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Christian Holidays: Fact Sheet

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Introduction

Christianity is one of the three major Abrahamic faiths, alongside Islam and Judaism. The religion is centered on the life, teachings and death of Jesus of Nazareth (The Christ) and is the most practiced of the world's religions.¹ The Pew Research Center estimates that 63% of U.S. adults self-identify as Christian as of 2024.² There are a large number of Christian traditions, with great variation in which holidays are celebrated and how.

This fact sheet highlights two holidays—Easter and Christmas—observed by a significant portion of American Christian denominations and addresses the ways these holidays are currently recognized in the United States.

This fact sheet is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to Christian holidays. It contains sample speeches and remarks from the Congressional Record, presidential statements and remarks, and selected historical and cultural resources. This is part of a series of Congressional Research Service fact sheets on religious holidays in the United States.

Major Holidays and Observances

With the exception of Christmas, the official government observance of most Christian holidays is determined at the state or local level.

Internationally, many countries celebrate these and other Christian feasts and liturgical days at the national level. Parliaments, banks, schools, and other institutions may be closed on these days.

Easter

Easter commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ and is the oldest annual Christian holiday or feast.³ The holiday is often observed with a special church service, followed by a family or community gathering that involves a special meal. Many Christians also include processions or parades; egg dyeing, rolling, and hunts; and sweets gifting in their celebrations.⁴

Easter does not occur on the same date each year. It is observed on the first Sunday following the first full moon on or after March 21. Some Eastern Orthodox traditions use the Julian calendar to calculate the date of Easter, instead of the Gregorian calendar. This means in some years Easter falls on the same date for both and in other years there can be as many as five weeks' difference.

The federal government does not observe Easter as a legal public holiday.⁵ However, the Senate and House of Representatives of the 119th Congress have each introduced bills to establish Easter Monday as a federal holiday (S. 1426 and H.R. 2951). State and local governments do not

¹ John Hick. "Christianity," in *Britannica Academic*, s.v., last modified November 6, 2025, <https://academic.eb.com/levels/collegiate/article/Christianity/105945>.

² Gregory A. Smith et al., "Decline of Christianity in the U.S. Has Slowed, May Have Levelled Off: Findings from the 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study," *Pew Research Center*, February 26, 2025, accessed December 14, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2025/02/26/decline-of-christianity-in-the-us-has-slowed-may-have-levelled-off/>

³ "Easter," *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford University Press, 2014, <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199659623.001.0001/acref-9780199659623-e-1828?rskey=3sLjUT&result=1856>. Accessed December 15, 2025.

⁴ Christian Roy, "Easter (Christianity)," in *Traditional Festivals: A Multicultural Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), pp. 121-128.

⁵ 5 U.S.C. §6103.

typically observe Easter as an official holiday, although some do recognize other days related to Easter with early or all-day closings. For example, state offices are closed or observe a few hours on the Friday before Easter (Good Friday) in Connecticut, California, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina, North Dakota, Tennessee, Texas and Wisconsin.

Each year the U.S. President hosts an Easter Egg Roll at the White House with President Rutherford B. Hayes being the first in 1878.⁶

Christmas

Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus Christ. The holiday is often observed by special church services and community-wide activities, such as caroling. Although Christmas celebrations can vary, some common celebration customs shared in the United States are Christmas plays or pageants, decorating and displaying Christmas trees, and gift-giving.⁷

Christmas is always observed on December 25. Some Eastern Orthodox traditions use the Julian calendar and celebrate Christmas on January 7 due to the differences between the Julian and Gregorian calendars. This date was chosen sometime in the fourth century A.D. and is generally considered to have been chosen to supersede non-Christian holidays commonly celebrated at the same time of year.⁸

Christmas is a federal holiday. It was one of the first four holidays established by federal legislation.⁹ When the original legislation was signed into law in 1870, it was an unpaid holiday exclusively for federal employees in the District of Columbia. The push for this legislation was led mainly by commercial interests that “wanted certain holidays to be formalized.”

Occasionally, Presidents have issued executive orders closing all executive branch departments and agencies of the federal government on the day immediately preceding or following Christmas.

