity"
- *Шинэ жилийн мэнд хүргэе* (*Shini jiliin mend hurgie*) - Mongolian
- *Wesołych Świąt* - Polish greeting used before Christmas (literally 'Happy Holidays').
- *Feliz Natal* - Portuguese for Happy Christmas
- *Boas Festas* - Portuguese for Happy Holidays
- *С Новым Годом* (*S Novim Godom*) - Russian, - Happy New Year Lit. "With a New Year" (on the 1st of January and later); *С Наступающим!* (*S Nastupajuschim*) Lit. "With the Coming (Year/Holiday)" (before the New Year has actually begun)
- *Felices Fiestas* - Spanish for Happy Holidays
- *Habari Gani* - Swahili for "What's the news?" is the daily greeting for each of the seven days of Kwanzaa.
- *Yeni yılınız kutlu olsun* - Turkish - "Happy New Year"
- *Веселих свят!* - Ukrainian for "Happy Holidays!"; or "□ □□□□□"

🎉🎉🎉🎉!" - Ukrainian for "Happy New Year!", literally meaning "With a New Year!"

- *Phát tài phát lộc Tấn tài tấn lộc* - Vietnamese language, "Luck and Prosperity"
- *Chúc mừng năm mới* - Vietnamese language, "Celebrate the New Year"
- *Gut Yontiff* - טוב-יום טוב, Yiddish for "good holiday" used on full-fledged festival days.
- *Vạn sự như ý* - Vietnamese language, "All things are as expected"

English

- *Happy Christmas* - United Kingdom, Ireland
- *Happy Easter* - English
- *Happy Halloween* - Canada, Ireland, United States
- *Happy Hanukkah* or *Happy Chanukah* - English
- *Happy Holidays* - Canada, United States
- *Happy Kwanzaa* - United States
- *Happy New Year* - English. Often yelled at stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve; greetings on first encounters early in the new year.
- *Happy Thanksgiving* - Canada, United States
- *Happy Valentine's Day* - United Kingdom, Ireland, United States
- *Happy Yuletide* - Traditional English generally referring to the period of cultural festivities surrounding Yule, Winter solstice, Christmas and the New Year.
- *Merry Christmas* - United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, United States, Canada, the phrase can be immediately followed by *and a Happy New Year*.
- *Merry Xmas* - Written English (often informal), referencing the Greek word *Χριστός*, for Christ.
- *Merry Yuletide* - English, can generally refer to the period of cultural festivities surrounding Yule, Winter solstice, Christmas and the New Year.
- *Season's Greetings* - United Kingdom Christmas cards, not usually spoken
- *Joyous Yule* - Usually a Wiccan or Neopagan greeting for the Winter solstice

Other

- *The sky is blue, the grass is green, may we have our Halloween* - Britain
- *It's a Festivus for the rest of us!* - yelled enthusiastically to explain the meaning of the holiday Festivus
- *Trick or Treat* - Canada, United States , the combined threat and request for candy of children at each door they visit on Halloween

See also

- Christmas card
- Christmas Eve
- Paschal greeting
- Winterval

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External links

- Jewish Holiday Greeting Chart (<http://www.patheos.com/Resources/Additional-Resources/Jewish-Holiday-Greetings.html>) , from *Patheos*
- Online Etymology Dictionary (<http://www.etymonline.com>)
- The Phrase Finder (<http://www.phrases.org.uk>)

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Categories: Christmas nomenclature and language | Greeting cards | Greeting words and phrases | English phrases | Holiday related topics | American and British English differences

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