

AColyte

SEPTEMBER 2013

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College



THIS is where we **ARE**
NOW is when we're **HERE**
We **KNOW** what to **DO**

AColyte

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College

Rev. John Williams, Ph.D., Editor

900 N. Grand Ave.

Suite 61647

Sherman, TX 75090

903.813.2220

jwilliams@austincollege.edu

WHAT IS AN *AColyte* AND WHY DO I HAVE ONE?

Welcome to the first edition of the *AColyte* for the 2013-14 school year. This journal is intended to provide a forum for the Austin College community to discuss theological issues and keep up with what's going on in our various Religious Life programs.

We operate with a fairly broad definition of theology around here. As far as we're concerned, anybody who spends time thinking about which things matter more than other things is a theologian. That probably even includes you.

The use of the term "*AColyte*" for our title is based on our hope that, like an acolyte who lights candles in a worship service, we can also be "bringers of light," or "bringers of flame," or instruments to help "lighten things up." If nothing else, we can promise to provide ample opportunities to practice the virtues of patience and forgiveness.

Feel free to contact [John Williams](#) if you have questions or comments or corrections.

FIRST WE SERVE

Before they ever went to class,
the Austin College Class of 2017
prepared

17,880 meals

To send to hungry families in a
remote area of the Mosquito
Coast in Honduras.

THANK YOU!!

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

Summer 2013

From Chicago to Berlin to Lutherstadt-Wittenberg
But Never Completely Away from Sherman

*Someday I'm gonna leave this dirty little town
Where the talk is cheap on the dirty little streets
And the trees are dying underneath a sky that's purple and brown
--Kieran Kane*

*This town is my town
Alright?
Love or hate it it don't matter
'Cause I'm gonna stand and fight
This town is my town
She's got her ups and downs
But love or hate it it don't matter
'Cause this is my town
--Michael Stanley*

I woke up in Chicago on June 12.

My wife, my kids, my parents, and I flew up there on June 11. We were scheduled to board an Air Berlin flight departing at 3:25pm on the 12th.

Because it was an international flight, the Air Berlin people had advised us to arrive at the airport three hours before our scheduled departure time. So we showed up at O'Hare Airport just after noon.

When we passed through security and got to the gate, we were informed that our plane had a minor maintenance issue and that completion of the necessary repairs would result in a delay of just over an hour before we would depart for Berlin.

I remember thinking at the time,

*No big deal.
For a nine-hour transatlantic flight,
I think we can wait an hour to be sure that everything's in good working order.*

After our originally-scheduled departure time of 3:25pm – but *before* our actual departure time after the repairs – a series of huge thunderstorms developed and struck the Chicago area.

O'Hare was closed to all traffic for just over three hours. The delay caused the cancellation of several flights, which meant that hundreds of long-distance travelers had to find hotel rooms for the night in the area around the airport.

We figured that stuff just happens sometimes when you travel. We'd take off a couple hours late and arrive in Berlin at 10 or 11 in the morning instead of the 7:00am that was printed on our tickets.

Then—just after 6pm—a nervous Air Berlin agent got onto the microphone at our gate and told us that—since our flight was going to be delayed for over three hours—the legal limit of the time that the flight crew could remain in the air before their mandatory rest period would expire while we were somewhere above the Atlantic.

So they canceled our flight until 2:30pm the next day.

They didn't have a backup crew.

And since the airport had already been closed for three hours the closest available hotel rooms were 40 miles away—at least a \$200 cab ride.

So we hunkered down, tried to get comfortable, and spent 26 hours in O'Hare Airport.

After I finished reading everything I had brought with me to read, I decided to spend a few minutes thinking about what I could write in the first *AColyte* for 2013-14.

I write these little rambles four or five times a year. As the subject line says, they're about "Faith, Doubt, and Other Things at Austin College."

For some reason—around 2am in O'Hare Airport—I found myself reflecting on the passage of time. Go figure.

Last year was my 20th year working for Austin College. And as I sat there in O'Hare I thought about some of what it might mean for me to have come to work in Wynne Chapel every day for 20 years.

To be honest—although I have loved every day working here—my feelings about living in Sherman for that long have kind of waxed and waned.

Through the years, my attitude toward this town has been similar to various characters that I know from the Bible.

When I was offered the job as Associate Chaplain and Director of Church Relations in July of 1993, they asked me to commit to stay for at least three years. And I wasn't sure I was ready to do that.

