



Why does Christmas evoke strong feelings among Jews in the United States? Of all the national holidays, only Christmas is founded on religious beliefs, with traditions and symbols associated with Christianity...

All commerce ceases on Christmas... [It] is celebrated privately in homes and in churches, and publicly in town squares and shopping malls...

If not celebrating Christmas, what then is a Jew to do? How is a Jew to respond? These questions are at the heart of... the December dilemma.

The lure of Christmas entices some Jews to become involved in the nonreligious aspects of Christmas and other Jews to reject it as a stepping-stone toward assimilation. These choices cause many Jews to feel displaced and marginalized...

Jews... employ a multitude of strategies to face the particular challenges of Christmas and to overcome feelings of exclusion and isolation... Using an ethnographic lens, this book analyzes recent and current major phenomena in American Jewish culture during Christmastime."

-- Excerpted from the Introduction (pgs 2-6)

## Kosher Christmas

Written by Kam Williams, Book Review  
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During an address to the nation back in December of 1962, John Fitzgerald Kennedy stated that, "Christmas is truly the universal holiday of all men." While the presidential pronouncement was probably well-meaning, it insensitively ignored the religious beliefs of millions of non-Christian Americans.

Given how the Christmas celebration extends over a season when everyone is expected to catch the spirit, it is understandable that folks of other faiths might feel the need to accommodate themselves to the awkward situation. After all, kids receive gifts, families exchange cards, and holiday-themed music is ubiquitous.

Over the years, America's Jewry has proven to be incredibly inventive in accommodating itself to the annual Christian ritual. Paradoxically, members of the Jewish community have composed many of the most-beloved Christmas songs of all time, including White Christmas (Irving Berlin), The Christmas Song (Mel Tormé and Bob Wells), Let It Snow! Let It Snow! Let It Snow! (Sammy Cahn and Jule Styne), Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer (Johnny Marks), Silver Bells (Jay Livingston and Ray Evans), Frosty the Snowman (Walter Rollins and Steve Fletcher), I'll Be Home for Christmas (Walter Kent and Buck Ram), Winter Wonderland (Felix Bernard), There's No Place Like Home for the Holidays (Al Stillman) and It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year (George Wyle).

While that's alluded to in *A Kosher Christmas*, the focus of the informative opus is more on Jews' collective response to their plight at Christmastime. In the book, author Rabbi Joshua Eli Plaut fondly chronicles a number of readily-identifiable, parallel cultural traditions which have emerged, ranging from the reinvention of Hanukkah to visiting Jewish museums to attending concerts to taking singles' cruises to eating Chinese food on Christmas Eve to volunteering at soup kitchens on Christmas Day.

As Rabbi Plaut explains, volunteerism is especially important since "it allows Jews an opportunity to participate in Christmas, but in a way that does not detract from their Jewish identity." An entertaining examination of a host of admirable adaptations which have enabled Jews to proudly partake and contribute at Christmastime.

To order a copy of *A Kosher Christmas*, visit: <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0813553806/ref%3Dnosim/thslfofire-+20>

*A Kosher Christmas:*  
'Tis the Season to Be Jewish  
by Rabbi Joshua Eli Plaut  
Foreword by Jonathan D. Sarna  
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