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Most Say Religious Holiday Displays on Public Property Are OK

*Widespread Belief in the Biblical
Christmas Story*

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
ON THIS REPORT:**

Alan Cooperman, Director, Religion Research

Greg Smith, Associate Director, Research

Jessica Hamar Martínez, Research Associate

Katherine Ritchey, Communications Manager

202.419.4372

www.pewresearch.org

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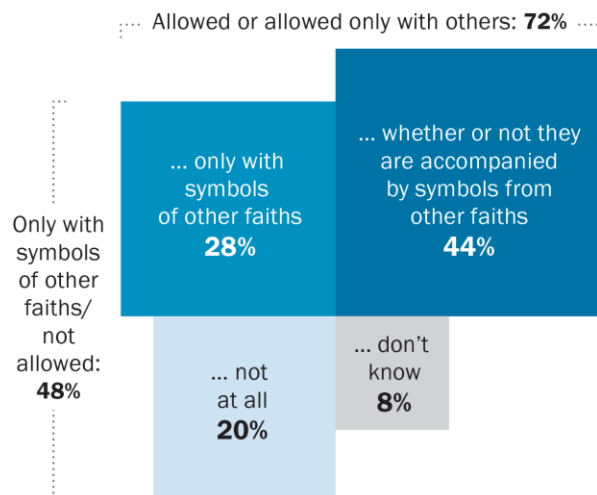
Widespread Belief in the Biblical Christmas Story

Controversies over public displays of religious symbols on government property annually pop up during the holiday season. For example, [Florida officials faced a quandary](#) again this year when they invited religious groups to erect displays in the State Capitol building and wound up not only with a Christian nativity scene but also with an atheist's "Festivus" pole made of beer cans and a local satanic temple's depiction of a fallen angel. Such controversies often end up in the courts, creating a [set of legal precedents](#) that public officials – and their lawyers – [have to take into account](#) at this time each year.

A new Pew Research Center survey finds that 44% of Americans say Christian symbols like nativity scenes should be allowed on government property even if they are not accompanied by symbols from other religions. In addition, 28% of U.S. adults say that such symbols should be permitted, but *only if* they are accompanied by symbols from other religions, such as Hanukkah candles. One-in-five (20%) say there should be no religious displays on government property, period.

Should Christian Symbols Be Allowed on Government Property?

% saying symbols like nativity scenes should be allowed on government property ...



Survey conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014. Q24.
See topline for full question wording.

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Advocates on both sides of these disputes can take some heart in Americans' views. On the one hand, nearly three-quarters of U.S. adults (72%) favor allowing Christian symbols on government property in at least some cases – either by themselves or with symbols from other faiths. Looked at another way, however, nearly half of Americans (48%) express reservations about these displays, either saying that Christian symbols must be accompanied by those from other faiths or that no religious displays should be allowed on government property.

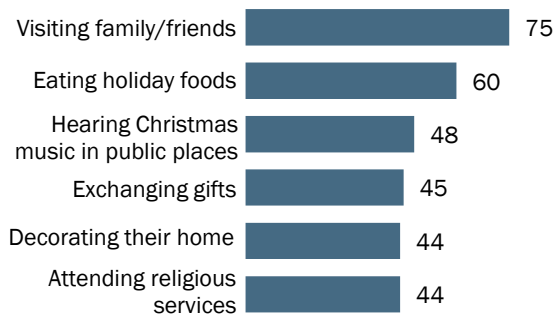
The new survey also suggests that most Americans believe that the biblical Christmas story reflects historical events that actually occurred. About three-quarters of Americans believe that Jesus Christ was born to a virgin, that an angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus, and that wise men, guided by a star, brought Jesus gold, frankincense and myrrh. And eight-in-ten U.S. adults believe the newborn baby Jesus was laid in a manger.

In total, 65% of U.S. adults believe that all of these aspects of the Christmas story – the virgin birth, the journey of the magi, the angel's announcement to the shepherds and the manger story – reflect events that actually happened. Among U.S. Christians, fully eight-in-ten (81%) believe in all four elements of the Christmas story. Even among people who are not affiliated with any religion, 21% believe all these events took place, and 37% believe at least one (but not all) of them occurred.