You see—I had lived in Sherman from 1980 to 1984.

In those days, there was a factory down the street from AC that made mayonnaise and salad dressing and things like that. And—about once a month—when they cleaned their grease traps—that facility shared with the vicinity an odor that was as distinctive as it was unpleasant. That smell was still burned into my memory when they asked me to commit to stay for three years.

So was the sensation of never completely getting all the shampoo rinsed out of my hair;

and the disappointment of losing the NPR signal from Dallas just as I drove past the Sherman city limit sign.

Here comes a quick jump into the Bible (it happens often in *Acolytes*):

John 1:45-46 says:

*45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him,
"We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."*

46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

When I graduated from here in 1984, my attitude toward Sherman was a lot like Nathaniel's attitude toward Nazareth. Beyond Austin College, I wasn't really sure that anything good could come out of Sherman, Texas.

I mean, what can you say about a town that named a freeway after one of the stars of Hee-Haw (more about that below)?

So anyway--we moved up here.

And it's been great.

My kids were born here.

Sherman has definitely grown on me. I'm not planning on going anywhere else any time soon.

But still there are times when Sherman feels like the edge of the herd.

In Jeremiah 29, God speaks through Jeremiah to a community of exiled Jews in Babylon:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon:

Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce.

*Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons,
and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters;
multiply there, and do not decrease.*

***But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,
and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find
your welfare.***

For some of us, living and studying and working here is a little bit like being one of the exiles that Jeremiah was writing to.

The folks to whom Jeremiah was writing were somewhere other than where they had expected to be. They lived among people who didn't necessarily hate them, they were just indifferent. The exiled Jews were a tiny community in a large culture that didn't really understand them and didn't share their values and traditions.

I don't want to go too crazy talking about our status as exiles, but I think it's fair to say that not everyone in this town understands what we do or how or why we do it.

And in some ways it's even worse outside Sherman.

I bet lots of us have had a conversation that goes something like this:

Where are you going to college?

Austin College.

Yeah – Austin's a great town.

Every now and then, some of us feel like exiles.

It's been 33 years since I was a freshman here, but I still remember that "Homesick and Surrounded by Weirdos" feeling.

That's okay, but I think we need to pay particular attention to two other parts of Jeremiah's message when we start thinking that way.

When I read Jeremiah 29:8

*Do not let the prophets and the diviners
who are among you deceive you,
and do not listen to the dreams that they dream,*

I'm reminded of voices I've heard on this campus in the last 20 years saying some version of

We should be more like that old, prestigious, highly endowed school that is somewhere else.

or

Wouldn't it be better if our football games were on TV and we could give scholarships to good athletes?

Of course we should have aspirations and we should never simply stand pat. But we shouldn't spend any time or energy wishing we were some other school in some other place.

+++++

That's about as far as I got in my notes from O'Hare Airport. It was a decent three-point outline.

- Sometimes we're skeptical about Sherman like Nathaniel was skeptical about Nazareth.
- Sometimes we feel like exiles
- We need to beware of false prophets and diviners who tell us we'd be better off if we were a different sort of place.

Then, on the night of June 15, something kind of weird happened.

We were in Lutherstadt-Wittenberg, Germany.

That's the place where Martin Luther nailed 95 Theses to the door of the Castle Church.

That action, by that obscure monk, in that fairly obscure little town in eastern Germany had some huge effects on the world where you live today – but we'll talk about that in a minute.

On the night of June 15, we went to hear a band of young people who were playing Rock & Roll and Country Music in a tent just outside the tower of the Castle Church.

They were all pretty good and they had one real hell-on-wheels guitarist. They played songs by Elvis Presley, Carl Perkins, Patsy Cline, Johnny Cash, and folks like that.

I've spent most of my life listening to – and playing – some of those songs. And I remember thinking how cool it was that those songs – most of which were written in this part of the world – made it all the way to Germany, where they were obviously loved and ably performed by those young German musicians.

And that made me think of Buck Owens.

A few lines above, as I was ranting a little about Sherman, I asked, "What can you say about a town that named a freeway after one of the stars of Hee-Haw?"

"Hee-Haw" was a Godawful television show that was on from 1969-1997.

It was full of terrible jokes and (mostly) really awful country music.

They had an animated donkey who said "Hee Haw" at the beginning of every show.

The hosts were Roy Clark (actually a really talented banjo player) and Buck Owens.

Every week, Buck Owens did the almost impossibly difficult job of seeming dumber than everybody else on the show.

