A LOOK AT THE WINTER HOLIDAYS OF MANY CULTURES

DePaul’s student body represents many different cultures, many of which celebrate major holidays in the winter months. To celebrate the season, Staff Council has compiled a list of these holidays.

Content is from this PBS URL unless otherwise noted. In addition to the content from PBS, we’ve included links to websites if you would like to learn more.

This year, there is not an Islamic religious holiday during December. To read more about various days which are significant in Islam, please see this link.

DECEMBER

8

BODHI DAY, ROHATSU (BUDDHISM)

This day marks the time when Prince Siddhartha Gautama, a spiritual teacher and founder of Buddhism, positioned himself under the Pipul tree and vowed to remain there until he attained supreme enlightenment. Buddhist traditions vary as to what Siddhartha’s experience was while meditating under the tree, but all agree that upon the rising of the morning star, he had experienced enlightenment and attained Nirvana: a state of being free from suffering and broken from the cycle of rebirth.

8 (SUNSET) – 16

HANUKKAH (JUDAISM)

Also known as the Festival of Lights, Hanukkah commemorates the 164 B.C.E. Maccabean recapture and rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. During this celebration, special readings and songs that focus on liberty and freedom are performed, and gifts are often given. Hanukkah lasts for eight nights, and on each night a candle from the Menorah is lit to represent the miracle of the eternal flame. Tradition has it that there was only enough consecrated olive oil to fuel the flame in the Temple for one day, but the oil miraculously burned for eight days, the time it took to prepare and consecrate fresh olive oil.

12

FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE (CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY)

In December of 1531, Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin saw visions of the Virgin Mary on the hill of Tepeyak near Mexico City. On December 12, Mary instructed him to ask church officials to build
a basilica in her honor in Mexico City. When Juan Diego asked for a sign, she placed roses in a blanket that he carried with him on his journey to the city. Upon arrival, he unrolled the blanket to find an image of Mary imprinted on the cloth. The Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe was built in her honor, and thousands of Catholics make pilgrimages there every year. This day is celebrated with festivals, dances and special masses.

22 or 23

**Dongzhi (Coming of Winter)**

To many Chinese, Dongzhi is as important as the Chinese New Year, if not more important. This is when family members gather and businesses close. Pastries and dumplings are prepared, the most popular being tangyuan, a tiny ball made of glutinous rice, cooked with vegetables and meat in soup. The word tangyuan is phonetically similar to the word tuanyuan (reunion). The whole family, sitting around the dinner table and enjoying hot tangyuan soup, is a familiar scene during Dongzhi.

25

**Christmas (Christianity)**

Christmas is the Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. The actual date of Jesus’ birth is unknown, but December 25th was made popular by Pope Liberius of Rome in 354 A.D. Although this day is celebrated by Christians throughout the world, traditions and practices vary within different cultures and communities. The day is often celebrated in prayer and song at church services, and gifts are often given to represent the gifts Jesus received from the three kings.

26

**Death of Prophet Zarathushtra (Zoroaster) (Zoroastrianism)**

This day commemorates the death of Zoroaster, an Iranian prophet and philosopher that founded Zoroastrianism. Zoroaster believed that the purpose of humankind was to always live truthfully, and to pursue constructive thoughts and deeds. Iranian followers of Zoroastrianism observe this day on December 26th, often through mourning and prayer. Parsi followers observe Zoroaster’s death in May.

26 – Jan 1

**Kwanzaa**

This holiday, created by the activist, author and professor Maulana Karenga in 1966, celebrates African-American heritage. Kwanzaa is derived from the Swahili term for “first fruits of harvest,”
and is often celebrated with feasts, sharing libations, and lighting candles in the kinara. The seven candles represent the seven principles of African heritage: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith).

31

**Oharae (Great Purification at Year’s End)**

Ending the year by exorcising its negative consequences in a great purification is observed in the emperor’s palace as well as at shrines all across the nation. Together with the niiname-sai and the tauæ-sai, the purification rituals are among those continuously performed since the very beginnings of the Japanese state.