Congressional Recognition

Some Members of Congress make floor statements, issue press releases, or enter Extensions of Remarks into the Congressional Record to recognize federal holidays and observances. The following are examples of such statements.

Representative Mary Miller, “Celebrating Faith Month,” remarks in the House, Congressional Record, April 29, 2025.

Senator Chuck Grassley, “Orthodox Christmas,” remarks in Senate, Congressional Record, January 7, 2025.

Representative Chip Roy, “Christmas 1777,” remarks in the House, Congressional Record, December 10, 2024.

⁶ “A Timeless Tradition: The White House Easter Egg Roll,” The White House, accessed December 15, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/white-house-easter-egg-roll/>.

⁷ Christian Roy, “Christmas (Christianity),” in *Traditional Festivals: A Multicultural Encyclopedia*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2005), pp. 61-72.

⁸ “Christmas,” in *A Dictionary of Comparative Religion*, ed. S.G.F. Brandon (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), p. 195.

⁹ CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus

Representative John Carter, “Celebrating the Christmas Season,” remarks in the House, Congressional Record, December 6, 2023.

Representative Michael Guest, “The Christmas Story from the Gospel of Luke,” remarks in the House, Congressional Record, December 14, 2023.

Representative Jan Schakowsky, “Jan’s Plans and Pans – Passover/Easter Edition,” press release, April 17, 2022.

Presidential Recognition

From the White House Easter Egg Roll to the lighting of the National Christmas Tree, many Presidents have made remarks in relation to Christian holiday celebrations held at the White House. They have also issued statements recognizing the observance of Christian holidays. Some recent examples include

Easter

[Presidential addresses and remarks](#) – Donald J. Trump (2017 – 2021; 2025 -)

Presidential addresses and remarks – Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (2021-2025)

Presidential addresses and remarks – Barack H. Obama (2009-2017)

Presidential addresses and remarks – George W. Bush (2001-2009)

Christmas

Presidential addresses and remarks – Donald J. Trump (2017 – 2021; 2025 -)

Presidential addresses and remarks – Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (2021 – 2025)

Presidential addresses and remarks – Barack H. Obama (2009 – 2016)

Presidential addresses and remarks – George W. Bush (2001-2008)

Presidential proclamations and remarks from 1993 to the present are available through the govinfo service on the Government Publishing Office website. Earlier remarks (including selected audio and video clips) are available through The American Presidency Project, established by the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Historical and Cultural Resources

Numerous resources provide information on the history and celebration of Christian holidays. Some of these include

Library of Congress, “Congress’s Role in the Creation of the White House Easter Egg Roll,” this blog post highlights why the Easter Egg Roll went from Capitol Hill to the White House.

Library of Congress, “Easter Week Illuminations.” This blog post talks about several representations of Easter Week in the Library's collection.

National Archives, “With Easter Monday You Get Egg Roll at the White House,” this web article highlights the history of the Easter Egg Roll.

National Park Service, “National Christmas Trees Through the Years,” this webpage features the history of the National Christmas Trees with a timeline and historical narrative.

Library of Congress, “Highlighting the Holidays.” This series of blog posts discusses particular holiday symbols and traditions, mainly relating to Christmas. Additional blog posts can be found by searching for “Christmas” in the search box.

Library of Congress, “National Jukebox: Christmas.” This search returns all of the Christmas music hosted by the Library's National Jukebox project.

U.S. House of Representatives, “The Annual Easter Egg Roll at the Capitol.” Highlights congressional involvement in the evolution of the annual Easter Egg Roll.

U.S. House of Representatives, “The Origins of the Capitol Christmas Tree.” Short overview of the history of the Capitol Christmas Tree.

The Library of Congress Prints and Photographs section has many images of people celebrating Christmas and Easter in its online catalog.

Related CRS Reports

CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus

CRS Report R43539, *Commemorations in Congress: Options for Honoring Individuals, Groups, and Events*, by Jacob R. Straus et al.

CRS Report R48065, *Congressional Recognition of Commemorative Days, Weeks, and Months: Background and Current Practice*, by Jacob R. Straus

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