He had a Red, White, and Blue guitar and he could never sing a song or deliver a "comedy" line without mugging before the camera in a really discomforting way.

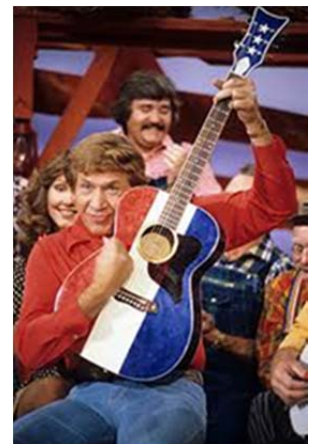
For years, I thought Buck Owens was the epitome of everything that was wrong with Country Music (cheezy, unsubtle, dumb).

Did you know that the portion of U.S. Highway 82 that goes through Sherman is the "Buck Owens Freeway?"

Buck Owens was born in Sherman Dadgum Texas.

Yikes.

But as my Liberal Arts education has progressed, I've learned a little more about ol' Buck.



Like Dwight Eisenhower's family a generation before, Buck's family didn't stay in Grayson County for long. When he was a small boy, his family joined the great migration of families who fled the Dust Bowl and went to California seeking a better life.

He grew up in California and began playing and recording country music there in the 1960s. He was one of the major developers of the "Bakersfield Sound" that strongly influenced the careers of people like Merle Haggard and Dwight Yoakam.

He's credited with developing several arrangement and recording techniques that made music sound better on the AM, transistor radios that were invented, introduced, and hugely popular in the 1960s.

In 1965, the Beatles (!) recorded Buck's song "Act Naturally" on their album "Help."

Did the Beatles record any songs written by somebody from *your* hometown?

Kind of makes Sherman at least a little bit cooler, doesn't it?

(To hear the Beatles version, go to: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-AsXFAP2tl>)

So I sat there at that little town in Germany where one man did something in 1517 that directly affects my life 496 years later.

- One of the results of Luther's action was that Protestant Christians insisted that the Bible had more authority than the structure of the Roman Church.
- That meant that all Christians were responsible to actually read the Bible.
- That meant that all Christians needed to be able to read.
- That meant that the Church needed to be in the education business.
- That's why churches started founding colleges.
- Like Austin College.

And I listened to that music that had been written by people who came from near where I came from being performed by people on a different continent and in a different century.

And I thought about how unlikely it was that the Beatles would have recorded a song written by a guy who was born in Sherman, Texas in 1929.

When I got home from Europe, I thought I was finished.

But I had barely gotten started. All of my reflections and ruminations turned out to be nothing but prologue.

By the time we got back to town on July 4, former Austin College First Lady **Sara Bernice Moseley** was in the hospital. She died on July 18.

Sara Bernice Moseley was a grand, grand woman – definitely one of my heroes.

She moved to Sherman in 1953 when her husband – Dr. John D. Moseley – became President of Austin College.

Last Spring, she attended her **60th** Austin College Commencement.

And I had the great honor – along with Dr. Hass and Rev. Neill Morgan of Covenant Presbyterian Church – of celebrating her amazing life as we participated in her funeral on July 25. Sara Bernice was remembered, honored, and celebrated all over the country for her leadership in the Presbyterian Church. And she will be quoted, revered, missed, and loved around here for a long, long time.

There are dozens of current Austin College students who benefit from various scholarship programs that either she and John D. established or that others created in her honor.

Even if you never knew her, she touched your life through the gifts she shared with Austin College.

Then, last month, Austin College alumnus and Senior Trustee **Ray Stephens** died. His Memorial service was here in Wynne Chapel.

During a long and distinguished career as an Ob/Gyn, Ray delivered over 10,000 babies – almost all of whom were born in Grayson County.

Hundreds of Austin College students who have studied abroad in the last decade have benefitted from Ray's generosity – as have homeless and at-risk youth from the entire Texoma area.

Both Sara Bernice and Ray were part of the Austin College community and part of the Sherman community for over 60 years.

They both touched countless lives through their service, generosity, graciousness, and faithfulness.

And they did it right here.

In this town.

Often on this campus.

And the world will never be the same.

Jeremiah 29:7 says

*seek the welfare of the city
where I have sent you into exile,
and pray to the Lord on its behalf,
for in its welfare you will find your welfare.*

That's a relevant lesson for us as we look to another year.

This is where we are.

Now is when we're here.

We know what to do.

