



The Man Who Invented Christmas

In fact, there were no Christmas trees at all. For most of the 2,000 years since the birth of Christ, Christmas was not a special holiday. If it was commemorated at all, it was with a candlelight service at the local church or cathedral and a special dinner at home. And that was pretty much it until the middle of the 19th century, when one man's novella helped to transform the celebration.

He has been called "the man who invented Christmas." His name is Charles Dickens. He is the author of a simple story he called *A Christmas Carol*.



Although Dickens is rightly regarded as one of the greatest writers in the history of the English language — he is the author of 20 novels, none of which has ever been out of print — there was a time when his popularity was at an all-time low.

The year was 1843. Dickens' books and columns weren't selling very well, his bank account was overdrawn and he was facing the possibility of declaring bankruptcy.

Frantic, he sat down a few weeks before Christmas and wrote a novella that he hoped would keep his creditors at bay. But his publishers flatly rejected his offering. No one would pay to have it printed and distributed.

So Dickens took an amazing gamble: He printed it himself. It was an exercise in vanity publishing long before the world knew that term. The author told friends of the risk he was taking and said it might mark the end of his career as a writer.

He should have had more confidence in the story he told. The book was an instant sensation, selling out the first printing of several thousand copies in just four days. A second printing was rushed through and sold out before the new year began. In no time at all, Dickens was forced to order a third and then fourth and fifth printing.

Then, someone adapted the story for the stage and *A Christmas Carol* became one of the most popular theater productions of all time. I dare say you can't find a city of any size in the English-speaking world where there isn't at least one production of Dickens' immortal play being performed this holiday season. And Hollywood has produced dozens of versions, including more than a few knock-offs, copycats, parodies and pastiches. If Dickens were still collecting royalties today, he would be one of the wealthiest billionaires on Earth.

By the way, *A Christmas Carol* was not only an incredible commercial success, it was also a critical hit, too. William Makepeace Thackeray, at the time Dickens' most severe critic, acknowledged the incredible power of the story:

The last two people I heard speak of it were women; neither knew the other, or the author, and both said, by way of criticism, "God bless him!" What a feeling this is for a writer to be able to



Written by [Wallis W. Wood](#) on December 24, 2011

inspire ... and what a reward to reap!

Today, we are all familiar with the story of the tight-fisted miser who said of Christmas, "Bah! Humbug!" Yet after visits by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future, Scrooge was transformed. As Tiny Tim says at the end, "God bless us all, every one."

But *A Christmas Carol* did more than restore Dickens' reputation and bank account. It also transformed what had been, up until then, a relatively minor holiday.

As historian Les Standiford has noted, in the early 19th century in England, the Christmas holiday "was a relatively minor affair that ranked far below Easter, causing little more stir than Memorial Day or St. George's Day today. In the eyes of the relatively enlightened Anglican Church, moreover, the entire enterprise smacked vaguely of paganism and, were there Puritans still around, acknowledging the holiday might have landed one in the stocks."

Dickens' biographer Peter Ackroyd and others have credited the novelist with single-handedly creating the modern Christmas holiday. Oh, not the contemporary orgy of shopping, spending and ostentatious display. In *A Christmas Carol* there are no gaudy decorations, no Christmas trees and, except for "the big prize turkey" at the end, no presents at all.

The only "gifts" exchanged are love, friendship and goodwill. Yet in this one small book, Dickens inspired his contemporaries, transformed a holiday and created an immortal message for us all. The lesson of *A Christmas Carol* is one of kindness, consideration and charity. Let us hope it lasts another 150 years — or even longer.

I am indebted to my good friend Alex Green for the inspiration for today's column. I have not only used many of the thoughts and ideas he expressed in his own column, I have shamelessly (but with his permission) borrowed his headline.

His column is called "Spiritual Wealth." Sadly, you cannot subscribe to it. It is available only to members of the Oxford Club, where he serves as investment director.

However, some of his most powerful columns have been published in a book you can get. It is called *Beyond Wealth: The Road Map to a Rich Life*, and it is available wherever books are sold. In fact, it is currently on sale at Amazon.com. I encourage you to order at least one copy now (new or used, printed or electronic) for yourself and many more next year, when it will make a wonderful Christmas present.

Please accept my very best wishes for a most joyous Christmas, surrounded by friends and family and filled with the true meaning of Christ's Mass.

Until next time, keep some powder dry.

Chip Wood was the first news editor of *The Review of the News* and also wrote for *American Opinion*, our two predecessor publications. He is now the geopolitical editor of *Personal Liberty Digest*, where his *Straight Talk* column appears weekly. This article first appeared in [PersonalLiberty.com](#) and has been reprinted with permission.



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