As Americans look forward to the holiday season, more than four-in-ten say they look forward “a lot” to attending religious services. Similar shares look forward to decorating their homes for the holidays, exchanging gifts and hearing Christmas music in stores and public places. And even larger numbers look forward to gathering with friends and family during the holidays and to eating holiday foods.

Anticipating the Holiday Season

% who are looking forward to each activity “a lot”



Survey conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014.

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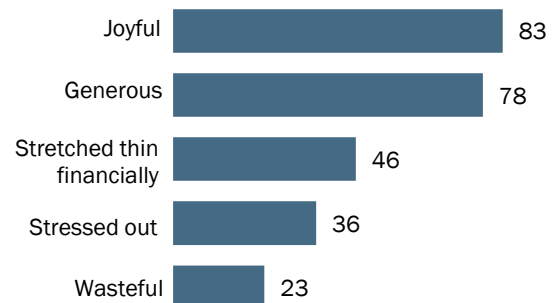
These are among the main findings of a new Pew Research Center survey conducted Dec. 3-7 among 1,507 adults. The survey also finds that the holiday season brings both joy and stress for many Americans. When asked about their feelings on buying and receiving holiday gifts, many people express mixed emotions. More than eight-in-ten Americans say the thought of exchanging gifts makes them feel joyful (83%), and nearly as many say it makes them feel generous (78%). At the same time, 46% say the prospect of exchanging holiday gifts makes them feel stretched thin financially, 36% report feeling stressed out about buying and receiving gifts, and about a quarter (23%) feel wasteful.

Feeling financially burdened by the holidays is closely linked with household income; nearly six-in-ten people with family incomes of less than \$30,000 say they feel stretched for money when they think about buying gifts, compared with just a third of those with family incomes of \$75,000 or more.

All in all, a majority of Americans (53%) express mixed emotions – both positive and negative – about buying and receiving gifts. More than a third have only positive feelings about gift-giving, saying it makes them feel joyful or generous (or both) but not stretched thin, stressed out or wasteful. And 7% express only negative feelings (financial strain, stress, wastefulness) about exchanging gifts.

Feelings About Gift-Giving

% who say they feel _____ when thinking about buying and receiving gifts



% expressing _____ feelings about buying and receiving gifts



Survey conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014.

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Most Say Christian Symbols on Government Property Are Acceptable

A plurality of Americans (44%) say that Christian symbols such as nativity scenes should be allowed on government property during the holidays whether or not they are accompanied by symbols from other faiths, while 28% say Christian symbols should be allowed on government property only if accompanied by other religious displays (such as Hanukkah candles). One-in-five (20%) say that no religious symbols should be allowed on government property.

Most Republicans and those who lean toward the GOP (60%) approve of Christian displays in public spaces, even if they are not accompanied by displays from other faiths. One-quarter of Republicans say Christian displays should be permitted only if

accompanied by other religious symbols, and just one-in-ten (9%) say that no religious symbols should be permitted on government property. Democrats and those who lean toward the Democratic Party, by contrast, are much more evenly divided on this question. Similar shares choose each of the three options: that Christian symbols should be permitted by themselves (32%); that such symbols should be allowed, but only if accompanied by other religious displays (31%); and that no religious symbols should be displayed on government property (30%).

Nearly six-in-ten evangelical Protestants (including two-thirds of white evangelicals) say Christian symbols should be allowed on government property regardless of whether or not other faiths are also represented. Fewer mainline Protestants (45%) and Catholics (43%) say the same. Among the

Should Religious Symbols Like Christian Nativity Scenes Be Allowed on Government Property?

% in each group who say...

	No religious symbols should be allowed	Only if accompanied by symbols of other faiths	Christian symbols should be allowed whether or not there are others	Don't know
	%	%	%	%
Total	20	28	44	8=100
Rep/lean Rep	9	25	60	6=100
Dem/lean Dem	30	31	32	8=100
Protestant	12	27	53	8=100
Evangelical Prot.	10	23	58	8=100
White evangelical	5	23	67	5=100
Mainline Prot.	15	32	45	7=100
White mainline	13	30	49	8=100
Catholic	19	32	43	7=100
Unaffiliated	38	29	28	6=100
<i>Attend religious services...</i>				
Weekly or more	10	25	56	9=100
Monthly/yearly	21	32	41	7=100
Seldom/never	31	28	34	6=100

Survey conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014. Q24. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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religiously unaffiliated, nearly four-in-ten (38%) say that no religious displays should be permitted on government property, while 29% think Christian symbols should be allowed if accompanied by displays from other religions, and 28% say Christian symbols should be allowed even by themselves.