Like Sara Bernice Moseley and Ray Stephens and so many more colleagues and students and alumni, we need to be about the business of ensuring that our individual and institutional giftedness is good news for this community and for every community touched by Austin College.

We need to be more concerned with transforming this community than transcending it.

We're all capable of being part of that work.

We have everything we need.

Right here.

Right now.

Let's get busy.

Until next time, I remain,

Just Another Cowboy Preacher,

Knowing we can change the world from here,

JOHN WILLIAMS

Chaplain

RELIGIOUS LIFE FAIR

**SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 8
12:30-2:00PM
IN THE WCC HALLWAY**

After lunch on Sunday September 8, come upstairs and meet representatives from AC Student Religious Organizations and religious congregations in Sherman.

SUNDAY NIGHT WORSHIP

WITH COMMUNION

6:00PM EVERY SUNDAY NIGHT

in the Small Chapel

(go in the Chapel entrance that's closest to the Wright Center—not the big doors under the bell tower)

followed by dinner in the home of John Williams or another professor or administrator.



B.S. in the W.C.

Bible Study

in the Wright Center

5:30 p.m. Tuesdays

beginning September 10

in the Moseley Room

(next door to the Dining Hall)

BRING YOUR TRAY AND YOUR BRAIN—
WE'LL PROVIDE THE REST

HELP NOW & HELP LATER

**AUSTIN COLLEGE
NON-PROFIT AND VOLUNTEER FAIR**

Thursday, September 12, 2013

11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

in the Wright Campus Center

Come learn about

**service opportunities,
meaningful internships; and
non-profit careers.**

Religious Dates and Festivals

2013-2014

JULY 8-AUGUST 7, 2013

Ramadan (Islam)

Ramadan ([Arabic](#): رمضان) (also written *Ramazán, Ramzán, Ramadhán, Ramdan, Ramadaan*) is an [Islamic](#) religious observance that takes place during the ninth month of the [Islamic calendar](#); the month in which the [Qur'an](#), according to tradition, was revealed to the [Prophet Muhammad](#). It is the Islamic month of [fasting](#), in which participating Muslims refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking from [sunrise](#) until [sunset](#). Fasting is meant to teach the [Muslim](#) patience, modesty and spirituality. Ramaḍān is a time to fast for the sake of [Allah](#), and to offer more prayer than usual. Muslims also believed through good actions, they get rewarded twice as much as they normally can achieve. During Ramaḍān, Muslims ask forgiveness for past sins, pray for guidance and help in refraining from everyday evils, and try to purify themselves through self-restraint and good deeds.

AUGUST 7-8, 2013

Eid (Islam)

Eid ul-Fitr or **Id-ul-Fitr** ([Arabic](#): العيد الفطر *Īdu l-Fiṭr*), often abbreviated to **Eid**, is a [Muslim holiday](#) that marks the end of [Ramadan](#), the Islamic holy month of [fasting](#). *Eid* is an Arabic word meaning "festivity", while *Fiṭr* means "to [break the fast](#)" (and can also mean "nature", from the word "fitrah"); and so the holiday symbolizes the breaking of the fasting period. It is celebrated starting on the first day of the Islamic month of [Shawwal](#).

SEPTEMBER 4-6, 2013

Rosh Hashanah (Judaism)

Rosh Hashanah occurs on the first and second days of [Tishri](#). In Hebrew, Rosh Hashanah means, literally, "head of the year" or "first of the year." Rosh Hashanah is commonly known as the Jewish New Year. This name is somewhat deceptive, because there is little similarity between Rosh Hashanah, one of the holiest days of the year, and the American midnight drinking bash and daytime football game.

There is, however, one important similarity between the Jewish New Year and the American one: Many Americans use the New Year as a time to plan a better life, making "resolutions." Likewise, the Jewish New Year is a time to begin introspection,

looking back at the mistakes of the past year and planning the changes to make in the new year.

No [work](#) is permitted on Rosh Hashanah. Much of the day is spent in [synagogue](#), where the regular daily [liturgy](#) is somewhat expanded. In fact, there is a special prayerbook called the machzor used for Rosh Hashanah and [Yom Kippur](#) because of the extensive liturgical changes for these holidays.

The common greeting at this time is L'shanah tovah ("for a good year"). This is a shortening of "L'shanah tovah tikatev v'taihatem" (or to women, "L'shanah tovah tikatevi v'taihatemi"), which means "May you be inscribed and sealed for a good year."

