

How I Celebrate Christmas – Transcript

Hello, my Lovely Learners, and Merry Christmas! Ho, ho, ho! In today's episode, I'm going to tell you all about how I celebrate Christmas with my family. Also, I'm open for new students, so if you want to book a private class with me, go to [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes). Keep listening to learn English!

Welcome to Easy Stories in English, the podcast that will take your English from OK to Good, and from Good to Great. I am Ariel Goodbody, your host for this show. Today's episode is a conversation about how I celebrate Christmas. As always, the transcript and PDF are available at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com), and you can find the link in the description.

So, if you're watching me on YouTube, you will notice a very different background, and that's because I've moved house. Woo! I can tell you though, the moving process was not as happy as that. Now, the actual moving itself went very well, but I didn't give myself enough time to rest afterwards, and I ended up having to take two days off work for stress. So that wasn't so fun.

And if you can't see my new place, you can hopefully at least hear, the sound quality is a bit better, because when I recorded in my old office, back before I moved, I was next to a loud main road, so the sound wasn't great. But here in North London, it's much quieter, much more peaceful, and I'm really happy with my room. I really like it. It feels cozy.

Now, not having a separate bedroom and office is not great, as if you're watching the video, you can currently see my bed, which, uh, I don't know, it motivated me to make my bed at least... So, thank you? But in the long term, I might want a bit more privacy. I'm thinking of getting a divider, a kind of screen to put between me and the bed.

And if you're really sharp eyed and you know a lot about the podcast, if you're a long time listener, then you will recognize the stuffed animals, the teddy bears at the back on my bed. There is, from the left to the right, Alejandro the red dragon, Simba the lion, and Takeshi the purple dragon. And if you're just listening and you're thinking, I can't see any of these dragons or lions, and I want to see Ariel's teddy bears, well, that's a good opportunity to go look for Easy Stories in English on YouTube. And subscribe to the channel, like the videos, and leave a comment.

But enough about moving because it's the most wonderful time of the year. That's right, it's Christmas.

Now, Christmas is obviously a very important holiday for Christians. Christmas has a big religious importance. But in the UK, Christmas is also very important culturally. If you've seen any British films from Christmastime, last episode I talked about Bridget Jones Diary, you'll know that we're quite similar to the Americans. We love Christmas trees, Christmas lights, we love the spirit of Christmas.

I guess Christmas is quite international now, lots of different people celebrate it. But what makes the UK different is we have some quite specific Christmas traditions, which I'm going to talk about in this episode. Of course, there are different ways of celebrating Christmas, even within the UK. So I'm going to tell you about how I typically celebrated Christmas with family when I was younger, but that doesn't mean that all British people celebrate the same. So if I tell you about a certain tradition or a certain type of food, not everyone necessarily does the same things.

So one of the interesting things with Christmas is that it's celebrated on different days in different parts of the world. In the UK, we do all of the celebrating on the 25th of December,

but in some parts of Europe, they celebrate on the 24th. Or maybe they do a bit on the 24th, a bit on the 25th, and in some places they even celebrate Christmas or they at least do the gift giving on the 6th of January. Because the 6th of January is the Ascension, when Jesus ascended into heaven, I think?. Let me just check that.

Okay, never mind, I just checked and it's not the Ascension. The Ascension is after Easter, which makes sense, because Jesus was born on Christmas, so he didn't go straight to heaven. The 6th of January is the Epiphany, um, don't ask me why it's called the Epiphany. It's also known as the Day of the Three Kings, Three Kings' Day in some countries, because there were the three wise kings who visited Mary and Joseph and brought presents for baby Jesus. So I am Christian, but apparently my knowledge is not that good. So anyway, the important thing is in the UK, it's the 25th of December.

So I have quite a big family. My mum has seven siblings so we were quite lucky we could travel around for Christmas and stay with different relatives. We usually did one year at my grandparents and then the next year we would either stay at home and have cousins visit us or we would go and visit some of our cousins.

And when we had Christmas at my grandparents' it was always a really big affair. It was a big thing. Usually between 15 and 18 people celebrating together. So it was a full house. My grandmother really loved having everyone for Christmas but she didn't want to do all the work herself so she made a list of tasks and when we arrived for Christmas she gave all of us a task, a job to do. For example, you have to go and collect firewood from the garden to put in the fireplace. You have to prepare this dessert, and so on.

