



Christmas History, Tradition & Symbols

# The History of “Xmas”

It is a common misconception that the abbreviation *Xmas* is a disrespectful version of the word Christmas. Critics claim its use is an attempt to take the "Christ" out of Christmas and secularize the holiday. Some even contend that its purpose is to literally cross out the word "Christ" with an "X". However, a look at the origins of Xmas, or X-mas, shows this is not the case.

In Greek, Christ is *Xristos*, or *Christos*, spelled Χριστός. The Greek letter X, or Chi, is the first letter of Christ's name and was a common abbreviation for "Christ" in past religious writings. Its usage can be traced as far back as 1021 AD in historic Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.



The labarum, often called the Chi Rho, is a religious symbol that may be more familiar to some. First used by emperor Constantine I of Rome in the 4th century as a military standard, it is a monogram formed with the first two letters of Christ's name – Chi Rho, or Χρ. It later came to be used more commonly as a general religious symbol for Christ.

With a history that can be traced back many centuries, it is clear that the "X" in Xmas is not an atheist attempt to remove the religious meaning from Christmas. It is instead an informal abbreviation of Christmas with roots in the Greek alphabet.

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