

# Day 1 – Belgium



**Vrolijk Kerstfeest!** That means “Merry Christmas” in Dutch, the main language spoken in Belgium. And to get us started on learning about Christmas around the world, Belgium is going to surprise us: they don’t get presents December 25! Instead, they believe that St. Nicholas (or *Sinterklaas*) brings them presents on December 6, which is St. Nicholas Day.

The night before St. Nicholas Day, kids put their shoes in front of the fireplace. They might leave a drawing or a snack as a present for him, and maybe even a carrot for his horse. They also leave something for Sinterklaas’ assistant, who they call Zwarte Piet, which means “Black Peter” in English. In the night, Sinterklaas lands on the roof with his horse and Zwarte Piet, who then climbs down the chimney and leaves presents in and around the kids’ shoes.

While kids get presents on December 6, Christmas Day is more of a religious festival in Belgium. On Christmas Eve, families eat a special meal that starts with a drink and nibbles (what we’d call appetizers), then they have dishes like seafood and stuffed turkey. The dessert (called *Kerststronk*) is a sponge cake covered with chocolate butter cream (like frosting) that is made to look like a bark-covered log. How fun!

Families often give small presents to each other on Christmas Eve, and some people go to a midnight Mass service. Then, on Christmas morning, they eat the same kind of breakfast they’d eat on a normal Sunday: freshly baked crusty rolls with butter and cold meats or jam, pastries, coffee cake and sometimes even a special sweet bread that’s made in a shape to look like baby Jesus. Throughout the day, people often visit friends or distant relatives. Christmas is a wonderful holiday to spend with the people we love!



## Fun Facts

- 🌍 As in many parts of the world, most people have a Christmas tree that they decorate with lights, ornaments, garlands and a star on top. And they'll often have a nativity scene too. Some people even have life-size ones!
- 🌍 For school Christmas parties, kids buy a small gift and then play a game to give out the presents. A popular one is playing music and passing the gift around while everyone sits in a circle. When the music stops, the person holding the gift gets to keep it.

## Let's color the nativity!

The nativity scene is often a part of Christmas decorations. It usually shows Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus in the stable, and sometimes even a couple of animals, shepherds and an angel. Let's color a picture of the nativity and then place it somewhere in the house — like on the fridge or by the Christmas tree — so that we can remember the true meaning of Christmas.



