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Americans Say Religious Aspects of Christmas Are Declining in Public Life

Shrinking majority believe biblical account of birth of Jesus depicts actual events

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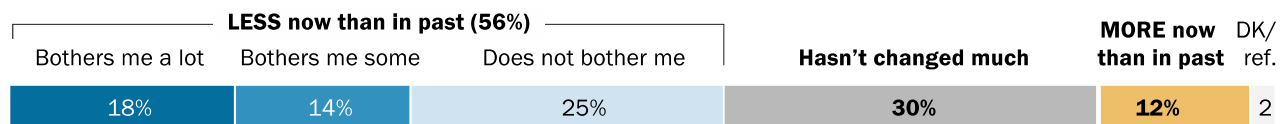
Americans Say Religious Aspects of Christmas Are Declining in Public Life

Shrinking majority believe biblical account of birth of Jesus depicts actual events

As long-simmering debates continue over how American society should commemorate the Christmas holiday, a new Pew Research Center survey finds that most U.S. adults believe the religious aspects of Christmas are emphasized less now than in the past – even as relatively few Americans are bothered by this trend. In addition, a declining majority says religious displays such as nativity scenes should be allowed on government property. And compared with five years ago, a growing share of Americans say it does not matter to them how they are greeted in stores and businesses during the holiday season – whether with “merry Christmas” or a less-religious greeting like “happy holidays.”

Most say religious parts of Christmas are now emphasized less, but relatively few are bothered by it

In American society in general, religious aspects of Christmas are emphasized ...



Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. “Does not bother me” includes those who say the declining emphasis on religious aspects of Christmas bothers them “not much” or “not at all,” as well as those who did not answer the question. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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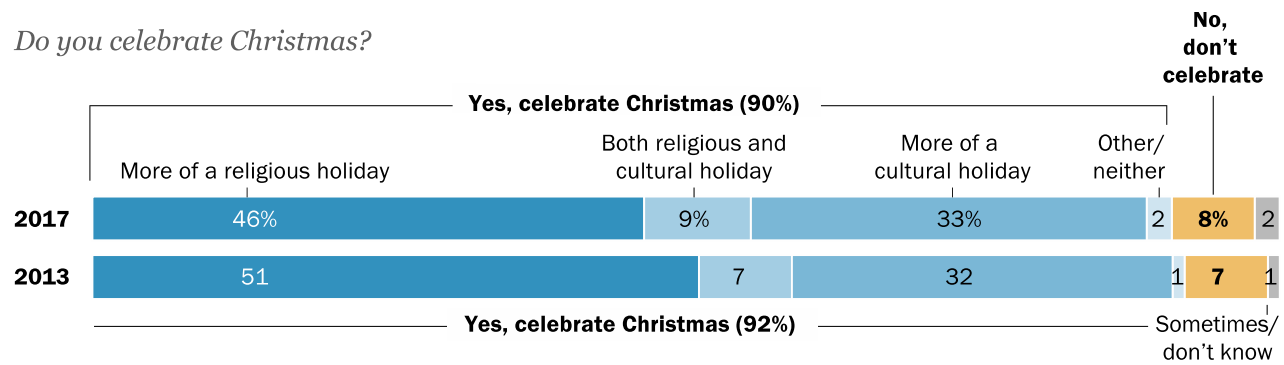
Not only are some of the more religious aspects of Christmas less prominent in the public sphere, but there are signs that they are on the wane in Americans’ private lives and personal beliefs as well. For instance, there has been a noticeable decline in the percentage of U.S. adults who say they believe that biblical elements of the Christmas story – that Jesus was born to a virgin, for example – reflect historical events that actually occurred. 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.

Currently, 55% of U.S. adults say they celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, including 46% who see it as more of a religious holiday than a cultural holiday and 9% who celebrate Christmas as both a religious and a cultural occasion. In 2013, 59% of Americans said they celebrated Christmas as a religious holiday, including 51% who saw it as more religious than cultural and 7% who marked the day as both a religious and a cultural holiday.

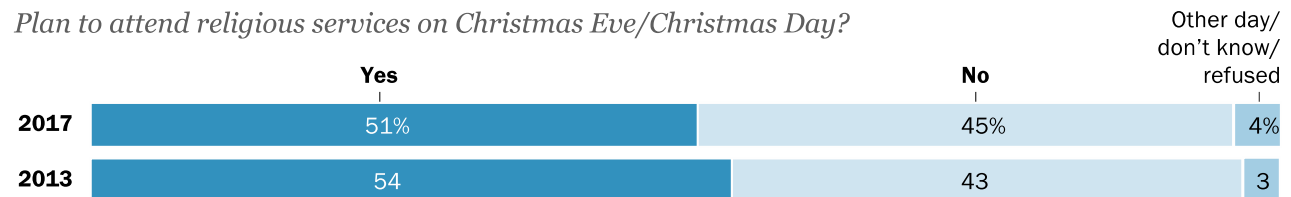
To be sure, while the public’s commemoration of Christmas may have less of a religious component now than in the past, the share of Americans who say they celebrate Christmas in *some* way has hardly budged at all. Nine-in-ten U.S. adults say they celebrate the holiday, which is nearly identical to the share who said this in 2013. About eight-in-ten will gather with family and friends. And half say they plan to attend church on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, little changed since 2013, the last time Pew Research Center asked the question.

Half of Americans plan to attend church on Christmas

Do you celebrate Christmas?



Plan to attend religious services on Christmas Eve/Christmas Day?



Plan to gather with family, friends on Christmas Eve/Christmas Day?

