

Newspapers, like greasy-spoon diners, are open 24/7, every day of the year. People here often dread pulling holiday duty. But our colleague **James Hilston**, a graphic artist at the Post-Gazette since 1998, doesn't mind. He doesn't believe in religious holidays. We've long been intrigued by James' life philosophy. This year, we asked him to elaborate on his holiday policies. He says ...

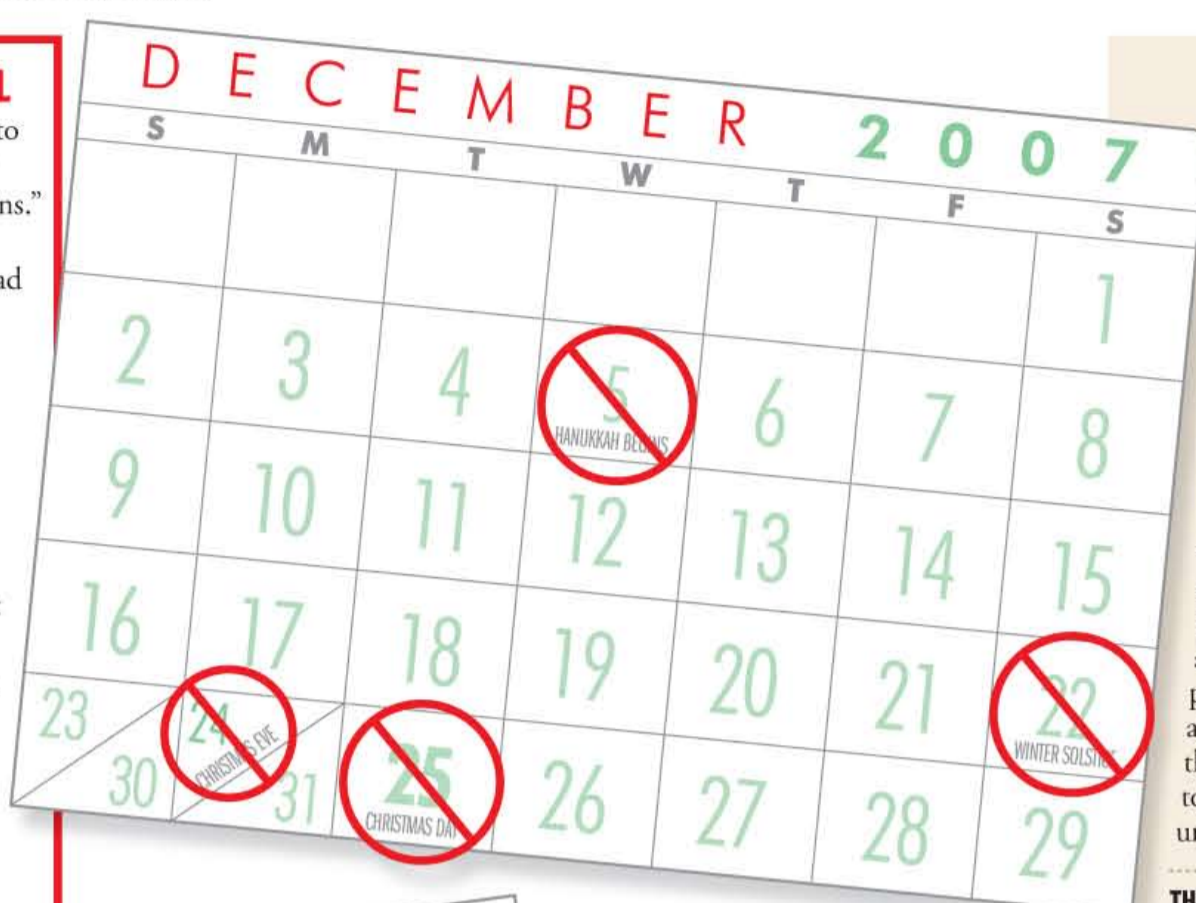
# Jesus is the reason I don't do the season

"You're so lucky you don't celebrate Christmas," I've been secretly told by tired and annoyed celebrants of the holiday. It's the 6th of January, and unlike the majority of people in this hemisphere, I don't have Christmas decorations to put away, scads of Christmas cards to sort through, or a dehydrated pine tree to dispose of. I didn't even put up a Christmas tree, and I haven't since 1986. But that's not all of which I've deprived myself and my children. I am also without the exorbitant after-holiday credit card balances, last-minute gift-buyer's remorse and the waiting in long lines with other frustrated shoppers, just to exchange a garment for the correct size.

## THE REASON, IN A CHESTNUT SHELL

**Just once**, just for the fun of it, I'd love to give a reason similar to the story told by Kate Beringer in the 1984 film, "Gremlins." If you don't recall the tragic tale of the holiday demise of Kate's dad, you can read the excerpt from the script online at the link at the end of the next paragraph.

**The actual reason** I don't celebrate Christmas and other religious holidays is this: It's what is taught in the Bible. I believe the Bible is really and actually God's inerrant and infallible communication to humankind, and that it teaches that members of the Body of Christ are prohibited from participating in religious rituals, holy days (holidays), sacraments and symbolisms. For further expansion and details regarding these claims, please visit [www.jameshilston.com](http://www.jameshilston.com) and click on the "Holidays" link in the left column.



## THE AWKWARD DANCE OF CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

Every Thanksgiving, and lately, it seems even a week earlier, the programming on the local radio stations reminds me of what's to come: hundreds of Merry Christmas wishes from new friends, unknowing acquaintances, forgetful co-workers and polite cashiers. And for each of these holiday wishes, I will be faced with the awkward and uncomfortable dilemma of asking myself, "Do I dodge it, say 'thanks' and let it go? Or is this a situation conducive to explanation and possible further discussion?" And what about the fact that the failure to return the sentiment with a "Merry Christmas to you, too" hangs out there like an unrequited "I love you"?

