

Less than half of Americans attend church at Christmas

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BRENTWOOD, Tenn.—As Americans make their Christmas plans, slightly less than half say they usually attend a church service during the holiday season.

A [Lifeway Research study](#) finds U.S. adults are split on whether they'll  be at church sometime this Christmas—47 percent say they typically attend church at Christmastime, while 48 percent say they do not, and 5 percent aren't sure.

“The very name ‘Christmas’ originates in the church’s celebration of Jesus Christ’s birth. In the mid-14th century, the words ‘Christ’s Mass’ were first merged as a single term for this celebration,” said Scott McConnell, executive director of Lifeway Research.

“While [9 in 10 Americans do something to celebrate Christmas](#), less than half typically attend church at Christmastime today.”

Pastors plan for larger crowds during the Christmas season. In 2023, Lifeway Research found U.S. Protestant pastors say they usually [plan four events or activities](#) at their churches to celebrate Christmas.

About 4 in 5 pastors (81 percent) say Christmas is one of their three highest attendance worship services, according to a 2024 [Lifeway Research study](#). Specifically, 28 percent say Christmas draws the most people to their church.

During the season, churches see more people at their Christmas Eve service than other worship services, a 2022 [Lifeway Research study](#)

revealed.

Who is most likely to attend?

This Christmas season, 47 percent of Americans say attending church is part of their usual holiday traditions, but some are more likely to show up than others.

Not surprisingly, those who attend church most often—more than once a week—are the most likely (95 percent) to be there for Christmas.

Protestants (57 percent), Catholics (56 percent) and those from other religions (53 percent) are more likely than the religiously unaffiliated (21 percent) to report usually attending a church service. The religiously unaffiliated are the most likely to say no (71 percent).

Americans with evangelical beliefs are far more likely than those without such beliefs to show up to church during Christmas (72 percent v. 40 percent).

What prompts Christmas church attendance?

Most of those attending church at Christmastime say they do so primarily because of their faith. Three in 5 (60 percent) of those who typically attend church during this season say they do so to honor Jesus.

Fewer say their church attendance comes from a desire to observe tradition (16 percent), to be with family and friends (15 percent) or to get in the Christmas spirit (8 percent). Few (1 percent) aren't sure what motivates their attendance.

“While church services draw more people in the Christmas season, their prime motivation isn’t unified. The majority are drawn to celebrate the birth of Jesus, honoring him as the Christ or promised Messiah. But others mostly join in because of the importance of family, their embrace of Christmas church tradition or to jumpstart Christmas vibes,” McConnell said.

Christians who attend church less often are more likely to say their Christmas attendance comes from tradition. Those who rarely or never attend (22 percent) and those who attend once or twice a month or only on religious holidays (27 percent) are more likely than those who attend about once a week (10 percent) and those who attend more than once a week (6 percent) to say they show up to observe tradition.

Americans with evangelical beliefs are more likely than other Americans to say they attend services to honor Jesus (74 percent v. 53 percent). The religiously unaffiliated are the most likely to say they attend to be with family and friends (42 percent) and to get in the Christmas spirit (21 percent). 

Some are just waiting to be invited

Those who don’t typically show up at Christmas may simply be waiting on an invitation. Most (56 percent) say they likely would attend church if someone they know invited them to attend with them at Christmas time, including 17 percent who are very likely.

Around a third (36 percent) say they’re unlikely, including 24 percent who are very unlikely. Another 8 percent say they’re not sure.

“More than 1 in 8 Americans are convinced they would not attend a Christmas service if an acquaintance invited them. However, the majority

of Americans who do not typically attend church at Christmastime say they probably would if they were invited by someone they know,” McConnell said.

“But anticipating a positive response may not be the best motivation for a churchgoer to invite people to a Christmas service. A different motivation in the chorus of an African American spiritual appeals to everybody: ‘Go tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born.’ This chorus suggests that the Hallelujah-inspiring good news of Jesus being born is reason enough to tell it on the mountain or on the city wall.”

Catholics (71 percent), Protestants (65 percent) and Americans of other religions (58 percent) who don’t typically attend during Christmas are more likely than the religiously unaffiliated (40 percent) to say they’re likely to attend a service if invited. The religiously unaffiliated are the most likely to say they are unlikely to attend if invited (55 percent).

Christians who already attend church at least occasionally are more likely to show up this time of year if invited. Christians who attend a worship service about once a week (76 percent) and those who attend once or twice a month or only on religious holidays (69 percent) are more likely than those who rarely or never attend (52 percent) to say they’re likely to show up if invited.

Christmas invitations also may be effective for women (61 percent say they’re likely to attend), Hispanics (72 percent), those in Midwest (65 percent) and Northeast (60 percent) and those with evangelical beliefs (69 percent).

Older Americans who don’t typically attend aren’t looking for an opportunity to start. Those 65 and older (48 percent) are the most likely to say they are unlikely to go to a church service with a friend if invited during Christmas.

The online survey was conducted Aug. 14-30, 2024, using a national pre-recruited panel. Researchers used quotas and slight weights to balance gender, age, region, ethnicity, education, religion and evangelical beliefs to reflect the population more accurately. The completed sample is 1,200 surveys, providing 95 percent confidence the sampling error from the panel does not exceed plus or minus 3.3 percent. Margins of error are higher in sub-groups.