

# Ding dong merrily on high!

Tim Peake is the first Brit to celebrate Christmas in space

## Royal Institution Christmas Lectures

Mon 28–Wed 30 December 8.00pm **BBC4**

**When does Christmas Day – any day? – begin when you're whizzing round the Earth so fast?** There's no "correct" time in space. But they had to pick a time zone – and they chose GMT.

## How will you know it's Christmas Day?

Because our colleagues on the ground will tell us. They tell us everything. I'll only have been on board for ten days when Christmas arrives, so it will be something really special.

## How many human beings have celebrated Christmas in space?

I am the 221st person to visit the International Space Station, though not all of them will have been on board at Christmas, of course. When you add in the people who were on board *Mir* [the Russian space station that was in orbit between 1986 and 2001], I guess fewer than 100 people have spent Christmas in space.

## Have you thought about how Father Christmas will deliver presents to the space station?

That's a great question! As Christmas approaches, I'll be keeping an eye out for any unusual activity over planet Earth. But I think my Christmas presents won't arrive by reindeer but via the Orbital 4 supply craft, which I hope will bring something up for me. My wife is able to send something called a "crew care package" – so there could be some small gifts and cards that I don't know anything about. That'd be nice.

## Did you receive space-related presents as a kid?

Yes, but no more than anybody else. I remember building rockets out of Meccano and getting *Star Wars* Lego sets. It was always *Star Wars* for me rather than *Star Trek*.

## How will your Christmas Day feel different from the rest?

Well, really, it'll be the food. I have heard that a Christmas pudding is making its way on to the space station, so I will enjoy that. I don't know precisely what my main course will be – but it will be tinned food, because everything we eat in space is tinned.

## Any brandy on the pudding?

No, none at all. There's no alcohol allowed on the space station. And you definitely can't set fire to things on the space station, except in special combustion chambers that are there for serious scientific experiments.

## And Christmas crackers?

They're probably not a good idea, because of the small explosives they contain. But who knows: maybe someone will send up a hat?

## Will you be able to watch the Queen's Speech?

We do get the internet – so we can watch television programmes. But it's not fast enough to stream live video. But we can ask for TV programmes – such as the Queen's Speech, for example – to be sent up to us overnight so that they're ready for us when we wake up the next morning.

## What other TV or radio will you be catching up with?

I'll ask them to send up episodes of stuff I've been watching on Netflix, such as *Breaking Bad*. I'm halfway through it at the moment. I love Chris Evans on *TFI Friday* and his Radio 2 morning show as well, so I'll get that sent up as a podcast. Things like that will help make life on the space station seem a bit more normal, and connect me back with planet Earth.

## Will you speak to your wife and two sons from the space station?

Absolutely. You can pick up a "phone" every day. They have four communication lines that are similar to Skype. You can go to your private bunk and call any phone in the world you want from your laptop. **VINCENT GRAFF**

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