



2020 Major Religious and Cultural Holidays and Festivals

This is as an educational resource about the major religious and cultural holidays and festivals celebrated by families that attend Forsyth County Schools. To add to this list contact icaracciolo@forsyth.k12.ga.us

Epiphany/Twelfth Night/Three Kings Day (Christian)

This date is also known as Befana Day; commemorates the revelation of God through Jesus Christ and marks the time the three wise men arrived in Bethlehem and presented gifts to the baby Jesus.

General practices: Prayer, festive meals, offerings, gifts.

Date(s) observed: Jan. 6, 2020

Christmas (Eastern Orthodox Christian)

Christmas is an annual celebration commemorating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah whose message and self-sacrifice began the Christian religion.

General practices: Many celebrate this holiday by attending church services, holding celebratory meals, and visiting family.

Date details: Eastern Orthodox Christmas is determined by the Julian calendar which regulates ceremonial cycle of the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches.

Date(s) observed: Jan. 7, 2020

Chinese New Year (Confucian, Taoist, Buddhist)

This is the most important of traditional Chinese holidays.

General practices: Families gather together to spend the evening preparing boiled dumplings and festive meals and giving of money to children in red envelopes.

Date details: Corresponds to the New Moon in Aquarius, which can fall from late January to mid-February.

Date(s) observed: Jan. 25, 2020

Magha Puja Day (Buddhist)

Magha Puja Day commemorates an important event in the life of the Buddha, in which the four disciples traveled to join the Buddha.

Date(s) observed: Feb. 10, 2020

Nirvana Day or Parinirvana (Buddhist)

Annual festival to commemorate Buddha's death in 483 BC and his final nirvana. Many Buddhists celebrate by visiting temples, monasteries and meditating.

Date(s) observed: Feb. 10, 2020

Ash Wednesday (Christian)

This is the first day of Lent, the period of 40 days before Easter in which many Christians sacrifice ordinary pleasures to reflect on Christ's sacrifice.

General practices: On this day, there are special church services and the faithful wear a cross of ashes marked on foreheads. Most Christians abstain from meat on this day and also throughout Lent, which ends the Saturday before Easter.

Date(s) observed: Feb. 26, 2020

Purim (Jewish)

Purim commemorates the time when the Jews were living in Persia and were saved by the courage of a young Jewish woman called Esther.

General practices: Many Jews hold carnival-like celebrations on Purim, dressing in costumes, and read the Book of Esther. Triangular fruit-filled pastries are eaten in opposition to the villain Haman, who wore a three-cornered hat.

Date(s) observed: March 9-10, 2020

Palm Sunday (Christian)

A commemoration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as crowds lined his path with palm fronds

General practices: Prayer, distribution of palm leaves commemorating Jesus' entry into Jerusalem prior to his crucifixion.

Date(s) observed: April 5, 2020

Naw Ruz (Baha'i)

This is the Baha'i New Year, a traditional celebration in Iran adopted as a holy day associated with Baha'i. It is a celebration of spring and new life.

General practices: Festive music dancing, prayers, meetings, meals. Begins at sundown.

Date(s) observed: March 19-20, 2020

Holi (Hindu)

Also known as the "Festival of Colors," this holiday can be traced to Hindu scriptures commemorating good over evil. This date is also a celebration of the colorful spring and a farewell to the dull winter.

General practices: Hindus often sprinkle colored water and powder on others and celebrate with bonfires and lights, signifying victory of good over evil.

Date details: Celebrated at the end of the winter season on the last full moon day of the lunar moon in late February or early March.

Date(s) observed: March 9-10, 2020

Maundy Thursday (Christian)

Thursday before Easter, commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus with the Apostles.

General practices: Prayer, Communion (Eucharist), meals, and foot-washing ceremonies among some Christian denominations.

Date details: Always falls on the Thursday before Easter Sunday.

Date(s) observed: April 9, 2020

Good Friday (Christian)

Friday before Easter; commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ; among some sects of Christianity and in many countries marks a day of fasting.

General practices: Prayer, fasting, abstaining from meat, and noon or afternoon services in some Christian denominations.

Date details: Always falls on the Friday before Easter Sunday.

Date(s) observed: April 10, 2020

Holy Friday/Good Friday (Eastern Orthodox Christian)

Friday before Easter commemorates the crucifixion of Jesus Christ among some sects of Christianity, and in many countries, marks a day of fasting.

General practices: Prayer, fasting, confession, and church services as well as the wrapping or dyeing of eggs (often red) in preparation for Easter Sunday.

Date details: Orthodox Good Friday is determined by the Julian calendar which regulates ceremonial cycle of the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches.

Date(s) observed: April 10, 2020

Easter (Christian)

Annual commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

General practices: Celebratory meals, family gatherings, distribution of colored eggs, baskets and chocolate bunnies. It is a celebration of renewal.

Date details: Easter Sunday is determined by the Gregorian calendar (Gregorian calendar regulates ceremonial cycle of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches).