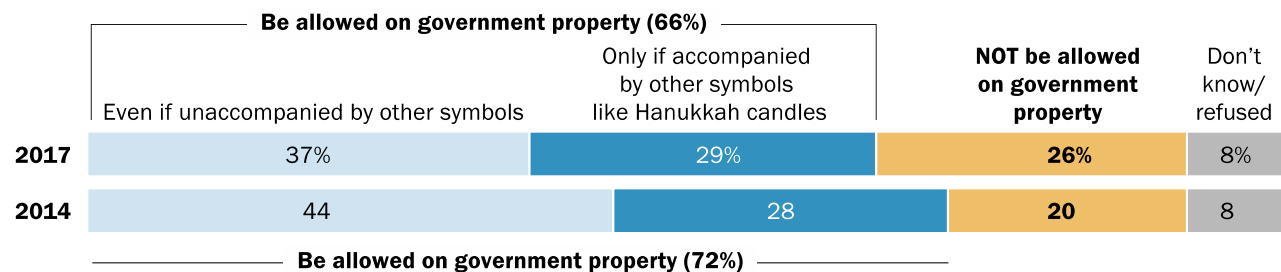


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 Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.
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But some of the ways Americans think about and commemorate Christmas appear to be moving in a more secular direction. For instance, while two-thirds of Americans continue to say that Christian displays like nativity scenes should be permitted on government property during the holidays, the share who say these displays should be allowed on their own (unaccompanied by symbols of other faiths) has declined by 7 percentage points since 2014. Meanwhile, the share of Americans who believe *no* religious displays should be permitted on government property has grown from 20% to 26% over the past three years.

Fewer now say Christian displays should be allowed on government property without representation from other religions

% who say Christian symbols like nativity scenes should ...



Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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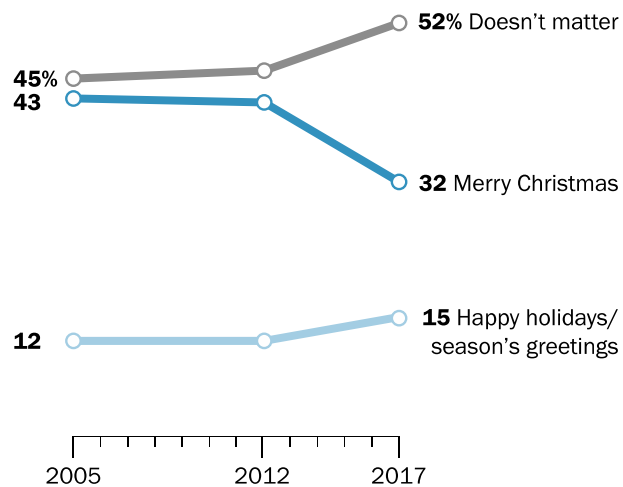
For more than a decade, conservative commentators and others – perhaps most prominently former Fox News host Bill O’Reilly – have been warning about what they perceive as a “War on Christmas,” or an effort to remove religious elements of the holiday from the public sphere. Conflicts over related issues have continued this year, and Donald Trump has repeatedly said, both during the 2016 presidential campaign and since his election, that Americans will be “saying ‘merry Christmas’ again” during his presidency.

A rising share of Americans say they do not have a preference about how they are greeted in stores during the holiday season, while a declining percentage prefer to have stores greet them with “merry Christmas.” Today, fully half of the U.S. public (52%) says that a business’ choice of holiday greeting does not matter to them, while roughly a third (32%) prefers for stores and businesses to greet customers with “merry Christmas” during the holidays. When this question was first asked over a decade ago, and then again in 2012, roughly equal shares expressed a preference for “merry Christmas” and said it didn’t matter.

When asked directly, most respondents in the new poll say they think religious aspects of Christmas are emphasized less in American society today than in the past. But relatively few Americans both perceive this trend and are bothered by it. Overall, 31% of adults say they are bothered at least “some” by the declining emphasis on religion in the way the U.S. commemorates Christmas, including 18% who say they are bothered “a lot” by this. But the remaining two-thirds of the U.S. public either is not bothered by a perceived decline in religion in Christmas or does not believe that the emphasis on the religious elements of Christmas is waning.

About half say it ‘doesn’t matter’ how stores greet customers for holidays

% who say they would prefer for stores/businesses to say ...



Note: Don't know/refused responses are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.
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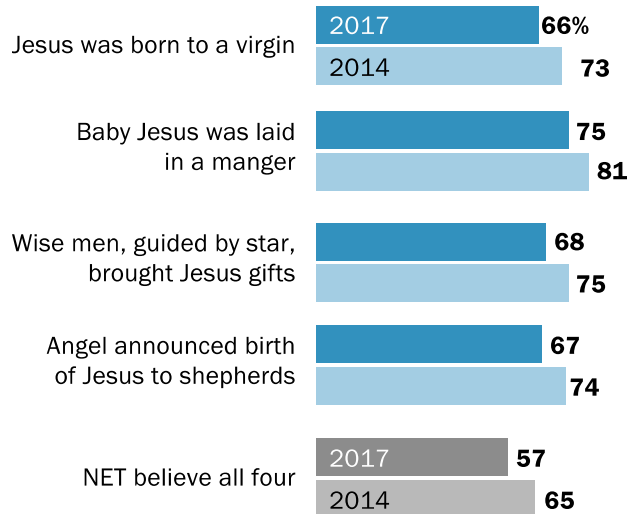
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Among the topics probed by the new survey, one of the most striking changes in recent years involves the share of Americans who say they believe the birth of Jesus occurred as depicted in the Bible. Today, 66% say they believe Jesus was born to a virgin, down from 73% in 2014. Likewise, 68% of U.S. adults now say they believe that the wise men were guided by a star and brought gifts for baby Jesus, down from 75%. And there are similar declines in the shares of Americans who believe that Jesus' birth was heralded by an angel of the Lord and that Jesus was laid in a manger as an infant.

Overall, 57% of Americans now believe in all four of these elements of the Christmas story, down from 65% in 2014.

Declining majority of Americans believe biblical Christmas story reflects historical events

% who believe ...



Note: Respondents were asked whether they believe in four elements of the Christmas story, including that "Jesus Christ was born to a virgin," that "an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus," that "wise men were guided by a star and brought Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh," and that "the newborn baby Jesus was laid in a manger."