So I'm going to talk about Christmas at my grandparents' because for me that is the prototypical Christmas. That is the model of Christmas in my head. When I think of celebrating Christmas as a child, it was always at my grandparents' house.

So I think we usually drove up about the 22nd or 23rd and then of course on the night of the 24th all of the kids get very excited and I always found it so hard to sleep. So the night before Christmas is known as Christmas Eve. We also have New Year's Eve, which is the 31st of December.

So on Christmas Eve, the 24th, the kids are put to bed early, but they usually don't sleep early. Because the whole time, not only are you excited about presents and food the next day, but you're thinking, when I wake up, there's going to be a stocking full of presents at the bottom of my bed. Santa is going to visit in the night.

So a stocking is like a really long sock. Kind of like women wear stockings normally. They're like tights. Now you might have seen in American films these kind of short red stockings that look like socks that they hang on the fireplace. I think this varies a lot between families in the UK, but in my family, we never used those small stockings, we used like actual long socks, like really long, like leg length, and we put them at the end of the bed before the night, so before we went to sleep, and then when you wake up, Oh, Santa has visited and filled your stocking with presents.

And it's interesting talking to different families because I think in a lot of families, the stocking is quite small, but again, in our family, the stocking was a big deal. It was full of presents and it usually had specific things each year, like one DVD, one book, a bag of chocolate coins, which are what they sound like. They're coin shaped chocolates and they're wrapped in gold foil so they look like coins. It would maybe have a pair of socks, some underwear. And then finally, at the bottom, a chocolate orange.

Now, originally, my parents always put an actual orange at the bottom because it's something healthy after all that chocolate and all of the other unhealthy things on Christmas day. I think the orange thing is some kind of Christmas tradition. I think other people do that

as well. But then my mum found out that her sister had just started giving chocolate oranges. So chocolate oranges are a very popular Christmas food in the UK. Again, like it sounds, it's chocolate in the shape of an orange and it's divided into small pieces. And it's really fun because when you open it, all of the pieces are stuck together and to break them apart you hit the orange really hard on a table. So it's a really fun chocolate for children because you get to take this chocolate orange and bang it on a table and then eat it.

The company that makes chocolate oranges is called Terry's, so they're often called Terry's Chocolate Oranges, and there was a famous advertising campaign when I was a child. They got Dawn French, who is a British comedian, and they would show her eating a chocolate orange, and she would always say, It's not Terry's chocolate orange, it's mine.

I bought my lovely uncle Jim a delicious Terry's chocolate orange for Christmas. Uh, you know, I think he prefers socks. No, he would. He would. He would.

Terry's chocolate orange. It's not Terry's. It's mine.

So yeah, chocolate oranges at Christmas are very nostalgic for me.

So us kids would usually wake up about four or five in the morning, go crazy opening our stockings, compare what we got with each other, and then we would go downstairs, have a very healthy breakfast of chocolate coins and chocolate orange, and watch some TV. Usually there'd be some Christmas films on for kids. And then a few hours later, the adults would usually come downstairs a lot less enthusiastic and full of energy than the children.

Now in many families, many people I've talked to have told me that in their family, this is when they would go and open all of the presents under the Christmas tree. But my family is a bit more serious than that. And of course, Christmas is actually about celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. So we weren't allowed to open our presents until we did two things.

One was go to mass. So mass is religious service, a Christian service. So we would either go to midnight mass, which as it sounds is a mass at midnight, the night before. The problem with midnight mass is you fall asleep, and then you get home and you can't get to sleep after that. Or we would go to mass on Christmas morning. So first we would all go to mass, and when you're a young kid and you just want to open presents, going to church is the last thing you want to do. But now I really like this tradition. It's always a really positive energy in the room for mass and Christmas day. Everyone feels really full of hope.

And the other thing we always had to do was a go for a family walk. My family are big walkers, we love walking, and the idea was we're going to spend the rest of the day eating food, drinking, and being lazy, so let's at least get in some fresh air and exercise before we do that.

And then around 11 or 12, it was finally the main event: opening presents. As a child, this was the most exciting part of the day, not only because you got to open your own presents, but also the adults would often give one of the younger children the job of going to the Christmas tree, finding different people's presents, and delivering them to the people. Because like I said, if there's 15 or 18 people in the house, we can't all be gathering around the Christmas tree at the same time.

