



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 22, 2017

Pew Survey: Christmas Celebration Becoming Less Religious

If you think the holiday season is growing more secular, you're not alone. A recent survey conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 56 percent of Americans think the Christmas season is less religious than in the past, a trend that is troubling to only 25 percent of those surveyed.



The same study found that fewer numbers of Americans believe that Christian holiday displays should be allowed on government property. Of those surveyed this year, 37 percent approve of Christian displays such as nativity scenes at government facilities, down from 44 percent in 2014.

As for holiday greetings, the numbers of those who would prefer a religious greeting such as "Merry Christmas" over a secular one like "Happy Holidays" has gone down over the past decade. More than 50 percent of those surveyed said how they are greeted by businesses and others doesn't matter, compared to those surveyed in 2005, when 45 percent said they didn't care about the type of holiday greeting they received.

By contrast, in the most recent survey, only 32 percent said they would prefer "Merry Christmas," down significantly from 2005, when 43 percent said they preferred a Christian holiday greeting.

Perhaps most troubling is the finding that fewer Americans than ever believe the core biblical truths of the Christmas story. According to the Pew survey, only:

- 66 percent of Americans believe in the virgin birth of Jesus, down from 73 percent in 2014.
- 75 percent believe that Jesus was laid in a manger, down from 81 percent in 2014.
- 68 percent believe that wise men, guided by a star, brought gifts to the baby Jesus, down from 75 percent in 2014.
- 67 percent believe that angels announced the birth of Jesus to shepherds, down from 74 percent in 2014.

"There has been a noticeable decline in the percentage of U.S. adults who say they believe that biblical elements of the Christmas story — that Jesus was born to a virgin, for example — reflect historical events that actually occurred," noted the Pew report. "And although most Americans still say they mark the occasion as a religious holiday, there has been a slight drop in recent years in the share who say they do this."

Specifically, the Pew survey found that while 90 percent of Americans celebrate Christmas in some manner, such celebrations are growing less religious by the year. Of those surveyed, 55 percent claimed to observe Christmas as a religious holiday, compared to 58 percent in 2013.

"To be sure, while the public's commemoration of Christmas may have less of a religious component now than in the past, the share of Americans who say they celebrate Christmas in some way has hardly budged at all, noted the Pew report. In fact, a little over 50 percent of those surveyed said they would attend a church service on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, down from 54 percent in 2013.



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Responding to the survey, the Reverend James Martin of the Jesuit magazine *America*, told the Religious News Service: “It’s not surprising, that as the culture grows more secular, fewer people find the Nativity story authentic, or even meaningful.” He added, however, that for Christians, believing the biblical account about Jesus “is essential. The Incarnation is one of the key beliefs of Christianity. Many people find it hard to believe: God becoming human, after all, is hard to fathom. But we have a God who is, at heart, mystery, and therefore unfathomable.”

Similarly, Ed Stetzer of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College said that “too many people think Christmas is about a mall and not a manger. On the upside, and Christians always look at the upside, as fewer people celebrate Christmas without knowing the story of Christ, we have the opportunity to tell them why Jesus came, why he lived and died, and ultimately that he rose again — changing everything for Christians, not just one day.”

The Pew report was based on 1,503 phone interviews with adults 18 years and older throughout all 50 states, with research conducted November 29 through December 4, 2017.



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