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults. "Americans Say Religious Aspects of Christmas Are Declining in Public Life"

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Religious ‘nones’ explain much, but not all, of decline in belief in Christmas story

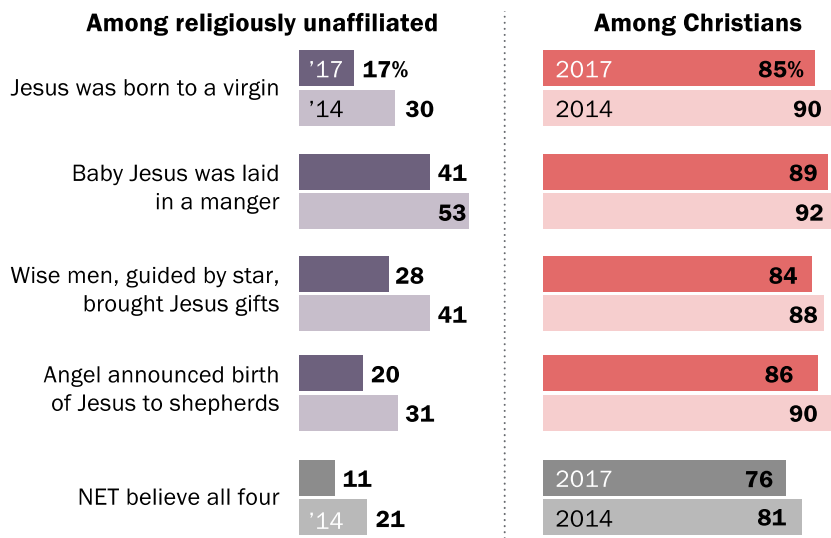
The religiously unaffiliated – those who identify religiously as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” and who are sometimes also referred to as religious “nones” – are much less likely than Christians to express belief in the biblical Christmas story. And, in recent years, “nones” have become even less likely to believe in it, contributing to the public’s overall decline in belief in the biblical depiction of Jesus’ birth. (Religious “nones” also have been growing as a share of the U.S. population, although the religiously unaffiliated share of respondents in the December 2017 survey is similar in size to the unaffiliated share of the December 2014 sample.)

At the same time, the new study finds a small but significant decline in the share of *Christians* who believe in the Christmas narrative contained in the Bible. To be sure, large majorities of

Christians still believe in key elements of the nativity story as described in the Bible. But the shares of Christians who believe in the virgin birth, the visit of the Magi, the announcement of Jesus’ birth by an angel and the baby Jesus lying in the manger all have ticked downward in recent years. Overall, the share of Christians who believe in all four of these elements of the Christmas story has dipped from 81% in 2014 to 76% today. This decline has been particularly pronounced among white mainline Protestants (for details, see page 20).

Belief in Christmas story declining among both ‘nones’ and Christians

% who believe ...



Note: Respondents were asked whether they believe in four elements of the Christmas story, including that “Jesus Christ was born to a virgin,” that “an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus,” that “wise men were guided by a star and brought Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh,” and that “the newborn baby Jesus was laid in a manger.”

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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Partisan differences in views on Christmas in public life

The study finds clear divisions along party lines in questions about the way Christmas is observed in American culture. For example, about half of those who identify with or lean toward the Republican Party express a preference for hearing “merry Christmas” from stores and businesses, compared with 19% of Democrats and those who lean toward the Democratic Party. By contrast, a majority of Democrats (61%) say “it doesn’t matter” when asked how they prefer to be greeted during the holidays; 38% of Republicans take this position. Democrats also are more likely than Republicans to prefer a less-religious greeting like “happy holidays” (20% vs. 7%).

A higher share of Republicans than Democrats express the view that the religious aspects of Christmas are emphasized less now than in the past (68% vs. 50%). And the partisan gap is even bigger when it comes to whether this perceived trend is seen as negative. Fully half of Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP say they are bothered “a lot” (32%) or “some” (20%) by a declining emphasis on the religious aspects of Christmas. Among Democrats, just one-in-five say they are bothered “a lot” (10%) or “some” (11%) by these changes.

There also are clear partisan divisions when it comes to the debate about religious displays on public property. Among Republicans, 54% say that Christian symbols, like nativity scenes, should be allowed on government property even if they are not accompanied by symbols from other faiths, while only half as many Democrats (27%) share this view.

Republicans more likely than Democrats to prefer ‘merry Christmas,’ support Christian displays on public property

	Rep./ lean Rep.	Dem./ lean Dem.
<i>Would prefer for stores/businesses to say ...</i>	%	%
Merry Christmas	54	19
Happy holidays/season’s greetings	7	20
Doesn’t matter	38	61
Don’t know/refused	<u>1</u>	<u><1</u>
	100	100

In American society in general, religious aspects of Christmas are emphasized ...

LESS now than in past	68	50
Bothers me a lot	32	10
Bothers me some	20	11
Does not bother me	16	30
MORE now than in past	13	11
Hasn’t changed much	18	37
Don’t know/refused	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>
	100	100

Christian symbols, like nativity scenes, should ...

Be allowed on government property	79	60
Only if accompanied by other symbols like Hanukkah candles	26	33
Even if unaccompanied by other symbols	54	27
NOT be allowed on gov’t property	15	33
Don’t know/refused	<u>5</u>	<u>7</u>
	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. “Does not bother me” includes those who say the declining emphasis on religious aspects of Christmas bothers them “not much” or “not at all,” as well as those who did not answer the question.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults. “Americans Say Religious Aspects of Christmas Are Declining in Public Life”

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Big differences in how generational cohorts mark the holidays

The survey finds large generational differences in the way Americans approach Christmas. Millennials, for example, are much less likely than older cohorts to say they celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, and more likely to say they celebrate it as a cultural holiday.