As an adult, however, the more enjoyable part of this is we would always open a bottle of champagne or a bottle of Prosecco. And, ah, yeah, I really love this part of the day. There was a period when I was a teenager where it got less fun because I didn't get as many presents as I did when I was a child, but now I just really enjoy the relaxation, seeing all the kids being really happy opening their presents, having a bit of bubbly. Bubbly means like champagne or prosecco, like a fizzy alcoholic drink. Having a bit of bubbly and sitting by the fire. Oh, it's just lovely.

Now the main meal of the day is eaten at different times depending on your family. Some families eat around one o'clock, some eat at three o'clock. We always had Christmas dinner in the evening around six or seven, so that left quite a big gap of time between opening presents and having dinner. Of course, for the people cooking, that was a very necessary gap of time. So for lunch, we would usually just have a very light lunch, some salad, some meats, maybe something like sushi or bread, just really simple food so we could save our appetites for dinner.

Every year the current monarch of the UK gives a speech. I say monarch because when I was a child it was always the Queen's speech. The Queen would appear on TV at 3pm and give a speech, talk to the country and actually the entire Commonwealth. So the Commonwealth is all of the countries that are, uh, technically part of the UK because of the history of colonization. Um, Canada, for example, is part of the Commonwealth.

Happy Christmas. 25 years ago, my grandfather broadcast the first of these Christmas messages. Today is another landmark, because television has made it possible for many of you to see me in your homes on Christmas Day. My own family often gather round to watch television, as they are at this moment, and that is how I imagine you now. I very much hope that this new medium will make my Christmas message more personal and direct.

So the Queen's speech is actually not something we cared about that much in my family. I don't think I ever really watched it growing up. Some people would watch it, but I know in some families at 3pm everyone is like, okay, gather round, it's the Queen's speech. Although now because the Queen has passed away it's of course the King's speech. King Charles gives a speech and he is Um, less charismatic than the Queen. He's not as interesting or nice as the Queen, so I don't imagine I'll be watching the King's speech this year, but maybe I will, because I feel like it's quite important in terms of British culture and politics.

One thing my mum always makes sure to listen to on Christmas Day is Carols at King's. So Christmas carols are songs that we sing at Christmas. In some places people travel around and knock on people's doors and sing carols to them. There are often carol services at churches where they raise money.

So King's is King's College Cambridge. It's one of the colleges at Cambridge University. King's is actually where I studied in Cambridge and King's has probably the most famous choir in the country. So there are students who are singers, who are choir singers, and if they study at King's and they are in the choir, the college pays for their entire degree, they pay for all of their studies, because they have to go to choir practice and sing in the church every single day.

So Carols at King's is a televised carol service. It is a singing service on TV from King's College Cambridge, where they sing a lot of classical carols and it's very beautiful. And my mum loves listening to it while she cooks on Christmas day.

Usually around 4 or 5pm the adults will have a gin and tonic. I have to say a gin and tonic or a G&T is one of my favourite cocktails and I especially associate it with my family and being at home for Christmas. Then, around 6 or 7pm, it's the main event food wise, I guess, I already said the presents were the main event, but this is what I'm waiting for this year. This is the thing I'm really excited about, and that is Christmas dinner.

Now, here's where things vary quite a bit between families. There are certain things that everyone does, but my family does a lot of extra things for Christmas dinner, which when I tell people about it, they're often quite surprised.

So the main thing that almost everyone does for Christmas dinner is turkey. I'm not talking about the country. Turkeys are birds. They come from North America and they go

[gobble gobble]. And we typically eat turkeys at Christmas, and in America they eat turkey for Thanksgiving.

Now inside the turkey, when you cook it, there is often stuffing. So stuffing is a mixture of like breadcrumbs, bits of bread, onions, celery, spices, and herbs. You stuff it, you push it inside the bird, and then you cook it, and it makes it really flavourful, it gives a lot of flavour to the stuffing, and I think it also keeps it moist, it keeps the water in so it doesn't get really dry. So we have turkey and stuffing.

Now, on turkey, you absolutely have to have gravy. So, gravy is a meat sauce. It's a sauce made with bones from the turkey. However, in my family, we also had two other kinds of sauce. We had cranberry sauce, which is a sweet sauce made from cranberries, a kind of red fruit, and then bread sauce.

Now, if you hear bread sauce and you're like, what? Yes, it's a very strange British thing. So bread sauce is made with milk, breadcrumbs, usually bits of old bread, and yeah, some spices, maybe onion. Usually my brother always had the job of making bread sauce because he loved bread sauce the most. If I remember correctly, it's pretty easy to make. You just put some old bread in a bowl of milk with like onion overnight, and then in the morning you mix it together. Um, but yeah, this is something that I think even in the UK a lot of people don't know, but it's a really nice traditional food, and it's a good way of using up old bread.