SEPTEMBER 13-14, 2013

Yom Kippur (Judaism)

Yom Kippur ([Hebrew](#): יוֹם כִּפּוּר, IPA: [jɔm ki'pur]), also known in English as the *Day of Atonement*, is the most solemn and important of the [Jewish holidays](#). Its central themes are [atonement](#) and [repentance](#). Jews traditionally observe this holy day with a 25-hour period of [fasting](#) and intensive [prayer](#), often spending most of the day in [synagogue](#) services.

Yom Kippur is the tenth and final day of the [Ten Days of Repentance](#) which begin with [Rosh Hashanah](#). According to Jewish tradition, God, or "YHVH" ("The One Who Was, Is and Shall Be"), inscribes each person's fate for the coming year into a "book" on Rosh Hashanah and waits until Yom Kippur to "seal" the verdict. During the Ten Days of Repentance, a Jew tries to amend his behavior and seek forgiveness for wrongs done against God (*bein adam leMakom*) and against his fellow man (*bein adam lechavero*). The evening and day of Yom Kippur are set aside for public and private petitions and confessions of guilt ([Vidui](#)). At the end of Yom Kippur, one considers one's self absolved by God.

SEPTEMBER 18-25, 2013

Sukkot (Judaism)

The Festival of Sukkot begins on [Tishri](#) 15, the fifth day after [Yom Kippur](#). It is quite a drastic transition, from one of the most solemn holidays in our year to one of the most joyous. Sukkot is so unreservedly joyful that it is commonly referred to in Jewish prayer and literature as Z'man Simchateinu **זְמַן סִמְחַתֵּינוּ**, the Season of our Rejoicing.

Sukkot is the last of the [Shalosh R'galim](#) (three pilgrimage festivals). Like [Passover](#) and [Shavu'ot](#), Sukkot has a dual significance: historical and agricultural. Historically, Sukkot commemorates the forty-year period during which the children of Israel were wandering

in the desert, living in temporary shelters. Agriculturally, Sukkot is a harvest festival and is sometimes referred to as Chag Ha-Asif ~~תשס"ג~~, the Festival of Ingathering.

The word "Sukkot" means "booths," and refers to the temporary dwellings that we are commanded to live in during this holiday in memory of the period of wandering. The Hebrew pronunciation of Sukkot is "Sue COAT," but is often pronounced as in [Yiddish](#), to rhyme with "BOOK us." The name of the holiday is frequently translated "Feast of Tabernacles," which, like many translations of Jewish terms, isn't very useful. This translation is particularly misleading, because the word "tabernacle" in the Bible refers to the portable Sanctuary in the desert, a precursor to the [Temple](#), called in Hebrew "mishkan." The Hebrew word "sukkah" (plural: "sukkot") refers to the temporary booths that people lived in, not to the Tabernacle.

Sukkot lasts for seven days. The two days following the festival, [Shemini Atzeret](#) and [Simchat Torah](#), are separate holidays but are related to Sukkot and are commonly thought of as part of Sukkot.

The festival of Sukkot is instituted in Leviticus 23:33 et seq. No [work](#) is permitted on the first and second days of the holiday. (See [Extra Day of Holidays](#) for an explanation of why the Bible says one day but we observe two). Work is permitted on the remaining days. These intermediate days on which work is permitted are referred to as Chol Ha-Mo'ed, as are the intermediate days of [Passover](#).

NOVEMBER 1, 2013

All Saints Day (Christianity)

All Saints' Day (officially the **Feast of All Saints** and also called **All Hallows** or **Hallowmas**^[1]), often shortened to **All Saints**, is a feast celebrated on November 1 in [Western Christianity](#), and on the first Sunday after [Pentecost](#) in [Eastern Christianity](#) in honour of all the [saints](#), known and unknown.

In terms of [Western Christian](#) theology, the feast commemorates all those who have attained the [beatific vision](#) in [heaven](#). Specifically, in the [Roman Catholic Church](#), the next day, [All Souls' Day](#), commemorates the departed faithful who have not yet been [purified](#) and reached [heaven](#).

NOVEMBER 3, 2013

Diwali (Hinduism)

Dīvali (or **Dīpāwali**, often written **Deepavali**) ([Tamil](#): தீபாவளி; [Telugu](#): దీపావళి) is a significant festival in [Hinduism](#), [Sikhism](#), [Buddhism](#), and [Jainism](#), and an official holiday in [India](#).^[1] Adherents of these religions celebrate Diwali as the *Festival of Lights*. They

light diyas—cotton-like string wicks inserted in small clay pots filled with coconut oil—to signify victory of good over the evil within an individual.