Similarly, while 42% of Millennials say they plan to attend church this Christmas, half or more of those in older generations say they will incorporate a trip to church into their Christmas celebration.

These generation gaps extend to questions about Christmas in public life. A majority of Millennials (61%) say they do not have a preference about how stores and businesses greet them during the holiday, while just 20% say they prefer for businesses to greet them with “merry Christmas” – significantly lower than the share of older cohorts who say this. And Millennials also are less likely than members of older generations to say it is acceptable to display Christian

Millennials more likely to celebrate Christmas as a cultural holiday; less likely to attend church

	Silent Gen. and older	Baby Boomers	Gen X	Millennials
	%	%	%	%
Yes, celebrate Christmas	89	90	92	88
More of a religious holiday	60	52	50	32
More of a cultural holiday	17	27	33	44
Both religious and cultural holiday	12	10	7	10
Other/neither	<1	2	2	2
No, don't celebrate	10	8	6	10
Sometimes/don't know	<1	2	3	2
	100	100	100	100
<i>Plan to attend religious services on Christmas Eve/Christmas Day?</i>				
Yes	56	58	53	42
No	40	39	43	55
Other day/don't know/refused	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Would prefer for stores/businesses to say ...</i>				
Merry Christmas	39	41	34	20
Happy holidays/season's greetings	10	12	16	19
Doesn't matter	51	46	50	61
Don't know/refused	<u>1</u>	<u><1</u>	<u><1</u>	<u><1</u>
	100	100	100	100
<i>Christian symbols, like nativity scenes, should...</i>				
Be allowed on government property	74	67	70	60
Only if accompanied by other symbols like Hanukkah candles	34	29	30	29
Even if unaccompanied by other symbols	40	39	40	31
NOT be permitted on gov't property	18	23	23	33
Don't know/refused	8	9	7	7
	100	100	100	100

Note: Figures may not add to 100% or to subtotals indicated due to rounding. The “Silent Gen. and older” category includes those born in 1945 or before. The “Baby Boomers” category includes those born 1946-1964. The “Gen X” category includes those born 1965-1980. The “Millennials” category includes those born after 1980.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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symbols on government property.

The survey also finds an important generational component to trends in beliefs about the Christmas story. Simply put, Millennials express lower levels of belief in the Christmas narrative than they did in 2014, and they are now significantly less likely than their elders to say that the Christmas story reflects events that actually occurred. This partly reflects the fact that there are fewer self-

identified Christians among Millennials than among older generations. Even among Christians, however, Millennials are now significantly less likely than older adults as a whole to believe in all four elements of the Christmas story covered in the survey, which is a change since 2014.

These are among the key findings from the latest Pew Research Center survey, conducted by telephone Nov. 29 to Dec. 4, 2017, among a representative sample of 1,503 adults nationwide. The rest of this report looks at the results of the survey in more detail, including trends over time and differences by religious affiliation and observance.

Growing doubts about events in the Christmas story among young people

	Silent Gen. and older		Baby Boomers		Gen X		Millennials	
	2014	2017	'14	'17	'14	'17	'14	'17
<i>% who believe ...</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Jesus was born to a virgin	76	78	76	73	75	69	67	55
Angel announced birth of Jesus	74	81	79	75	76	71	68	54
Wise men visited Jesus	74	78	77	75	76	72	72	57
Baby Jesus was laid in a manger	80	81	83	83	83	79	78	65
NET All four	66	70	68	65	67	62	59	44

Note: The "Silent Gen. and older" category includes those born in 1945 or before. The "Baby Boomers" category includes those born 1946-1964. The "Gen X" category includes those born 1965-1980. The "Millennials" category includes those born after 1980.
Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.
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Christmas in public life

Smaller majority now says Christian displays on government property are acceptable

While most Christians (73%) continue to think displaying religious symbols on government property is acceptable during the Christmas season, Christians as a whole have become less supportive of this position over the last three years. The change is most pronounced among white evangelical Protestants, who are less likely, by 10 percentage points, to favor displaying Christian symbols on government property today (80%) than in 2014 (90%). By comparison with white evangelicals, the views of other Christian groups are more stable on this question.

Most white evangelical Protestants (57%) say they think it is OK for Christian symbols like nativity scenes to be displayed on government property even if the Christian symbols are not accompanied by imagery from other faiths. Smaller shares of black Protestants (41%), white mainline Protestants (39%) and Catholics (35%) are comfortable displaying only Christian symbols on government property, although similar shares of all three groups say such displays are acceptable if they are accompanied by religious symbols from other faiths.

Religious “nones” are divided in their views about religious displays on government property. Half think that displaying Christian symbols on government property is acceptable (including 24% who think such displays are OK by themselves and 27% who think they are only acceptable if accompanied by other religious symbols), while 45% say no religious symbols should be displayed on government property.

Growing minority of Americans oppose religious displays on government property

% who say ...

	2014				2017			
	NET OK to display Christian symbols like nativity scenes on gov't property	Only if accompanied by other religious symbols like Hanukkah candles	Even if unaccompanied by other religious symbols	NET No religious symbols should be allowed on gov't property	NET OK to display Christian symbols like nativity scenes on gov't property	Only if accompanied by other religious symbols like Hanukkah candles	Even if unaccompanied by other religious symbols	NET No religious symbols should be allowed on gov't property
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	72	28	44	20	66	29	37	26
Christian	79	28	50	14	73	31	42	19
Protestant	80	27	53	12	74	28	45	18
White evangelical	90	23	67	5	80	24	57	13
White mainline	79	30	49	13	71	32	39	22
Black Protestant	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	71	31	41	16
Catholic	75	32	43	19	70	35	35	19
Unaffiliated	57	29	28	38	50	27	24	45
<i>Attend religious services ...</i>								
Weekly or more	80	25	56	10	72	29	44	19
Monthly/yearly	72	32	41	21	70	30	40	23
Seldom/never	63	28	34	31	58	30	27	36
<i>Ages 18-29</i>								
30-49	73	37	36	23	60	33	27	33
50-64	71	27	44	21	66	28	38	28
65+	75	25	50	18	68	28	41	22
<i>65+</i>								
Rep./lean Rep.	71	27	44	17	71	31	40	22
Dem./lean Dem.	85	25	60	9	79	26	54	15
	63	31	32	30	60	33	27	33