Another thing for me that is a Christmas essential is roast potatoes. Roast as in cooked in the oven. Now these aren't just any potatoes. In my family, we always roast them in duck fat. So in the fat from a duck, you. It's complicated. I don't remember. I think you boil them and then you wrap them in duck fat and then you roast them. But they come out so crispy. So delicious. Oh God, I love roast potatoes.

When it comes to vegetables, it varies a lot between families. I would say the three that you normally get are carrots, roast parsnips. Now parsnips look like carrots, but they're white. They're kind of like white carrots. They have a slightly different flavor. In a lot of European countries, parsnips are just like food you feed to animals. You would never eat them as a person, but in the UK, oh, look, you need to try roast parsnips. If you roast parsnips with honey and herbs, it's so delicious.

And then finally, Brussels sprouts. Brussels sprouts are like tiny little cabbages. Um, again, if you haven't tried Brussels sprouts, they might seem a bit strange. They're kind of a love it or hate it food. A lot of British people hate Brussels sprouts, but in my family, we kind of had this feeling of, you have to eat your Brussels sprouts because they are very good for you. However, they do have a reputation for making you fart. So, fart is when you release wind from your backside, from your bum, like that's a fart, or that could also be a fart. So, Brussels sprouts have a bit of a reputation for making you fart, but personally, I love them.

Finally, it wouldn't be Christmas dinner without pigs in blankets. Pigs in blankets are small sausages wrapped in bacon. So it's basically pork on pork, or pork wrapped around pork.

Now I am a vegetarian now. For most of the year I've been cooking vegetarian and vegan, but I'm probably going to make an exception this Christmas. Um, you know, it's just once a year, and I love sharing food with people, and it's very nostalgic food for me, and I know it's going to be delicious, and I also don't want to give too much extra work to my mum having to make different versions of everything.

So I will be eating meat this Christmas. Hopefully it won't disagree with my stomach too much. I did eat a burger for the first time a few weeks ago, and I felt sick the day afterwards, but it was a really heavy burger covered in cheese, so that probably didn't help.

And then it's on to dessert, and again for dessert things get very complicated. So the traditional Christmas dessert in the UK is Christmas pudding. So Christmas pudding is kind of shaped like an upside down bowl. It's kind of dome shaped. It doesn't look super lovely. It's kind of dark and brown. Basically it's a pudding made with sweet dried fruit, fresh fruit, butter, eggs, nuts, and either brandy or sherry, which are two types of alcohol.

A big part of Christmas pudding is the presentation, so it often comes with some holly on it. So holly is a kind of bush or tree. Holly leaves are very sharp, if you touch them you will hurt yourself, and they have red berries which you can't eat, but we often put a bit of holly on the Christmas pudding to decorate it.

And then before you eat it, you pour brandy on it and set it on fire, and it burns a beautiful blue colour. So it's a really beautiful, lovely traditional Christmas dessert, and if it's made well, it tastes really good.

In my family, we've also started having panettone at Christmas. So panettone is an Italian Christmas food. It's this kind of tall, sweet bread which sometimes has fruit inside. I think it just became kind of fashionable a few years ago to have panettone for Christmas in the UK as well. And I really recommend it. It's delicious. Obviously it's not British, but it's yummy.

And then throughout the entire Christmas period, we eat mince pies. So what are mince pies? Mince pies are small pies filled with mincemeat. Now, be careful, mincemeat these days doesn't actually have meat in it. Traditionally you would put old meat in it and you would use fruits and sweet things to cover the flavor. It was a way of using up old meat. But now mincemeat is not meaty at all. So it's different from beef mince, for example.

So modern mincemeat is made with chopped apples, dried fruit, alcohol, spices, and suet. Suet, S U E T, is a very strange ingredient. We use suet in very, very few things now, but basically suet is like a type of animal fat. It's a bit annoying because if you want to make mince pies you have to buy suet and then for the rest of the year it just sits in your fridge because you usually don't cook other things with it. You can get vegetable suet these days and I think a lot of people use vegetable suet because otherwise they wouldn't be vegetarian.

So around Christmas, leading up to Christmas, if you go to someone's house, if you go to a carol service, people will always serve mince pies. If you buy mince pies in the shop, they have quite a flaky pastry, like the pastry, the outside breaks apart easily in your hand, and it's very wet and sweet inside.