Majorities Believe Christmas Story Historically Accurate

Nearly three-quarters of U.S. adults (73%) say they believe that Jesus Christ was born to a virgin. One-in-five do not believe in the virgin birth, and 6% say they don't know or decline to answer the question. These findings are virtually unchanged compared with 2013.

The new survey also asked whether other elements of the Christmas story reflect events that actually happened. Fully eight-in-ten Americans (81%) believe that the newborn baby Jesus was laid in a manger. Three-quarters believe that wise men, guided by a star, brought Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And 74% say the account of an angel of the Lord appearing to shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus reflects an event that actually occurred.

Across all four questions about the Christmas story, women are more likely to express belief than men. And belief in the Christmas story is more widespread among respondents who have not completed college than it is among college graduates. However, there is little sign of a consistent generation gap on these questions.

Most Say Christmas Story Historically Accurate

% of U.S. adults saying they believe each

	Jesus was born to a virgin	Baby Jesus was laid in a manger	Wise men, guided by star, brought gifts of gold, frankincense, myrrh	Angel announced birth of Jesus to shepherds
	%	%	%	%
Total	73	81	75	74
Men	69	78	71	70
Women	78	85	80	78
Age 18-29	70	80	74	69
30-49	72	80	74	73
50-64	76	83	77	78
65+	78	81	75	76
College grad+	60	73	64	59
Some college	77	83	80	78
High school or less	80	85	80	82
Protestant	91	92	89	90
Evangelical Protestant	96	95	94	96
White evangelical	96	95	96	97
Mainline Protestant	85	88	82	82
White mainline	83	87	81	80
Catholic	86	92	84	90
Unaffiliated	30	53	41	31
<i>Attend religious services...</i>				
Weekly or more	92	93	91	93
Monthly/yearly	81	84	78	80
Seldom/never	42	64	53	46

Survey conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014. Q87, Q89a-c. Based on total. The question about the virgin birth asked "Do you believe that Jesus Christ was born to a virgin, or don't you believe this?" The other questions asked respondents whether they believe each element of the story "is an event that actually occurred, or not." See topline for full question wording.

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Evangelical Protestants are the most likely to say they believe in each of these four events, with 94% or more expressing belief in each. Strong majorities of Catholics and mainline Protestants also believe in all of these elements of the Christmas story, though they are somewhat less unanimous in their belief. Religious “nones” are far less likely than Christians to believe in the elements of the Christmas story mentioned in the survey, though substantial shares say they believe in the magi’s journey to visit Jesus (41%) and that Jesus was laid in a manger as a newborn (53%).

Fully 65% of American adults believe in all four of these elements of the Christmas story – the virgin birth, an angel announcing the birth of Jesus to shepherds, wise men following a star to bring gifts to Jesus, and that the baby Jesus was laid in a manger. Just 14% say that they do not believe any of these events actually happened (including those who responded to an earlier question by saying they do not believe Jesus ever actually lived, and were therefore not asked about other parts of the Christmas story). About one-in-five (22%) have mixed views on the Christmas story, saying they believe in at least one element, but not all of them.

Belief in Elements of the Christmas Story

% of U.S. adults saying they...

	Believe all four elements of the Christmas story	Believe in some elements	Do not believe any elements
	%	%	%
Total	65	22	14
Protestant	82	15	3
Evangelical Protestant	89	11	1
White evangelical	90	9	1
Mainline Protestant	74	20	7
White mainline	72	20	8
Catholic	76	20	4
Unaffiliated	21	37	42
<i>Attend religious services...</i>			
Weekly or more	86	11	3
Monthly/yearly	69	22	9
Seldom/never	34	34	32

Survey conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014. Q87, Q89a-c. Based on total.