Note: "Don't know"/refused responses not shown. "N/a" indicates insufficient sample size for analysis.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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Most say religious aspects of Christmas emphasized less now than in past

Seven-in-ten white evangelical Protestants say that in American society, the religious aspects of Christmas are emphasized less today than in the past, and most (59%) say they find this at least somewhat bothersome. Nearly two-thirds of white mainline Protestants agree that the religious aspects of Christmas get less emphasis today than in the past, but compared with white evangelicals, they are less troubled by this development; 41% of white mainline Protestants say the declining emphasis on the religious aspects of Christmas bothers them “a lot” or “some.”

Roughly half of Catholics (49%), religious “nones” (50%) and black Protestants (52%) say religion has a shrinking role in the way Christmas is celebrated in the U.S., but “nones” are less likely than other groups to be bothered by this trend.

About a third of Americans are bothered by perceived shrinking role of religion in Christmas

In American society in general, are religious aspects of Christmas _____

	NET Emphasized less now than in past %	Bothers me a lot/ some %	Does not bother me %	NET Emphasized more now than in past %	Hasn't changed much %	Don't know %
Total	56	31	25	12	30	2=100
Christian	60	40	20	12	27	1
Protestant	64	45	20	13	22	1
White evangelical	71	59	12	13	16	1
White mainline	63	41	22	12	25	<1
Black Protestant	52	31	22	12	36	0
Catholic	49	29	20	11	39	1
Unaffiliated	50	11	38	12	35	4
<i>Attend religious services ...</i>						
Weekly or more	63	44	19	12	24	1
Monthly/yearly	53	33	20	14	32	1
Seldom/never	53	18	35	10	35	2
<i>Ages</i>						
18-29	57	20	38	12	29	1
30-49	51	27	24	14	33	2
50-64	58	41	17	11	29	2
65+	61	40	21	11	27	1
<i>Party affiliation</i>						
Rep./lean Rep.	68	52	16	13	18	1
Dem./lean Dem.	50	21	30	11	37	1

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. “Does not bother me” includes those who say the declining emphasis on religious aspects of Christmas bothers them “not much” or “not at all,” as well as those who did not answer the question.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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While half or more of adults of all ages agree that emphasis on the religious aspects of Christmas has declined (compared with Christmases past), adults under 50 are significantly less likely than those ages 50 and older to say they find this bothersome.

One-third prefer for stores, businesses to use ‘merry Christmas,’ while half now say it doesn’t matter to them

Most white evangelical Protestants say they prefer for stores and other businesses to greet their customers by saying “merry Christmas” during the holidays. But evangelicals are somewhat less likely to express this view today (61%) compared with 2012 (70%).

Within every other major Christian tradition, there are at least as many people who say the holiday greetings used by stores and businesses don’t matter to them as there are who say they prefer “merry Christmas.” And among religious “nones,” fully 72% say the holiday greeting businesses use doesn’t much matter to them.

One-third prefer for stores to use ‘merry Christmas,’ but half now say holiday greeting doesn’t matter

% who say they prefer stores and businesses greet their customers ...

	With “merry Christmas”			With less-religious terms like “happy holidays” or “season’s greetings”			Doesn’t matter		
	2005	2012	2017	2005	2012	2017	2005	2012	2017
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	43	42	32	12	12	15	45	46	52
Christian	47	50	41	10	9	14	43	41	45
Protestant	51	50	44	10	9	11	38	41	45
White evangelical	72	70	61	5	4	6	23	26	33
White mainline	45	41	37	6	6	13	49	53	50
Black Protestant	n/a	n/a	23	n/a	n/a	23	n/a	n/a	54
Catholic	41	49	36	6	10	19	51	40	44
Unaffiliated	n/a	21	10	n/a	17	18	n/a	61	72
<i>Attend religious services ...</i>									
Weekly or more	56	56	44	7	7	13	37	37	42
Monthly/yearly	32	37	33	16	17	16	51	45	51
Seldom/never	36	31	17	11	12	17	53	56	66
<i>Ages</i>									
18-29	n/a	n/a	19	n/a	n/a	24	n/a	n/a	56
30-49	41	41	28	12	9	13	46	49	59
50-64	46	48	42	13	11	13	41	41	45
65+	63	55	39	5	11	12	30	34	48
<i>Political affiliation</i>									
Rep./lean Rep.	60	63	54	6	5	7	33	32	38
Dem./lean Dem.	33	28	19	15	17	20	51	55	61

Note: Don’t know responses not shown. “N/a” indicates insufficient sample size for analysis. Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults. “Americans Say Religious Aspects of Christmas Are Declining in Public Life”

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Christmas commemorations and beliefs

Religious and family elements of Christmas celebrations

Large majorities in every major Christian group say they celebrate Christmas. Even among religious “nones,” fully 85% say they celebrate the holiday.

There are sizable differences, though, in the way people from various religious groups think about the occasion. Perhaps not surprisingly, most Christians (72%) say they mark the day as a religious holiday, including 60% who celebrate as more of a religious holiday than a cultural occasion and 12% who mark it as both a religious holiday and a cultural holiday. The share of Christians who celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday – either solely religious or partly religious and partly cultural – ranges from 64% among black Protestants to 92% among white evangelical Protestants.

Among religious “nones,” however, seven-in-ten (69%) say they celebrate Christmas as more of a cultural holiday than a religious occasion, compared with just 10% who celebrate it as a more of a religious holiday and 4% who celebrate both the religious and cultural aspects.