31 December to 5 January

**Hatsumode (First Shrine Visit of the New Year) (Shintoism)**

Shrines throughout Japan welcome large crowds of people for a variety of both public and private rituals to ensure health, success, and prosperity for the coming year. This is part of Oshogatsu (New Year’s celebrations), one of Japan's two major holidays. The other major holiday is Obon, observed in either July or August to acknowledge and welcome the return of ancestral spirits.

31

**Watch Night (Christianity)**

Watch Night traditionally began with the Moravians, a small Christian denomination from what is the present-day Czech Republic, in the early 1700s. Participants attend special church services to reflect upon and give thanks for the previous year, and pray for the future. Watch Night became a significant event for African-American Christian communities after the celebration of 1862, the evening before the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect and abolished slavery.

**Maidyarem Gahambar (Zoroastrianism)**

Gahambars are seasonal festivals, and occur six times per year in the Zoroastrian calendar. Maidyarem Gahambar is the mid-year winter feast and, like the other Gahambars, is celebrated for five days.
Holidays Observed by Indigenous American People include:

**LATE NOVEMBER OR EARLY DECEMBER**

**SHALAKO CEREMONIAL (PUEBLO)**

The Pueblo Indians at the Zuni Pueblo in southwestern New Mexico celebrate this impressive ceremonial dance in the fall of each year. Intended to commemorate the dead and entreat the gods for good health and weather in the coming year, the ceremony involves all-night ritual dances and chants, and the blessing of houses. The dance features towering masked figures with beaks who represent the rainmaker’s messengers. They wear kachina regalia that is ten feet tall. As they move from house to house through the Pueblo, the dancers make clacking noises to indicate the houses receiving blessings. They stop at the designated houses, remove their masks, perform chants, and share food with the inhabitants. Others taking part in the ceremony represent rain gods, whip-carrying warriors, and the fire god.

**ON OR NEAR THE WINTER SOLSTICE**

**SOYAL (HOPI)**

Among the Hopi Indians, the Soyal period was observed for the purpose of helping the sun turn from its departure and begin its return. The rituals associated with Soyal were held in the kiva (ceremonial rooms) and marked by fasting and silence.

**DECEMBER 21**

**GUATEMALAN WINTER SOLSTICE (PALO VOLADORE) (MAYAN)**

In Guatemala, Mayan Indians honor the sun god they worshipped long before they became Christians with a dangerous ritual known as the palo voladore, or “flying pole dance.” Three men climb to the top of a 50-foot pole. As one of them beats a drum and plays a flute, the other two each wind a long rope attached to the pole around one foot and jump. If they land on their feet, it is believed that the sun god will be pleased and that the days will start getting longer.”

This Content is from the following sources:


**PACIFIC ISLANDERS**

The efforts of Christian missionaries in the Pacific Islands are reflected in the faiths of Pacific-Islander Americans. There are 8000 Pacific Islander members of the United Methodist Church in the United States. The church has 23 Pacific Island United Methodist congregations and 97 Pacific Island clergy. Catholics accounted for 4500 of the 20,000 Tongans living in the United States. Fijian-Americans and Tahitian-Americans are also adherents of both faiths.

While denominations vary, Pacific Islander tradition is interwoven with religious services. Worshippers value a service in their native language. Tongan-American ministers and congregation usually wear ta'ovalas.

In Tonga, where the king is the head of the church, religious observances affect the calendar. Government and shops close down for Good Friday. Tongans in the United States try to take that day off. Tongans in both countries attend services leading up to the sunrise Easter service. Government also takes a vacation that extends from the week before Christmas until the first week in January. Tongan Americans know that this is the best time to visit family in the South Pacific.

Pacific Islanders of all faiths participate in out-reach programs. The Catholic St. Joseph Women's Association in San Bruno, California, was formed in 1977 to raise funds for seminarians studying for the priesthood in Tonga. In 1984, the association began issuing scholarships and awards for educational and athletic accomplishments.”