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Nearly nine-in-ten evangelical Protestants (89%) say they believe in all four of these parts of the Christmas story, as do roughly three-quarters of Catholics (76%) and mainline Protestants (74%). Among religious “nones,” 21% believe in all four elements of the Christmas story, 37% believe in at least one (but not all), and 42% do not believe that any part of the Christmas story mentioned in the survey reflects an event that actually occurred.

Many Look Forward to Visiting Loved Ones, Eating Holiday Foods

The vast majority of Americans (91%) say they look forward to visiting with family and friends during the holiday season, including three-quarters who look forward to this “a lot.” Six-in-ten U.S. adults look forward “a lot” to eating holiday foods. Smaller numbers express this level of anticipation about hearing Christmas music in stores and other public places (48%), giving and receiving gifts (45%), decorating their homes for the holidays (44%) and attending religious services (44%).

Visiting With Family and Friends Among Most Anticipated Holiday Activities

% who look forward to each activity...

	A lot %	Some %	Not much/ at all %	Won't do this (VOL.)/DK %
Visiting with family and friends	75	16	8	2=100
Eating holiday foods	60	26	13	1=100
Hearing Christmas music in public places	48	25	26	1=100
Giving and receiving gifts	45	32	22	2=100
Decorating their home for the holidays	44	26	27	3=100
Attending religious services	44	23	31	2=100

Survey conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014. Q85a-f. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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Fully two-thirds of evangelical Protestants (68%) say attending religious services is a part of the holiday season they look forward to “a lot.” About half of Catholics (48%) and 42% of mainline Protestants say the same. Just 12% of the religiously unaffiliated say they look forward “a lot” to attending religious services during the holiday season. Religious differences are smaller on the other questions about what people look forward to during the holidays.

Women, Regular Worship Attenders Among Most Enthusiastic About Holiday Activities

% saying they look forward to each activity “a lot”

	Visiting with friends and family	Eating holiday foods	Playing of Christmas music in public	Giving and receiving gifts	Decorating your home for the holidays	Attending religious services
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total	75	60	48	45	44	44
Men	73	56	41	41	36	37
Women	77	63	56	48	52	51
Age 18-29	73	69	43	47	46	35
30-49	78	63	47	51	50	43
50-64	72	53	46	38	39	45
65+	76	52	60	39	36	54
Married/living with partner	78	62	51	48	48	47
Not married	72	58	45	41	40	40
Parent of child under 18	76	63	49	52	53	44
Not parent of child <18	75	59	48	41	40	44
Protestant	77	61	54	48	49	57
Evangelical Protestant	78	63	62	52	50	68
White evangelical	83	67	68	54	54	72
Mainline Protestant	75	59	43	43	48	42
White mainline	75	56	41	45	50	40
Catholic	76	63	56	43	48	48
Unaffiliated	72	59	31	40	36	12
<i>Attend worship services...</i>						
Weekly or more	83	60	63	49	51	81
Monthly/yearly	75	62	47	50	50	35
Seldom/never	67	57	32	33	28	10

Survey conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014. Q85a-f.

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Overall, Americans who attend religious services regularly are more enthusiastic about the various activities associated with the holiday season than are those who attend worship services less often. Those who attend religious services at least a few times a year are more likely to look forward “a lot” to all of the activities mentioned (with the exception of eating holiday foods) when compared with those who seldom or never attend religious services. For example, roughly half of respondents who attend religious services at least once a year say they are looking forward “a lot” to giving and receiving holiday gifts and to decorating their home for the holidays. Among those who seldom or never attend religious services, one-third or fewer share these sentiments.

Women also tend to be more excited than men about holiday activities. While roughly equal shares of men and women say they look forward to visiting with friends and family during the holidays, women look forward to every other activity measured by the survey more than men.

Americans who are married or living with a partner are more likely than those who are not to look forward to many of these holiday activities. And parents with children under 18 at home are more inclined than others to look forward “a lot” to giving and receiving holiday gifts (52% vs. 41%) and decorating their homes for the holidays (53% vs. 40%).

Eating holiday foods, exchanging gifts and decorating are more highly anticipated by adults under age 50 than by older Americans. By contrast, Americans ages 65 and older are more excited than younger adults about hearing Christmas music and attending religious services.