The five day festival of Divali occurs on the new moon between October 13 and November 14. On the [Hindu calendar](#) it is centered on the new moon day that ends the month of [Ashwin](#) and begins the month of [Kartika](#), beginning on the 13th day of the dark half of [Ashwin](#) (Ashwin 28th) and ending on the 2nd day of the bright half of [Kartika](#) (Kartika 2nd). The main day of celebration varies regionally.^{[2][3]}

NOVEMBER 27-DECEMBER 5, 2013

Hanukkah (Judaism)

Hanukkah ([Hebrew](#): חנוכה, pronounced [ˈχanuka], alt. **Chanukah**), also known as the **Festival of Lights**, is an eight-day [Jewish holiday](#) commemorating the rededication of the [Holy Temple](#) in [Jerusalem](#) at the time of the [Maccabean Revolt](#) of the [2nd century BCE](#). Hanukkah is observed for eight nights, starting on the 25th day of [Kislev](#) according to the [Hebrew calendar](#), and may occur from late November to late December on the [Gregorian calendar](#).

The festival is observed by the kindling of the lights of a special [candelabrum](#), the nine-branched [Menorah](#) or *Hanukiah*, one light on each night of the holiday, progressing to eight on the final night. An extra light called a [shamash](#) ([Hebrew](#): "guard" or "servant") is also lit each night for the purpose of lighting the others, and is given a distinct location, usually above or below the rest.

DECEMBER 25, 2013

Christmas (Christianity)

Christmas^[3] or **Christmas Day**^{[4][5]} is a [holiday](#), held on December 25 to commemorate [the birth](#) of [Jesus](#), the central figure of [Christianity](#).^{[6][7]} The date is not known to be the actual birth date of Jesus, and may have initially been chosen to correspond with either the day exactly nine months after some early Christians believed [Jesus had been conceived](#),^[8] the date of the [winter solstice](#) on the ancient Roman calendar,^[9] or one of various ancient [winter festivals](#).^{[8][10]} Christmas is central to the [Christmas and holiday season](#), and in Christianity marks the beginning of the larger season of [Christmastide](#), which lasts [twelve days](#).^[11]

Although nominally a [Christian](#) holiday, Christmas is also widely celebrated by many non-Christians,^{[1][12]} and many of its popular celebratory customs have [pre-Christian](#) or [secular](#) themes and origins. Popular modern customs of the holiday include gift-giving, [music](#), an exchange of [greeting cards](#), [church](#) celebrations, a special meal, and the display of various decorations; including [Christmas trees](#), [lights](#), [garlands](#), [mistletoe](#), [nativity scenes](#), and [holly](#). In addition, [Father Christmas](#), so named in parts of England and in France ('Pere Noel'), known as [Santa Claus](#) in many other areas, including

[Scotland](#), [North America](#), [Australia](#) and [Ireland](#)), is a popular [folklore](#) figure in many countries, associated with the bringing of gifts for children.^[13]

Because [gift-giving](#) and many other aspects of the Christmas festival involve heightened economic activity among both Christians and non-Christians, the holiday has become a significant event and a key sales period for retailers and businesses. The economic impact of Christmas is a factor that has grown steadily over the past few centuries in many regions of the world.

JANUARY 6, 2014

Epiphany (Christianity)

Epiphany ([Greek](#) for "to manifest" or "to show"), is a Christian [feast day](#) which celebrates the revelation of [God in human form](#) in the person of [Jesus Christ](#). Epiphany falls on January 6. ...Western Christians commemorate the visitation of the [Biblical Magi](#) to the [child Jesus](#) on this day, i.e., his manifestation to the [Gentiles](#). [Eastern Christians](#) commemorate the [baptism of Jesus](#) in the [Jordan River](#), his manifestation to the world as the [Son of God](#). It is also called [Theophany](#), especially by Eastern Christians.

MARCH 5, 2014

Ash Wednesday (Christianity)

In the [Western Christian calendar](#), **Ash Wednesday** is the first day of [Lent](#) and occurs forty-six days (forty days not counting [Sundays](#)) before [Easter](#). It is a [moveable feast](#), falling on a different date each year because it is dependent on the [date of Easter](#). It can occur as early as 4 February or as late as 10 March.