The survey also finds that older adults are much more likely than younger people to celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday. And Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to observe Christmas as a religious holiday. About three-quarters of Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP say they celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday, compared with just 46% of Democrats.

Nine-in-ten Americans say they celebrate Christmas

	2013	2017
	%	%
Total	92	90
Christian	96	95
Protestant	95	95
White evangelical	98	98
White mainline	98	96
Black Protestant	89	91
Catholic	96	95
Unaffiliated	87	85
Ages 18-29	91	86
30-49	93	92
50-64	91	90
65+	94	89
Rep./lean Rep.	94	94
Dem./lean Dem.	91	89

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.
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Most religious ‘nones’ celebrate Christmas, but more culturally than religiously

% who say ...

	2013					2017				
	NET Celebrate as religious holiday	More religious than cultural	Both religious & cultural	More cultural than religious	Celebrate another way	NET Celebrate as religious holiday	More religious than cultural	Both religious & cultural	More cultural than religious	Celebrate another way
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	59	51	7	32	1	55	46	9	33	2
Christian	72	65	8	22	1	72	60	12	22	1
Protestant	75	67	8	20	<1	75	64	11	19	1
White evangelical	89	82	7	9	<1	92	84	8	5	1
White mainline	66	56	10	31	<1	66	52	15	29	0
Black Protestant	67	60	7	21	1	64	55	8	22	5
Catholic	68	59	9	26	2	65	51	14	29	1
Unaffiliated	16	10	6	68	3	14	10	4	69	3
Attend religious services ...										
Weekly or more	82	76	6	11	1	79	69	10	11	2
Monthly/yearly	60	52	8	32	1	60	48	12	31	2
Seldom/never	30	21	8	56	3	26	20	7	58	1
Ages 18-29	44	39	6	44	3	40	31	9	45	1
30-49	55	50	6	36	1	53	43	10	37	2
50-64	64	55	10	26	1	62	55	7	27	1
65+	75	66	9	19	1	66	54	12	22	1
Rep./lean Rep.	72	66	6	22	1	74	65	9	19	1
Dem./lean Dem.	49	41	8	41	1	46	36	10	41	1

Note: Those who do not celebrate Christmas or “sometimes” celebrate it are not shown. “Celebrate another way” includes those who said “don’t know” or did not answer the question.

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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This year, roughly eight-in-ten Americans (82%) say they intend to gather with family and friends on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day, down slightly since 2013 (86%). Large majorities in every religious group, ranging from 75% of religious “nones” to 89% of Catholics, say they anticipate attending a family gathering at Christmastime.

About half of American adults (51%) are planning to attend religious services on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day. Among white evangelicals and white mainline Protestants, the shares who say they will attend religious services this Christmas are somewhat higher than in 2013. Among Catholics, by contrast, the share saying they will attend Christmas Mass has declined somewhat since 2013, from 76% to 68%.

Fully 84% of those who attend religious services on a weekly basis throughout the year say they will also go this Christmas. And most people who attend religious services occasionally – once or twice a month or a few times a year – also say they will go at Christmas (60%). Among those who seldom or never attend religious services, by contrast, very few (9%) say they will make an exception for Christmas.

Nearly two-thirds of Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP say they will attend church on Christmas (65%). Among Democrats, 45% plan on attending religious services this year.

Most Americans will gather with family on Christmas; about half will attend church

% who plan to _____ on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day

	Gather with family, friends		Attend religious services	
	2013	2017	2013	2017
	%	%	%	%
Total	86	82	54	51
Christian	87	86	66	67
Protestant	88	85	62	67
White evangelical	90	87	71	78
White mainline	89	84	47	57
Black Protestant	87	84	65	59
Catholic	85	89	76	68
Unaffiliated	84	75	16	12
<i>Attend religious services ...</i>				
Weekly or more	88	86	83	84
Monthly/yearly	88	85	60	60
Seldom/never	82	74	14	9
Ages 18-29	91	81	46	40
30-49	85	82	57	50
50-64	85	82	55	58
65+	83	79	60	57
Rep./lean Rep.	88	86	62	65
Dem./lean Dem.	85	81	48	45

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults. “Americans Say Religious Aspects of Christmas Are Declining in Public Life”

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Shrinking majority of public believes biblical Christmas story depicts actual events

Most Americans believe Jesus was born to a virgin, that he was visited by three wise men from the east, that his birth was announced to shepherds by an angel of the Lord, and that the baby Jesus was laid in a manger as an infant. But the share of Americans who believe that each of these four elements of the Christmas story reflects actual historical events is lower today than in 2014.

The declines in belief in the Christmas narrative are sharpest among religious “nones.” For instance, belief in the virgin birth has declined from 30% in 2014 to 17% today among religious “nones.” But even among some Christian groups, there are signs of growing doubts about the Christmas story as relayed in the Bible. The share of white mainline Protestants who believe in the virgin birth, for instance, has declined from 83% to 71%. And the share of Catholics who believe the birth of Jesus was announced by an angel of the Lord now stands at 82%, down from 90% in 2014.

Declining majorities believe in virgin birth, other elements of Christmas story

% who believe ...

	Jesus was born to a virgin		Angel announced birth of Jesus to shepherds		Wise men, guided by star, brought Jesus gifts		Jesus was laid in manger	
	2014	2017	2014	2017	2014	2017	2014	2017
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	73	66	74	67	75	68	81	75
Christian	90	85	90	86	88	84	92	89
Protestant	91	87	90	88	89	87	92	90
White evangelical	96	95	97	97	96	95	95	98
White mainline	83	71	80	77	81	74	87	81
Black Protestant	n/a	96	n/a	91	n/a	90	n/a	88
Catholic	86	83	90	82	84	80	92	87
Unaffiliated	30	17	31	20	41	28	53	41
<i>Attend religious services ...</i>								
Weekly or more	92	92	93	92	91	91	93	92
Monthly/yearly	81	70	80	71	78	70	84	79
Seldom/never	42	37	46	38	53	43	64	56
<i>Ages 18-29</i>								
30-49	70	54	69	52	74	54	80	64
50-64	72	64	73	66	74	68	80	76
65+	76	74	78	76	77	75	83	83
<i>65+</i>								
Rep./lean Rep.	78	74	76	76	75	75	81	80
Dem./lean Dem.	85	81	85	83	84	81	88	87
Dem./lean Dem.	66	58	66	59	69	61	76	69

Note: "N/a" indicates insufficient sample size for analysis. Respondents were asked whether they believe in four elements of the Christmas story, including that "Jesus Christ was born to a virgin," that "an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus," that "wise men were guided by a star and brought Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh," and that "the newborn baby Jesus was laid in a manger."