Most Feel Joyful, Generous About Gift-Giving

More than eight-in-ten U.S. adults (83%) say thinking about buying and receiving holiday gifts makes them feel joyful, and nearly as many (78%) say the prospect of exchanging gifts makes them feel generous. Still, 46% say exchanging gifts makes them feel stretched thin financially and 36% say it makes them feel stressed out. About a quarter (23%) say the thought of exchanging gifts makes them feel wasteful.

Mostly Positive Feelings About Buying and Receiving Holiday Gifts

When you think about buying and receiving holiday gifts, does it make you feel _____, or not?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
	%	%	%
Joyful	83	16	1=100
Generous	78	21	1=100
Stretched thin financially	46	53	1=100
Stressed out	36	63	1=100
Wasteful	23	75	2=100

Survey conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014. Q86a-e. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.

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Household income is closely connected to whether people feel financially burdened by exchanging holiday gifts.

Nearly six-in-ten of those who have an annual household income of less than \$30,000 (58%) say gift-giving makes them feel stretched thin financially, compared with a third of those with an income of \$75,000 or more. But while most lower-income Americans feel financially strained by the prospect of December gift-giving, most do not report feeling “stressed out” about buying and receiving gifts.

U.S. adults under the age of 30 are more likely than older adults to say gift-giving makes them feel generous. And Americans ages 65 and older are somewhat less likely than younger adults to say exchanging gifts makes them feel stretched thin financially or stressed out.

Feelings About Buying and Receiving Gifts

% saying they feel _____ when thinking about buying and receiving holiday gifts

	Joyful	Generous	Stretched thin financially	Stressed out	Wasteful
	%	%	%	%	%
Total	83	78	46	36	23
Age 18-29	85	86	49	38	25
30-49	85	79	53	41	26
50-64	79	75	45	34	21
65+	82	71	31	26	19
<i>Family income</i>					
\$75,000+	82	76	33	32	24
\$30,000 - \$74,999	84	80	46	36	22
<\$30,000	81	78	58	40	24
Protestant	86	79	44	35	21
Evangelical Protestant	88	82	44	33	19
White evangelical	88	83	46	34	19
Mainline Protestant	83	75	44	38	23
White mainline	85	75	44	39	22
Catholic	90	84	43	31	20
Unaffiliated	72	71	51	36	28

Survey conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014. Q86a-e.

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About the Survey

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted Dec. 3-7, 2014 among a national sample of 1,507 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia (605 respondents were interviewed on a landline telephone, and 902 were interviewed on a cell phone, including 513 who had no landline telephone). The survey was conducted by interviewers at Princeton Data Source under the direction of Princeton Survey Research Associates International. A combination of landline and cell phone random digit dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Survey Sampling International. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Respondents in the landline sample were selected by randomly asking for the youngest adult male or female who is now at home. Interviews in the cell sample were conducted with the person who answered the phone, if that person was an adult 18 years of age or older. For detailed information about our survey methodology, see <http://people-press.org/methodology/>.

The combined landline and cell phone sample are weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity and region to parameters from the 2012 Census Bureau's American Community Survey and population density to parameters from the Decennial Census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cell phone only, or both landline and cell phone), based on extrapolations from the 2013 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cell phones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. Sampling errors and statistical tests of significance take into account the effect of weighting.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,507	2.9 percentage points
Protestant	778	4.1 percentage points
Evangelical Protestant	445	5.4 percentage points
White evangelical	308	6.4 percentage points
Mainline Protestant	332	6.2 percentage points
White mainline	268	6.9 percentage points
Catholic	291	6.6 percentage points
Unaffiliated	294	6.6 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER
DECEMBER 2014 POLITICAL SURVEY
FINAL TOPLINE
DECEMBER 3-7, 2014
N=1,507**

**ALL OTHER QUESTIONS PREVIOUSLY RELEASED OR HELD FOR FUTURE RELEASE
NO QUESTIONS 3-4, 8-11, 13-16, 22-23**

ASK ALL:

On a different subject,

Q.24 Thinking about holiday displays on government property, which comes closest to your view? **[READ; READ CATEGORIES IN REVERSE ORDER FOR HALF THE SAMPLE]?**