Ash Wednesday gets its name from the practice of placing ashes on the foreheads of the faithful as a sign of repentance. The ashes used are gathered after the Palm Crosses from the previous year's [Palm Sunday](#) are burned. In the liturgical practice of some churches, the ashes are mixed with the Oil of the [Catechumens](#)^[1] (one of the [sacred oils](#) used to anoint those about to be [baptized](#)), though some churches use ordinary oil. This paste is used by the minister who presides at the service to make the [sign of the cross](#), first upon his or her own forehead and then on those of congregants. The minister recites the words: "Remember (O man) that you are dust, and to dust you shall return", or "Repent, and believe the Gospel."

MARCH 15-16, 2014

Purim (Judaism)

Purim ([Hebrew](#): פורים *Pûrîm* "lots", related to [Akkadian](#) *pûru*) is a [festival](#) that commemorates the deliverance of the [Jewish](#) people of the ancient [Persian Empire](#)

from [Haman](#)'s plot to annihilate them, as recorded in the [Biblical Book of Esther](#) (*Megillat Esther*). According to the story, Haman [cast lots](#) to determine the day upon which to exterminate the Jews.

Purim is celebrated annually according to the [Hebrew calendar](#) on the 14th day of the [Hebrew month](#) of [Adar](#) (Adar II in leap years), the day following the victory of the Jews over their enemies; as with all Jewish holidays, Purim begins at sundown on the previous secular day. In cities that were protected by a surrounding wall at the time of [Joshua](#), including [Shushan](#) (Susa) and [Jerusalem](#), Purim is celebrated on the 15th of the month, known as *Shushan Purim*. Purim is characterized by public recitation of the Book of Esther (*keriat ha-megilla*), giving mutual gifts of food and drink ([mishloach manot](#)), giving charity to the poor (*mattanot la-evyonim*), and a celebratory meal (*se'udat Purim*);^[1] other customs include drinking wine, wearing of masks and costumes, and public celebration.

APRIL 14-22, 2014

Passover (Judaism)

Passover ([Hebrew](#), [Yiddish](#): פּֿֿסח, [Pesach](#) is a [Jewish](#) and [Samaritan](#) holy day and festival commemorating the Hebrews escape from enslavement in Egypt.

Passover begins on the 15th day of the month of [Nisan](#) (equivalent to March and April in Gregorian calendar), the first month of the [Hebrew calendar's](#) festival year according to the [Hebrew Bible](#)

In the story of [the Exodus](#), the Bible tells that God inflicted [ten plagues](#) upon the Egyptians before Pharaoh would release his Hebrew slaves, with the tenth plague being the killing of firstborn sons. The Hebrews were instructed to mark the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a spring lamb and, upon seeing this, the spirit of the Lord *passed over* these homes, hence the term "passover".^[2] When Pharaoh freed the Hebrews, it is said that they left in such a hurry that they could not wait for bread to rise. In commemoration, for the duration of Passover, no [leavened bread](#) is eaten, for which reason it is called "The Festival of the Unleavened Bread".^[3] [Matza](#) (unleavened bread) is the primary symbol of the holiday. This bread that is flat and unrisen is called Matzo.

APRIL 17, 2014

Maundy Thursday (Christianity)

Maundy Thursday, also known as "Holy Thursday" is the Thursday of [Passion Week](#), one day before Good Friday (the Thursday before Easter). Maundy Thursday is the name given to the day on which Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples, known as the Last Supper. Two important events are the focus of Maundy Thursday.

First, Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with His disciples and thereby instituted the

Lord's Supper, also called Communion ([Luke 22:19-20](#)). Some Christian churches observe a special Communion service on Maundy Thursday in memory of Jesus' Last Supper with His disciples. Second, Jesus washed the disciples' feet as an act of humility and service, thereby setting an example that we should love and serve one another in humility ([John 13:3-17](#)). Some Christian churches observe a foot-washing ceremony on Maundy Thursday to commemorate Jesus' washing the feet of the disciples.

The word "Maundy" is derived from the Latin word for "command." The "Maundy" in Maundy Thursday refers to the command Jesus gave to the disciples at the Last Supper, that they should love and serve one another.

APRIL 18, 2014

Good Friday (Christianity)

Good Friday, also called **Holy Friday**, **Black Friday**, or **Great Friday**, is a [holiday](#) observed primarily by adherents to [Christianity](#) commemorating the [crucifixion of Jesus](#) and his death at [Calvary](#). The holiday is observed during [Holy Week](#) as part of the [Paschal Triduum](#) on the [Friday](#) preceding [Easter Sunday](#), and often coincides with the Jewish observance of [Passover](#).

