

Explaining Christmas to an Alien

It's the year 2513. You are a group of intergalactic philosophers travelling through space, searching for a planet where you can start a new world. On the way, you have adventures and help aliens to solve their problems.

It's nearly Christmas. Because you're a long, long way from home, you feel a bit homesick. So you decide to have a proper celebration. You stop off at a nearby planet to get supplies.

You explain to the local aliens what happens at Christmas. They don't understand, so you show them some adverts and soap operas from Christmas TV. After they've watched them, they seem even more puzzled.

"We would like to help you, but we're not sure this Christmas thing is a good idea. We wouldn't want to help you do something that wasn't good for you. So before we help you, we have some questions."

"Why do you send cards wishing each other 'Happy Christmas' when you can say it face to face?"

"Why do you wish people things anyway? How can wishing something make it more likely to happen?"

"Why do you spend your time shopping and thinking about presents for other people, while they do the same for you? Why not just buy presents for yourself, because you know what you want?"

"Why do you cover things in paper and then rip the paper off again?"

"Why do some of the things you buy cost four times as much as other things that do the same job? What do the markings on them mean?"

"It is very strange, too, that on your planet little children get the presents they have asked for, not the presents that their parents know would be best for them. Why do the parents not decide?"

"Why do you have a feast about a child being born thousands of years ago when plenty of fresh babies are born every day?"

"Some of you leave your warm homes once a year to go to old and badly heated buildings to sing songs and shake each other's hands. If you must do this, why not do it in the summer when it would be nice to be cool?"

"Are your males more stupid than your females? Only, it is the females that mostly cook the dinner. Are the males not allowed to be left alone with hot things?"

"We are puzzled by these things you read out of the things that go bang. When you read them to each other, your faces look as though you are in pain. But you also seem to enjoy them. It is very confusing."

"Why eat a meal so large that you all feel uncomfortable and all the old people fall asleep?"

"People who already have lots of things seem to get lots more things. People who have very few things seem to get less. Would you not be happier if it was the other way round?"

"You have visits from mothers' brothers and fathers' fathers' fathers who you do not see much for the rest of the year. If you like these people, why do you not see them more often? If you do not like them, why see them at all?"

"At Christmas, you are together with people you know. But you all spend much of the time watching people you do not know on television. Do you not like each other very much?"

So before you can stock up on festive supplies, you need to answer the aliens questions and explain to them what the point of Christmas is in the first place!

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(This is a bonus episode connected to Alien Adventures in Philosophy, a Philosophy Quest that is available as a live event or teacher resource pack from January 2014)