Date(s) observed: April 12, 2020

Pesach/Passover (Jewish)

Pesach is a week-long observance commemorating the freedom and exodus of the Israelites (Jewish slaves) from Egypt during the reign of the Pharaoh Ramses II (one of three pilgrimage festivals).

General practices: Family gatherings, ritualized meals called Seders, reading of the Haggadah, lighting of Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the last night of Passover.

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Date(s) observed: April 8-16, 2020

Buddha Day/Visakha Puja (Buddhist)

This holiday is traditionally known as Buddha's birthday. It is the major Buddhist festival, commemorating the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha.

General practices: Buddhists often decorate their homes and visit their local temples. Observers are encouraged to refrain from slaughtering and to avoid eating meat on this date.

Date(s) observed: April 8, 2020

Pascha/Easter (Eastern Orthodox Christian)

Annual commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus Christ

General practices: Celebratory meals, family gatherings, distribution of colored eggs and baskets of breads, meats, eggs, cheeses and other foods. It is a celebration of renewal.

Date details: Easter Sunday is determined by the Julian calendar which regulates ceremonial cycle of the Eastern Orthodox Christian churches.

Date(s) observed: April 19, 2020

Yom HaSho'ah (Jewish)

Holocaust Remembrance Day; a day to remember the lives and names of Jewish victims and activists of the Holocaust.

General practices: Ceremonies or events to remember Holocaust victims who died during World War II. Activities may include lighting memorial candles and reciting the Kaddish, which is a prayer for the departed.

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Date(s) observed: April 20-21, 2020

Ramadan (Muslim)

Ramadan is an occasion to focus on faith through fasting and prayer and is one of the most important Muslim holidays. Ramadan is notable because the Qur'an was first revealed during this month, and Muslims see the Qur'an as the ultimate form of guidance for mankind. The night that the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad is called Lailat ul Oadr and standing in prayer this one night is thought to eclipse months of worship.

General practices: Fasting is required during the entire month of Ramadan. Muslims refrain from food and beverages during the daylight hours and smoking and sexual relations are forbidden. Worshipers break the fasting each night with prayer, reading of the Qu'ran, and a meal called the iftar. In addition, many Muslims also attend night prayers at Mosques. Muslims also believe that their good actions bring a greater reward during this month than any other time of the year, so almost all Muslims try to give up bad habits during Ramadan.

Date details: Dates are determined by the lunar calendar. Lunar calendars can vary based on region and practice. The observed date marks the beginning of a 30-day observation.

Date(s) observed: April 23-May 23, 2020

Shavuot (Jewish)

Commemorates receipt of the Torah on Mount Sinai (two of three pilgrimage festivals).

General practices: Evening of devotional programs and studying the Torah, lighting of Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the second night of Shavuot.

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Date(s) observed: May 28-30, 2020

Ascension of the Baha'ullah (*Baha'i*)

Commemorates the death of the founder of the Baha'i faith. Baha'llah died on May 29, 1892.

General practices: Devotional programs and reading from the scriptures.

Date(s) observed: May 29, 2020

Eid al-Fitr (*Islamic*)

Eid al-Fitr means "break the fast" and is the last day of Ramadan, marking the end of a month of fasting. The phrase commonly used by Muslims to wish someone a happy Eid is "Eid Mubarak," which translates to "Blessed Eid" in Arabic.

General practices: Muslims often pray, exchange gifts, give money to children, feast, and celebrate with friends and family.

Date details: Dates are determined by the lunar calendar. Lunar calendars can vary based on region and practice. Eid al Fitr is a three-day celebration and begins at sundown.

Date(s) observed: May 23-24, 2020

Tisha B'Av (*Jewish*)

Commemorates a series of Jewish tragedies including the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem.

General practices: Fasting and mourning.

Date details: Begins at sundown on first day, fast deferred because of the Sabbath.

Date(s) observed: July 29-30, 2020

Raksha Bandhan (*Hindu*)

The Rakhi festivity falls in the holy month of Shraavan; The origin and history of Rakhi can be dated back to the mythological Pauranic times.

General practices: A day to acknowledge siblings and their relationships.

Date(s) observed: Aug. 3, 2020

Krishna Janmashtami (*Hindu*)

This two-day festival celebrates the birth of Krishna, a widely-worshiped Hindu god. Krishna is considered to be a warrior, hero, teacher and philosopher.

General practices: During this festival, Hindus are likely to forgo sleep in order to sing bhajans, traditional Hindu songs. Many Hindus also fast during the first day of the festival. Dances, songs and plays depicting the life of Krishna are common.

Date details: The first day is called Krishan ashtami or Gokul ashtami. The second day is known as Kaal ashtami or more popularly Janam ashtami.

Date(s) observed: Aug. 11, 2020

Rosh Hashanah (*Jewish*)

Start of the Jewish New Year, day of judgment and remembrance; the Jewish calendar celebrates the New Year in the seventh month (Tishrei) as a day of rest and celebration ten days before Yom Kippur.

