

Reading

- The Xmas Files: The Philosophy of Christmas, by Stephen Law

The Christmas Spirit

What significance – if *any* – does Christmas have for you? Do you identify with the messages, and history of Christmas? Or do you have a more negative attitude? What are we to make of the **sentimentality** involved in Christmas, and the way Christmas gets depicted in our **culture**?

Gifts

But why do we engage in gift giving at Christmas? Can gift giving be **altruistic**? Or is self-interest hidden behind every gift (which is what someone who subscribes to **egoism** believes)? A more general philosophical question about us is: is genuine altruism possible?

Peace

Christmas often comes with a message of peace and goodwill. What does peace mean? Does it require absolute non-violence or **pacifism**? Should we seek peace in this sense? Is it possible or realistic? Can violence – including war – ever be justified?

Santa Claus

Consider the sentence ‘Santa has a white beard’ – is it true, false, or neither? We can raise philosophical puzzles about **existence** for these sorts of claims. Surely Santa *does* have a white beard! But if he doesn’t *exist*, then how can “he” possibly have a white beard?

God, Christ, and Miracles

Reflecting on Christmas raises puzzles in the **philosophy of religion**: does God exist? Does it make sense to suppose that Jesus was God embodied in human form? How should we understand the idea of a virgin birth? Should we believe in miracles?

Faith and Mental Health

Christmas is often linked to faith. But what is **faith**? And is it a good thing? Can religious faith be good for your **mental health** – as some studies suggest? Can religious faith ever be bad for your mental health?