APRIL 20, 2014

Easter (Christianity)

Easter ([Greek](#): Πάσχα, *Pascha*) is the most important annual religious feast in the [Christian liturgical year](#).^[1] According to Christian scripture, [Jesus](#) was [resurrected](#) from the dead on the third day from his [crucifixion](#). Christians celebrate this resurrection on **Easter Day** or **Easter Sunday**^[2] (also **Resurrection Day** or **Resurrection Sunday**), two days after [Good Friday](#) and three days after [Maundy Thursday](#). The [chronology](#) of his death and resurrection is variously interpreted to be between [A.D.](#) 26 and 36. Easter also refers to the [season](#) of the church year called [Eastertide](#) or the [Easter Season](#). Traditionally the Easter Season lasted for the forty days from Easter Day until [Ascension](#) Day but now officially lasts for the fifty days until [Pentecost](#). The first week of the Easter Season is known as Easter Week or the [Octave of Easter](#). Easter also marks the end of [Lent](#), a season of fasting, prayer, and penance.

JUNE 3-5, 2014

Shavuot (Judaism)

Shavuot (or **Shavuos**, in [Ashkenazi](#) usage; [Hebrew](#): שבועות, lit. "Weeks") is a [Jewish holiday](#) that occurs on the sixth day of the Hebrew month of [Sivan](#) (late May or early June). Shavuot commemorates the anniversary of the day [God](#) gave the [Torah](#) to

[Moses](#) and the Israelites at [Mount Sinai](#). It is one of the *shalosh regalim*, the three Biblical pilgrimage festivals. It marks the conclusion of the [Counting of the Omer](#).

The date of Shavuot is directly linked to that of [Passover](#). The [Torah](#) mandates the seven-week [Counting of the Omer](#), beginning on the second day of Passover and immediately followed by Shavuot. This counting of days and weeks is understood to express anticipation and desire for the Giving of the Torah. On Passover, the Jewish people were freed from their enslavement to [Pharaoh](#); on Shavuot they were given the Torah and became a nation committed to serving God.

In the Bible, Shavuot is called the *Festival of Weeks* (Hebrew: השבועות חג, *Hag ha-Shavuot*, [Exodus 34:22](#), [Deuteronomy 16:10](#)); *Festival of Reaping* (Hebrew: הקציר חג, *Hag ha-Katsir*, [Exodus 23:16](#)), and *Day of the First Fruits* (Hebrew: הבכורים יום, *Yom ha-Bikkurim*, [Numbers 28:26](#)). The [Mishnah](#) and [Talmud](#) refer to Shavuot as *Atzeret* (Hebrew: עצרת, a solemn assembly), as it provides closure for the festival activities during and following the holiday of Passover. Since Shavuot occurs 50 days after Passover, Christians gave it the name [Pentecost](#) (πεντηκόστη, "fiftieth [day](#)").

According to Jewish tradition, Shavuot is celebrated in the Land of [Israel](#) for one day and in the diaspora (outside of Israel) for two days. [Reform Jews](#)^[1] celebrate only one day, even in the diaspora.

JUNE 8, 2014

Pentecost (Christianity)

Pentecost ([Ancient Greek](#): πεντηκοστή [ἡμέρα], pentekostē [hēmera], "the fiftieth day") is one of the prominent feasts in the [Christian liturgical year](#). The feast is also called [Whitsun](#), Whitsunday, Whit Sunday, Whitsuntide, especially in the [United Kingdom](#). Pentecost is celebrated seven weeks (49 days) after [Easter](#) Sunday, hence its name.^[1] Pentecost falls on the tenth day after [Ascension Thursday](#).

Historically and symbolically related to the Jewish [harvest festival](#) of [Shavuot](#), which commemorates God giving the [Ten Commandments](#) at [Mount Sinai](#) fifty days after the [Exodus](#), Pentecost now also commemorates the descent of the [Holy Spirit](#) upon the [Apostles](#) and other followers of [Jesus](#) as described in the [Book of Acts](#), Chapter 2 in the [New Testament](#). For this reason, Pentecost is sometimes described as "the Church's birthday."

The Hindu, Hebrew, and Muslim calendars – being Lunar – mark a shorter year than the Gregorian solar calendar. This is why the holidays slide around each year instead of remaining fixed on our calendar.