General practices: Prayer in synagogue and festive meals

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Date(s) observed: Sept. 19-20, 2020

Yom Kippur (Jewish)

Yom Kippur is often considered the holiest day of the year for Jews, and the day is dedicated to atonement and abstinence.

General practices: During Yom Kippur, Jews fast from before sundown until after sunset, and light a Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on the night of Yom Kippur.

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Date(s) observed: Sept. 27-28, 2020

Eid al-Adha (Islamic)

Eid al-Adha is a major festival that celebrates the willingness to make sacrifices in the name of one's faith. According to legend, the prophet Ibrahim was ordered to sacrifice his son in God's name. When Ibrahim was prepared to kill his son, God stepped in and gave him a sheep to sacrifice instead. This holiday celebrates Ibrahim's total faith in God, and Muslims view this holiday as an important annual reminder.

General practices: Prayers, gift giving, prayers, and sometimes slaughtering of sheep, with a portion of the meat gifted to the poor.

Date details: Lunar calendars vary based on region and practice. Begins at sundown.

Date(s) observed: July 30-31, 2020

Sukkot (Jewish)

A week-long celebration which begins with the building of Sukkah for sleep and meals. Sukkot is named for the huts Moses and the Israelites lived in as they wandered the desert before reaching the promised land.

General practices: Families in the United States commonly decorate the sukkah with produce and artwork.

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Date(s) observed: Oct. 2-9, 2020

Shemini Atzeret (Jewish)

Holiday with significant work restriction

Also known as Atzereth, this is a fall festival, which includes a memorial service for the dead and features prayers for rain in Israel.

General practices: Jews light a Yahrzeit memorial candle at sundown on Shemini Atzereth (the eighth night of Sukkot).

Date details: Begins at sundown.

Date(s) observed: Oct. 9-11, 2020

Simchat Torah (Jewish)

Simchat Torah marks the completion of the annual cycle of the reading of the Torah in the synagogue and the beginning of the new cycle.

General practices: Practitioners dance in synagogues as all the Torah scrolls are carried around in seven circuits.

Date(s) observed: Oct. 10-11, 2020

Navaratri (Hindu)

Navarati is one of the greatest Hindu festivals, and celebrates the triumph of good over evil. During this time, Hindus worship Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati.

General practices: Durga is the mother goddess, and so Hindus try to visit their mothers and other relatives during this time. Some Hindus will pray and fast, and there are often feasts and dances.

Date(s) observed: Oct. 17-26, 2020

Birth of Bahá'u'lláh (Baha'i)

This holiday celebrates the birthday of Bahá'u'lláh, one of the Baha'i faith's most important figures. For Bahá'ís, the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh is a Holy Day celebrating the rebirth of the world through the love of God, just as Christmas is for Christians.

Date(s) observed: Oct. 18-19, 2020

Diwali (Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jain)

Diwali, the Hindu "festival of lights," is an extremely popular holiday for multiple religions throughout southern Asia. Diwali extends over five days and celebrates the victory of good over evil. The Times of India described Diwali as "a reaffirmation of hope, a renewed commitment to friendship and goodwill, and a religiously sanctioned celebration of the simple." Fireworks, oil lamps, and sweets are common, making this a favorite holiday for children. The lamps are lit to help the goddess Lakshmi find her way into people's homes.

General practices: Lighting oil lamps and candles, setting off fireworks and prayer.

Date(s) observed: Nov. 14, 2020

Hanukkah/Chanukah (Jewish)

Hanukkah is the Jewish festival of lights and lasts for eight days. Hanukkah commemorates the Jewish struggle for religious freedom. The history of the holiday involves a historic military victory in which a Jewish sect called the Maccabees defeated the Syrian Greeks. The celebration commemorates a miracle in which a sacred temple flame burned for eight days on only one day's worth of oil.

General practices: On each of the eight nights of Hanukkah, Jewish families light an additional candle of the menorah candelabrum until all eight candles are lit. Jews celebrate with food and song, as well as exchanging gifts for eight days.

Date details: Hanukkah begins at sundown on the first day.

Date(s) observed: Dec. 10-18, 2020

Christmas (Christian)

Christmas is an annual celebration commemorating the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah whose message and self-sacrifice began the Christian religion.

General practices: Many celebrate this holiday by giving gifts, attending church services, decorating Christmas trees and visiting family.

Date(s) observed: Dec. 24-25, 2020

Kwanza (African American and Pan-African)

Kwanzaa is a holiday which celebrates family, community and culture created by Dr. Maulana Karenga in 1966. Its origins are in the first harvest celebrations of Africa from which it takes its name, "matunda ya kwanza" which means "first fruits" in Swahili.

General practices: Seven days culminating in a feast of faith

Date(s) observed: Dec. 26, 2020 to Jan. 1, 2021