

# Here's Why People Are Mad About Starbucks' Red Cups

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## The holiday tradition has become unexpectedly controversial

When Starbucks [released its famous red cups to launch its holiday season on November 1](#), customers who ordered hot beverages received a red cup that was noticeably unadorned.

The 2015 cup that Starbucks describes as “a two-toned ombré design, with a bright poppy color on top that shades into a darker cranberry below” is rather plain compared to past versions that featured ornaments and reindeer.

As it turns out, the blank design irked some customers. On November 5, Joshua Feuerstein, [an Arizona-based evangelist who describes himself as a “social media personality,”](#) posted on his Facebook page that this year’s spartan red cup illustrated Starbucks’ dismissal of Christmas as a Christian holiday in favor of political correctness.

In the video attached to the post, Feuerstein says that Starbucks “wanted to take Christ and Christmas off of their brand new cups. That’s why they’re just plain red.” Feuerstein said that instead of boycotting the coffee chain, he wanted to start a “movement,” so he went into a Starbucks—with his gun, as Arizona has an open-carry law and Starbucks has not outright banned firearms—ordered a hot drink, and told the barista that his name was “Merry Christmas,” which was subsequently scribbled on his red cup.

“So guess what, Starbucks? I tricked you into putting Merry Christmas on your cup,” Feuerstein said in his video. He urged his Facebook followers to do the same. The video has been watched about 12 million times and nearly 500,000 people have shared it.

On Sunday, three days after Feuerstein posted his video, [Starbucks released a statement](#) explaining the design of this year's red cup. The company said that it took a "cue from customers who have been doodling designs on cups for years"—Starbucks started its holiday cup tradition in 1997—so "this year's design is another way Starbucks is inviting customers to create their own stories with a red cup that mimics a blank canvas." It's also worth noting previous Starbucks red cups lacked any outright Christian symbolism.

Jeffrey Fields, Starbucks vice president of design and content, said in the release that in the past the holiday cups have told stories. This year, Starbucks "wanted to usher in the holidays with a purity of design that welcomes all of our stories," Fields wrote. He said that the coffee chain "has become a place of sanctuary during the holidays," so it's "embracing the simplicity and the quietness of it."

In recent years, the Starbucks brand has become closely associated with the holidays. In its January earnings report, the company said that one in seven American adults received a Starbucks gift card during the holiday season—up from one in eight the year prior. And [in its release introducing its red cups this year](#), the company said that in the 48 hours following the release of its 2014 red cup, a photograph of one was shared on Instagram every 14 seconds.