### THE DODGES:

**Them:** "Merry Christmas"  
**Me:** "Hi," or "See ya," or "Take care," or "Happy New Year."

### THE ATTEMPTS AT HUMOR

*Reserved for those who understand my sense of humor; if you don't think these are funny, then I probably wouldn't be saying these to you anyway:*

"Happy Rama-hanu-kwanzaa-mass," or "Happy Festivus,\* (insert name here), may you do well on your feats of strength."

### THE MORE DIRECT REPLIES

*As circumstances allow, of course:*

**Them:** "Merry Christmas"  
**Me:** "Actually, I don't celebrate it."  
**Them:**  
**Me:** "I know. Weird, huh?" (and I wait for them to ask "why")

### DECEMBER 26

*You might be thinking that the aforementioned awkwardness goes away on December 26. On the contrary; the greeting shifts to a question:*

**Them:** "How was your Christmas?"  
**Me:** "I volunteered to work it."  
**Them:** "Oh, I'm sorry, that must be awful."  
**Me:** "No, it's fine. I don't celebrate Christmas."

\*A non-denominational secular holiday introduced in a 1997 "Seinfeld" episode, "The Strike." See [www.jameshilston.com](http://www.jameshilston.com) for explanation and details.

## WHY DO CHRISTMAS SONGS HAVE TO BE SO CATCHY?



I don't mind the non-Christmas winter songs, such as "Jingle Bells," "Frosty the Snowman" and "Winter Wonderland." But I get a little bit annoyed when I find myself inadvertently humming "Angels We Have Heard on High" and "Little Drummer Boy." Why do they have to be so catchy?



## CHRISTMAS

It doesn't matter if it's a white one, because, for me, it's just another work day, although a lonely one, since very few others are working. However, there are usually plenty of holiday goodies lying around in the office to keep me company. For the kids, there's no waking up to mountains of presents (that's what Presents Day is for! See below). Instead, since they are homeschooled, they might even get to crack open the textbooks.

## THANKSGIVING

Getting to skip Thanksgiving Day; now that's something to be thankful about. Although I love to eat big juicy birds as much as the next guy, I give thanks that I can safely avoid the mad throngs in the grocery stores as they hunt and gather the plethora of food they'll use for their celebration. And since there is no traveling over the river and through the woods to visit relatives and overeat, I get to watch Detroit play Dallas without carbohydrate-heavy eyelids.



## SPILLING THE SANTA BEANS



I've never had to worry about my children learning the "real story" behind Santa. On the other hand, I have had to worry about them spilling the beans to their Santa-believing cousins or neighbors, and subsequently facing the wrath of their indignant parents. Oops.

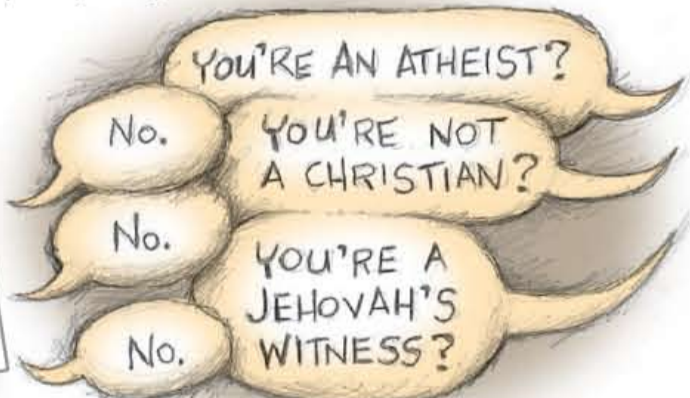
## EASTER

Sometimes I'm asked what I'm giving up for Lent. My usual answer is "Self-denial." Consequently, for me Easter doesn't mark the end of 40 days of avoiding chocolate. It's just another lazy Sunday. I get to sleep in; none of that sunrise church service stuff. I don't have to worry about wearing my very best Sunday Best, and there's no concern that my kids are going to like the Easter Bunny more than Jesus.



## REACTIONS

The reactions and questions I get range from polite queries to hostile interrogations. And the level of my politeness depends on the demeanor of the questioner. Some examples, followed by sample responses:



"Aren't you a Christian?"  
*That depends on how one defines the term "Christian." According to the biblical definition, I'm not.*

"Are you a Jehovah's Witness?"  
*No, but the Jehovah's Witnesses who come to my front door seem to enjoy the fact we have this no-Christmas thing in common, albeit for vastly different reasons.*

"You don't celebrate Jesus' birthday?"  
*No, and, depending on the historian you read, neither did anyone else before 200 A.D.*

"Don't you believe in Jesus?"  
*I do, just not one who was born in the winter on the same day as pagan deities. It seems inconceivable to some that a believer in Jesus wouldn't celebrate his birthday.*

"Are you an atheist?"  
*No, but some of my favorite people are.*

## WHAT ABOUT THE CHILDREN? PRESENTS DAY!

celebrated Christmas or Easter. They have never believed in the Easter Bunny or Kris Kringle, the venerable Saint Nicholas, a.k.a., the Santa Claus. But they do believe in presents, which is why they get tons of them on Presents Day. Presents Day is our annual non-religious celebration of presents, scheduled on or near Presidents Day, taking full advantage of the homophonic ambiguity. Also, birthdays are a big deal, because we do believe in cake.



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