

Christmas in the North of India

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Christmas is the biggest celebrated Christian festival in India which brings a spirit of festivity not only for the Christian alone but for the people of all faiths. In many places buildings and streets are lighted up on the Christmas Eve. Christmas cards, decoration materials, Christmas cakes and gift items are sold at many places mostly by non-Christian shop keepers.

Most Christian families start preparing for Christmas quite early. People clean their houses and those who can afford even apply a fresh coat of paint to the walls. Christmas cards are sent to friends, relatives and people of importance. New clothes are bought if not for all at least for the children. Carol rounds begin about 15 days before Christmas day. Members of the church go from house to house singing Christmas carols and sharing the spirit of happiness and joy. At each house the carol group sing and pray with the families and have some snacks (usually tea/coffee, cake, peanuts etc) before moving to the next house. They cover 10 to 15 families each evening.

Shortly before Christmas, families exchange cakes and cookies as a symbol of love and affection. Schools and colleges organize Christmas programmes for the students which may include a carol service and a nativity play. Many schools in Punjab which may not have even a single Christian student or teacher also quite enthusiastically hold Christmas functions and celebrate it in a most lavish style.

The midnight service for Christmas usually begins at 10.00pm on the eve of Christmas day and continues till midnight. Then the birth of Jesus Christ is announced by bursting fire crackers and use of fire works. It is attended both by the Christian and non Christian communities. Scores of Hindus, Sikhs and people of other faiths come to whisper their prayers in the church, confident that their Prayer will be answered without any regard to the faith to which they belong. This is followed by the watch night service till 4am. In the villages after the watch night service people go through the streets proclaiming the good news of the birth of Christ.

On the morning of the Christmas day people gather in the Church for the Christmas communion service. The day is spent by visiting friends and relatives, enjoying the cake and cookies and sharing the goodies. Christmas processions are carried out and one can be dressed up Santa Claus on decorated chariots/horse carts riding the streets of the city.

At the Diocesan headquarters at Amritsar a small Christmas service is held which is followed a gift exchange programme and dinner. Friends from the all over the diocese are invited for this gathering. Relevant portions from Hindu, Sikh and Muslim scriptures are read by workers belonging to respective faith communities.

Indeed, Christmas is a time for getting together and rekindling the spirit of the church. In India there are many who don't know the joy of Christmas and yet more who can not afford it. It is our duty and pleasure to reach out to them and share the love of Christ.

With the spread of globalization, there has been a change in the way people celebrate Christmas. Greeting cards have now been replaced by e-greetings and simple SMS is enough to convey one's love and Christmas greetings. The change in the life style of people has impacted our mode of Christmas celebration which is not free from the market economy. However, efforts are made to conserve the social values of Christmas Celebration that enhances inter-personal relationships and inter-faith good will.

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