However, in my family, we have our own mince pie recipe, which is quite different. It has more of a hard biscuit like pastry. The outside is more like a biscuit, it doesn't flake. And the inside is a lot less sweet and wet, but you can taste the fruit more. Actually, I made a YouTube video on the Easy Stories in English YouTube channel where I cooked my family's mince pie recipe, or at least I tried to, but I made a crucial mistake which you'll have to watch the video to find out about. I'll put a link in the description to the video so you can see how we make mince pies in my family.

Mince pies and Christmas pudding can be a bit dry, so we traditionally have them with brandy butter. And brandy butter is basically just butter, sugar, and brandy. It's not subtle, but it is delicious. And with our family mince pies I love heating them up in the microwave and then putting brandy butter on top and then it all melts and it's all gooey and soft. And then if you want even more brandy, you can pour a bit of brandy on top.

As you may have guessed in my family, Christmas is quite an alcoholic affair. We drink quite a lot at Christmas. Um, but it's nice. I like it.

And as if that wasn't already enough dessert, at my grandparents' house, we would also have small bowls full of sweets on the table. So they would usually be really nice sweets like chocolate covered nuts, sugared almonds, Turkish delight, also known as lokum, and so on. So if you weren't full enough between the main course and dessert or after dessert, you could just snack on those little sweets, although we usually kept them there for several days. So there was no rush. You could eat all of the delicious sweets whenever you wanted. And my favorite was always Turkish delight.

Now one thing I can confidently say that every British household does at Christmas is open Christmas crackers. So Christmas crackers, you might have heard of them from Harry Potter, they're basically cardboard tubes with two ends and we put the Christmas crackers in front of our plates at dinner. And then at some point during the meal, maybe after dessert, you take the Christmas crackers and you play a game with them.

So you turn to the person on your left or your right, each of you takes one end of the Christmas cracker and you pull. And inside the cracker there's a little piece of paper that makes a bang. It explodes and goes bang. So it's really fun to pull crackers because you get this little, ooh, this little moment of surprise and then usually one person has the big end of the cracker and the other person has the small end. So the person who wins the big end of the cracker can open it and inside there is a prize.

So the prizes are always a paper crown. We have these colourful crowns made of tissue paper which then everyone wears for the rest of the meal. They usually have a bit of paper with really bad jokes on it, like terrible terrible jokes. They have to be bad jokes for some reason. If they're good jokes, it's just not the same. And then usually a little toy or a puzzle, something like that. Some years we got, um, adult Christmas crackers which had useful things in them, like small little tools, like maybe little screwdrivers. Screwdrivers are a tool you can use to turn screws.

And yeah, even though Christmas crackers are a bit rubbish, even though the jokes and the prizes are quite bad, they're just a very important part of the Christmas tradition. They're really good fun, I would say.

So usually by that point in the day, everyone is pretty drunk and exhausted. So you go to bed and then the next day, the 26th of December, is Boxing Day. Now Boxing Day isn't special. It just has a name in the UK for some reason. So on Boxing Day, you either play with your presents, laze around and watch TV, or you maybe go out and do something. Many families go and watch a film or go shopping because there are often sales after Christmas. In my family, we often drove somewhere to meet some other relatives and then we would all go for a family walk.

And basically, that's Christmas. After that, you have those awkward days between Christmas and New Year's, where you don't really have anything to do, so you're just kind of lazing around the house. And the weather's usually pretty horrible, but this year, I, I just can't wait for Christmas. I'm so excited. I'm looking forward to the rest time. I'm looking forward to reading books. I'm looking forward to seeing my family and I'm really looking forward to the food and drink. I need it.

So, I hope you enjoyed this episode. I hope you found it useful. I want to say thank you to all of you for being such lovely learners this year. I would really love to hear how your English has improved over this year, how the podcast has helped you. So please do leave a comment at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com). Again, the link to the transcript is in the description, and you can go leave a comment at the bottom of the transcript, or on YouTube. You could leave a review on Spotify. Anything you can do like that would really help me and also warm my heart.

Thank you again for listening to Easy Stories in English, and I will remind you, you can go and book classes with me at [EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes](https://www.EasyStoriesInEnglish.com/Classes). What a fantastic way to start the new year, improving your English. Have a fantastic Christmas and a Happy New Year, and I'll see you soon. Bye.