

The origin of the Christmas Tree is not clear. The use of [evergreen trees](#), wreaths, and garlands to symbolize eternal life was a custom of the ancient [Egyptians](#) and even the Chinese. Tree worship was common among pagan Europeans. The Scandinavians had the custom of decorating the house and barn with evergreens at the New Year to scare away the devil. There is much documentation on the symbolism of trees in [Viking](#) and [Saxon](#) communities where they worshiped trees.

The stories around Santa Claus also vary on community. I was in Amsterdam in December one year and was surprised to learn that for their community Santa did not come in a sleigh, but on a ship and dressed very much like a pirate.

For American Jews this time of year can be difficult. We are surrounded by Christmas culture. Christmas songs abound on the radio, Christmas decorations are in every store, television/theater/school programming have one Christmas themed show after another. The Jewish people can get overwhelmed by the volume of Christmas that exists.

This can get more complicated. How do we as Jews deal with interfaith families? When we have a Christian spouse, not to mention if there are children in an interfaith family, how do we deal with Christmas? Should a Christmas Tree be placed up in the household? Should we give gifts, if the holiday of Chanukkah comes at a different time?