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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Taken together, the data show that nine-in-ten white evangelical Protestants continue to believe in all four of these parts of the Christmas story, which is very similar to the share who said this in 2014. Among white mainline Protestants, by contrast, a shrinking majority believes in each of these four aspects of the Christmas narrative. (The change in the share of Catholics who believe in all four parts of the Christmas story is not statistically significant.)

Among religious “nones,” just 11% believe in all four of these parts of the Christmas story (down from 21%), while fully half believe in *none* of them (53%, up from 42%).

Three-quarters of Republicans believe in the virgin birth, the visit of the three wise men, the announcement of Jesus’ birth by an angel, *and* the laying of baby Jesus in a manger. By contrast, about half of Democrats (47%) believe in all four of these parts of the Christmas story.

Recent drop in share of U.S. adults who believe in all four elements of biblical Christmas narrative

% in each group who ...

	Believe all four elements of Christmas story		Believe some but not others		Do not believe any of the four elements of Christmas story	
	2014	2017	2014	2017	2014	2017
Total	65	57	22	24	14	19
Christian	81	76	16	19	3	6
Protestant	82	78	15	17	3	5
White evangelical	90	91	9	8	1	1
White mainline	72	59	20	31	8	10
Black Protestant	n/a	83	n/a	15	n/a	2
Catholic	76	71	20	22	4	7
Unaffiliated	21	11	37	36	42	53
<i>Attend religious services ...</i>						
Weekly or more	86	85	11	12	3	3
Monthly/yearly	69	59	22	28	9	13
Seldom/never	34	28	34	34	32	39
<i>Ages 18-29</i>	60	43	24	29	15	28
30-49	64	56	21	27	15	18
50-64	67	66	22	20	11	14
65+	68	66	18	20	14	14
<i>Rep./lean Rep.</i>	77	75	15	14	8	11
<i>Dem./lean Dem.</i>	56	47	25	30	18	23

Note: “N/a” indicates insufficient sample size for analysis. Respondents were asked whether they believe in four elements of the Christmas story, including that “Jesus Christ was born to a virgin,” that “an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus,” that “wise men were guided by a star and brought Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh,” and that “the newborn baby Jesus was laid in a manger.”

Source: Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017, among U.S. adults.

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Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted Nov. 29 to Dec. 4, 2017, among a national sample of 1,503 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (377 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 1,126 were interviewed on a cellphone, including 728 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers under the direction of Abt Associates. A combination of landline and cellphone random-digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, visit <http://www.pewresearch.org/methodology/u-s-survey-research/>.

The combined landline and cellphone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity, and region to parameters from the 2016 Census Bureau's American Community Survey one-year estimates and population density to parameters from the decennial census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cellphone only, or both landline and cellphone), based on extrapolations from the 2016 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cellphone have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Survey conducted Nov. 29-Dec. 4, 2017

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,503	2.9 percentage points
Christian	1,034	3.5 percentage points
Protestant	683	4.3 percentage points
White evangelical	251	7.1 percentage points
White mainline	207	7.8 percentage points
Black Protestant	105	11 percentage points
Catholic	313	6.4 percentage points
Unaffiliated	323	6.3 percentage points
<i>Worship attendance</i>		
Weekly or more	520	4.9 percentage points
Monthly/yearly	468	5.2 percentage points
Seldom/never	477	5.2 percentage points
Republican/lean Rep.	522	4.9 percentage points
Democrat/lean Dem.	769	4.1 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

Pew Research Center undertakes all polling activity, including calls to mobile telephone numbers, in compliance with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act and other applicable laws.

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**PEW RESEARCH CENTER
DECEMBER 2017 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
NOVEMBER 29-DECEMBER 4, 2017
N=1,503**

QUESTIONS 1-3, 6-7, 11-12, 16-17, 21-24, 34-35, 41-42, 50-51, 56-57 PREVIOUSLY RELEASED OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE

NO QUESTIONS 5, 8-10, 13-14, 18-20, 25, 27, 30-33, 36-40, 43-49, 52-55, 58-75

ASK ALL:

Next,

Q.4 Do you celebrate Christmas, or not?

Nov 29-Dec 4		Dec 3-8
<u>2017</u>		<u>2013</u>
90	Yes	92
8	No	7
1	Sometimes (VOL.)	1
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<1

TREND FOR COMPARISON: *Do you celebrate Christmas?*

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	(VOL.) DK/Ref
<i>Gallup/USA Today: Dec 10-12, 2010</i>	95	4	<1
<i>Gallup/USA Today: December, 2008</i>	93	7	0
<i>Gallup/CNN/USA Today: December, 2005</i>	96	4	<1
<i>Gallup: December, 2003</i>	95	5	0
<i>Gallup: December, 2000</i>	96	4	<1
<i>Gallup/CNN/USA Today: December, 1994</i>	96	4	<1

ASK IF CELEBRATES CHRISTMAS OR DECLINED TO SAY (Q.4=1,3,9):Q.4a For you personally, is Christmas **[INSERT; RANDOMIZE]**?**BASED ON TOTAL:**

Nov 29-Dec 4		Dec 3-8
<u>2017</u>		<u>2013</u>
46	More of a religious holiday	52
33	More of a cultural holiday	33
9	Both of these (VOL.)	7
1	Other/none of these (VOL.)	1
0	Do not celebrate Christmas (VOL.)	0
<1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	1
8	<i>Does not celebrate Christmas (Q.4=2)</i>	7

ASK ALL:

Next,

Q.15 In your view, would you prefer if stores and businesses greet their customers by saying "merry Christmas," OR would you prefer if stores and businesses use less-religious terms such as "happy holidays" and "season's greetings," or doesn't it matter to you?

