

This is Steve Ember with a VOA Special English holiday program.

Music fills the air. Colorful lights shine brightly in windows. Children and adults open gifts from loved ones and friends. These are all Christmas traditions.

Another tradition is snow. Christmas in the northern part of the world comes a few days after the start of winter. In many places, a blanket of clean white snow covers the ground on Christmas Day. This is what is meant by a "White Christmas."

Of course, many places do not get snow at Christmas. In fact, they may be very warm this time of year. People who like snow, but live where it is warm, can only dream of having a white Christmas.

American songwriter Irving Berlin captured these feelings in his song "White Christmas." It is one of the most popular Christmas songs of all time.

The opening words explain why the singer is dreaming of a white Christmas. Most people never hear these words, so they never

really understand the true meaning of the song. Here's how it starts:

The sun is shining.

The grass is green.

The orange and palm trees sway.

I've never seen such a day in Beverly Hills, L.A.

But it's December the 24<sup>th</sup>

And I'm longing to be up north.

Up north, where it is cold and snowy. Not south, where it is warm and sunny.

Over the years, hundreds of singers and musicians have recorded "White Christmas." But the version most people still know best was sung by Bing Crosby.

Songwriter Irving Berlin was born in Russia in 1888. He did not celebrate Christmas as a religious holiday. He was Jewish.

But his song celebrates an idea of peace and happiness that anyone, anywhere -- snowy or not -- can enjoy.

To all of you, best wishes this holiday season from all of us in VOA Special English.

This is Steve Ember.



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