

Christmas in Russia



Christmas in Russia is celebrated on 25 December in the Julian calendar followed by the Eastern Orthodox Church and 7 January in the Gregorian calendar. It is considered a high holiday by the church, one of the 12 Great Feasts, and one of only four of which are preceded by a period of fasting. Traditional **Russian Christmas** festivities start on Christmas Eve, which is celebrated on 6 January [or 24 December].

Christmas was largely erased from the Russian calendar for much of the 20th century due to the Soviet Union's anti-religious policies, but many of its traditions survived, having been transplanted to New Year's Day. Although Christmas was re-established as a holiday in the 1990s after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it is still eclipsed by New Year's Day, which remains the most important Russian holiday.

In Russia, the Christmas holiday became an official celebration ordered by Prince Vladimir in the late 10th century. However, given the early Christian community of Kievan Russians, the celebration may have a longer history.



In the 19th century, a lavishly decorated Christmas tree became central to the holiday, a tradition originally imported by Nicholas I's wife, Alexandra Feodorovna, from her native Prussia. The tradition of giving gifts to children on Christmas took root around the same time. Christmas gifts were traditionally brought by Ded Moroz (or Grandfather Frost), the Russian counterpart of Saint Nicholas or Father Christmas, albeit a little taller and less stout. Rooted in Slavic folklore, Ded Moroz is accompanied by his beautiful granddaughter, Snegurochka (or the Snow Maiden), who rides with him on a sleigh pulled by a trio of horses.

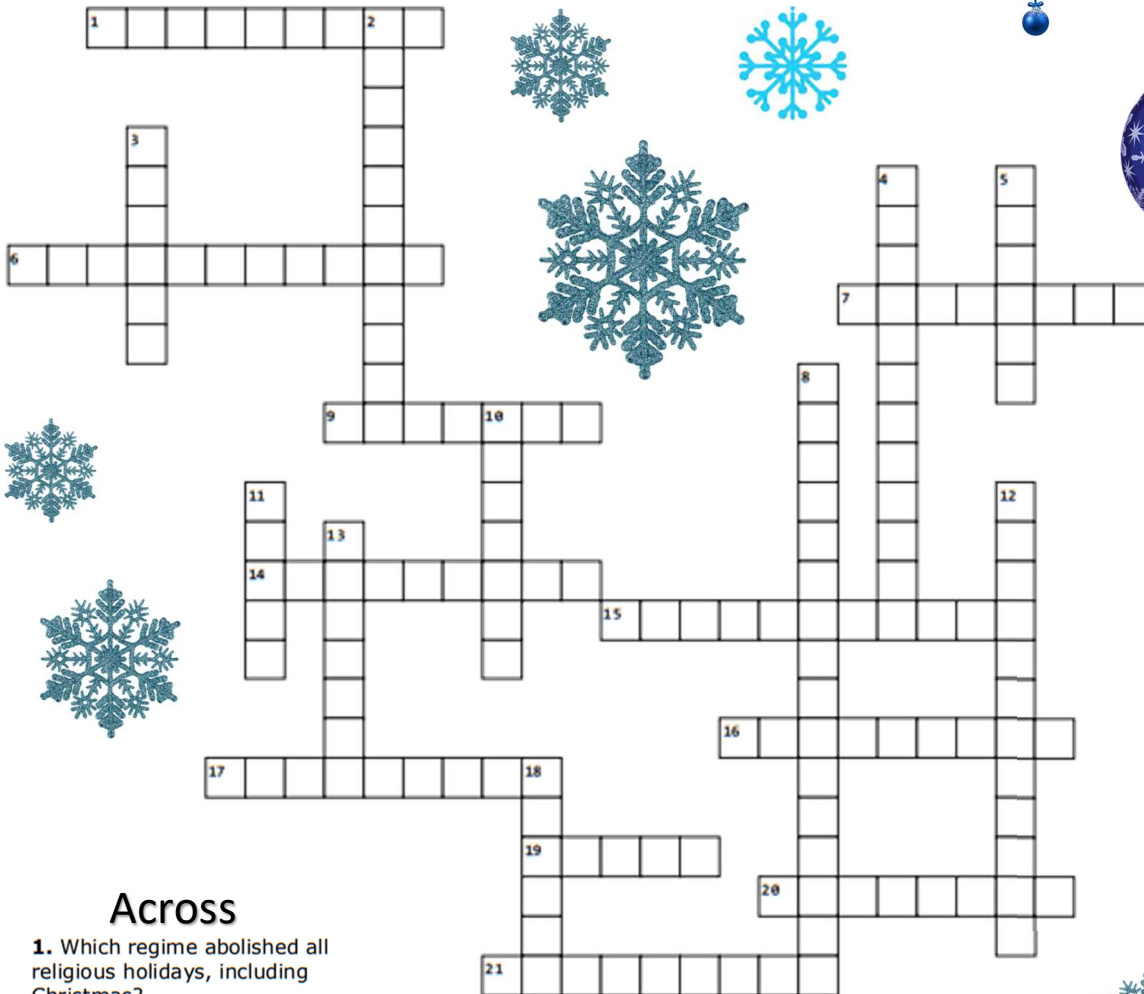
During the early Soviet period, all religious celebrations were discouraged under the official state policy of atheism. The Bolsheviks argued that Christmas was a pagan sun-worshipping ritual with no basis in scientific fact and denounced the Christmas tree as a bourgeois German import. In 1929, all religious holidays, including Christmas, were abolished by a decree of the Stalinist regime. However, in a surprising turn of state politics in 1935, many Russian Christmas traditions were revived as part of a secular New Year's celebration after Joseph Stalin's advisers convinced the *Vozhd* (or supreme leader) of the proletarians' need for a break from their hard work in the middle of a long, cold winter.



The Christmas tree was repurposed as a "New Year's fir tree" to be admired by all children throughout the Soviet Union, including those in republics that had not historically celebrated Christmas due to their different religious traditions, such as the Central Asian ones. Other Russian Christmas attributes and traditions, such as gift-giving, Ded Moroz's visits and Christmas decorations, lost their religious significance and became associated with New Year's celebrations, which were secular in nature.

In 1991, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Christmas was reinstated alongside other religious holidays.

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Across

1. Which regime abolished all religious holidays, including Christmas?
6. What happened to the USSR before Christmas was finally reinstated alongside other religious holidays in the 1990's?
7. Which Russian prince ordered the Christmas holiday to become an official celebration, in the late 10th century?
9. In which month is the Russian Christmas festivities celebrated?
14. Which calendar is followed by Western European churches?
15. To which holiday have many surviving Christmas traditions been transplanted to?
16. Who first introduced decorated Christmas trees to Russia?
17. What did the Bolsheviks think of the Christmas tree?
19. What is the Russian term for supreme leader?
20. Who traditionally brought Christmas gifts to Russians?
21. Which regime repurposed the Christmas holidays in the 1930's?

Down

2. Who usually accompanies Moroz Ded?
3. What pulls Grandfather Frost's sleigh?
4. Who needed a break from their hard work in the middle of a long, cold winter?
5. Which calendar is followed by the Eastern Orthodox Church?
8. What is another name for Moroz Ded?
10. What was the official religion policy during the early Soviet period?
11. What did the Bolsheviks think of Christmas?
12. How was the Christmas tree repurposed, to be admired by all children throughout the Soviet Union.
13. How did religious Russian Christmas traditions change?
18. Whose anti-religious policies largely erased Christmas from the Russian calendar for much of the 20th century.