Nov 29-Dec 4 <u>2017</u>		Dec 5-9 <u>2012</u>	December <u>2005</u>
32	Prefer "merry Christmas"	42	43
15	Prefer less-religious terms	12	12
52	Doesn't matter	46	45
1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	<1	1

ASK ALL:

On another subject,

Q.26 Thinking about holiday displays on government property, which comes closest to your view? [**READ; READ CATEGORIES IN REVERSE ORDER FOR HALF THE SAMPLE**]?

Nov 29-Dec 4 <u>2017</u>		Dec 3-7 <u>2014</u>
26	No religious symbols, like Christian nativity scenes, should be allowed on government property, [OR]	20
29	Religious symbols like Christian nativity scenes should be allowed on government property, but ONLY if accompanied by symbols from other faiths such as Hanukkah [PRONOUNCED: "HAH-nuh-kuh"] candles, [OR]	28
37	Christian symbols like nativity scenes should be allowed on government property whether or not they are accompanied by symbols from other faiths	44
8	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	8

ASK ALL:

Q.28 And thinking about the way Christmas is celebrated in American society in general, do you think the RELIGIOUS aspects of the Christmas season are [**RANDOMIZE:** emphasized more now than in the past, emphasized less now than in the past], or hasn't this changed very much?

Nov 29-Dec 4 <u>2017</u>	
12	Religious aspects of the Christmas season are emphasized more now than in the past
56	Religious aspects of the Christmas season are emphasized less now than in the past
30	Hasn't changed very much
2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

Q.28 And thinking about the way Christmas is celebrated in American society in general, do you think the RELIGIOUS aspects of the Christmas season are **[RANDOMIZE: emphasized more now than in the past, emphasized less now than in the past]**, or hasn't this changed very much?

ASK IF MORE/LESS (Q.28 = 1,2):

Q.29 And how much, if at all, does this bother you? **[READ]**

BASED ON TOTAL:

Nov 29-Dec 4

2017

12	Religious aspects of the Christmas season are emphasized more now than in the past
2	A lot
2	Some
2	Not much
6	Not at all
0	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
56	Religious aspects of the Christmas season are emphasized less now than in the past
18	A lot
14	Some
8	Not much
16	Not at all
<1	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
30	Hasn't changed very much
2	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)

ASK ALL:

Q.76 Do you plan to **[INSERT ITEM, RANDOMIZE]** on Christmas Eve or Christmas day this year, or not? And do you plan to **[INSERT NEXT ITEM]** on Christmas Eve or Christmas day this year, or not?

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	(VOL.) <u>Plan to do this, but</u> <u>on a different day</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
a. Attend a gathering with extended family or friends				
Nov 29-Dec 4, 2017	82	16	<1	2
Dec 3-8, 2013	86	12	<1	1
b. Attend religious services				
Nov 29-Dec 4, 2017	51	45	<1	3
Dec 3-8, 2013	54	43	1	3

TREND FOR COMPARISON:

Do you, or does your family, do each of the following as part of its celebration of Christmas, or not? How about attend religious services on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day
USA Today/Gallup: December, 2010¹

62	39	--	<1
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¹ Those who answered in a previous question that they did not celebrate Christmas were not asked this question and recorded as "no." "Plan to do this, but on a different day" was not a volunteered option.

Next,

ASK ALL:

Q.77 Do you believe that Jesus Christ was born to a virgin, or don't you believe this?

Nov 29-Dec 4 <u>2017</u>		Dec 3-7 <u>2014</u>	Dec 3-8 <u>2013</u>
66	Yes, believe	73	73
25	No, don't believe	20	19
8	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	6	7

ASK ALL:

Q.77 Do you believe that Jesus Christ was born to a virgin, or don't you believe this?

ASK IF "DON'T BELIEVE" OR "DK/REF" ON Q.77 (Q.77=2,9):

Q.78 Regardless of your religious beliefs, do you think Jesus Christ ever actually lived, or not?

BASED ON TOTAL:

Nov 29-Dec 4 <u>2017</u>		Dec 3-7 <u>2014</u>
66	Yes, believe Jesus Christ was born to a virgin	73
34	NET Don't believe/Don't know if Jesus Christ was born to a virgin	27
22	Yes, believe Jesus Christ lived	20
7	No, don't believe Jesus Christ lived	5
5	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	2

ASK IF "BELIEVE" IN Q.77 OR Q.78 (Q.77=1 OR Q.78=1):

Q.79 Thinking about the Christmas story, for each of the following, please tell me whether you believe it is an event that actually occurred or not. First, **[INSERT, RANDOMIZE]**... Do you believe this is an event that actually occurred, or don't you believe this? Next, **[INSERT NEXT]**...**[IF NECESSARY: Do you believe this is an event that actually occurred, or don't you believe this?]**

BASED ON TOTAL:

	Believe this event actually <u>occurred</u>	No, don't <u>believe</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>	<i>NET Don't believe in Jesus</i>
a. An angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus				
Nov 29-Dec 4, 2017	67	17	5	11
Dec 3-7, 2014	74	15	3	7
b. Wise men were guided by a star and brought Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh				
Nov 29-Dec 4, 2017	68	15	5	11
Dec 3-7, 2014	75	14	4	7
c. The newborn baby Jesus was laid in a manger				
Nov 29-Dec 4, 2017	75	8	5	11
Dec 3-7, 2014	81	9	3	7