Dec 3-7
2014

- 20 No religious symbols, like Christian nativity scenes, should be allowed on government property, [OR]
28 Religious symbols like Christian nativity scenes should be allowed on government property, but ONLY if accompanied by symbols from other faiths such as Hanukkah **[PRONOUNCED: "HAH-nuh-kuh"]** candles, [OR]
44 Christian symbols like nativity scenes should be allowed on government property whether or not they are accompanied by symbols from other faiths, [OR]
8 Don't know/Refused **(VOL.)**

NO QUESTIONS 25-29, 32-35, 39, 41-44, 47-52, 56-60, 62-65, 67-69, 71-73, 79-84

ASK ALL:

Q.85 Now, thinking about the holiday season, tell me how much, if at all, you look forward to each of the following. First do you look forward to **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE]** a lot, some, not much, or not at all? And do you look forward to **[ITEM]** a lot, some, not much, or not at all? How about **[INSERT NEXT ITEM]**? **[READ AS NECESSARY: Do you look forward to [ITEM] a lot, some, not much, or not at all?]**

		<u>A lot</u>	<u>Some</u>	<u>Not much</u>	<u>Not at all</u>	(VOL.) <u>Not planning to do this</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	Visiting with family and friends Dec 3-7, 2014	75	16	4	4	1	1
b.	Attending religious services Dec 3-7, 2014	44	23	11	20	1	1
c.	Eating holiday foods Dec 3-7, 2014	60	26	9	4	*	1
d.	Decorating your home for the holidays Dec 3-7, 2014	44	26	13	15	2	1
e.	The playing of Christmas music in stores and public places Dec 3-7, 2014	48	25	12	14	*	1
f.	Giving and receiving gifts Dec 3-7, 2014	45	32	13	8	1	1

ASK ALL:

Q.86 When you think about buying and receiving holiday gifts, does it make you feel **[INSERT, RANDOMIZE]**, or not? Does it make you feel **[INSERT NEXT]**, or not? **[IF NECESSARY: When you think about buying and receiving holiday gifts, does it make you feel [INSERT ITEM], or not?]**

		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>
a.	Joyful Dec 3-7, 2014	83	16	1
b.	Stressed out Dec 3-7, 2014	36	63	1
c.	Wasteful Dec 3-7, 2014	23	75	2
d.	Generous Dec 3-7, 2014	78	21	1
e.	Stretched thin financially Dec 3-7, 2014	46	53	1

ASK ALL:

Next,

Q.87 Do you believe that Jesus Christ was born to a virgin, or don't you believe this?

<u>Dec 3-7</u> <u>2014</u>		<u>Dec 3-8</u> <u>2013</u>
73	Yes, believe	73
20	No, don't believe	19
6	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)	7

ASK IF "DON'T BELIEVE" OR "DK/REF" ON Q.87 (Q.87=2,9):

Q.88 Regardless of your religious beliefs... Do you think Jesus Christ ever actually lived, or not?

BASED ON TOTAL

<u>Dec 3-7</u> <u>2014</u>	
20	Yes, lived
5	No, did not live
<u>2</u>	Don't know/Refused (VOL.)
27	<i>Don't believe/Don't know if Jesus Christ was born to a virgin (Q87=2,9)</i>

ASK IF "BELIEVE" IN Q.87 OR Q.88 (Q.87=1 OR Q.88=1):

Q.89 Thinking about the Christmas story, for each of the following, please tell me whether you believe it is an event that actually occurred or not. First, **[INSERT, RANDOMIZE]**... Do you believe this is an event that actually occurred, or don't you believe this? Next, **[INSERT NEXT]**...**[IF NECESSARY: Do you believe this is an event that actually occurred, or don't you believe this?]**

BASED ON TOTAL

	Yes, believe this event actually <u>occurred</u>	No, don't <u>believe</u>	(VOL.) <u>DK/Ref</u>	<i>Don't believe in Jesus (No/DK on Q.88)</i>
a. An angel of the Lord appeared to shepherds to announce the birth of Jesus Dec 3-7, 2014	74	15	3	7
b. Wise men were guided by a star and brought Jesus gold, frankincense [PRONOUNCE: "FRANK-in-sens"] and myrrh [PRONOUNCE: "murr"] Dec 3-7, 2014	75	14	4	7
c. The newborn baby Jesus was laid in a manger Dec 3-7, 2014	81	9	3	7