

Journey Into the  
*Heart of Christmas*





# Merry Christmas!

The Christmas season brims with wonder and excitement. The miraculous birth of the Christ-child—the fulfillment of a long-awaited promise—gives us every reason to celebrate. Our Savior has come, and this is a time for joy!

Within these pages, you will find recipes, carols, project ideas, books, and more to warm your heart, remind you of the reason for the season, and draw your family closer together as you revel in the profound earthly blessings we cherish. Embrace the spirit of giving as you create handmade gifts for your loved ones, delve into the rich traditions and stories of Christmas, and find joy in the simple pleasures that make this season so special.

As you eagerly anticipate the birth of Christ, may this ebook bless your family's journey into the heart of Christmas.

— *The Indiana Association of Home Educators*

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## CHRISTMAS ORNAMENTS—THEN & NOW

**Decorating trees at Christmastime** originated in Germany back in the early 1600s. Families would hang dried fruits and nuts from trees after the leaves had fallen to remind others of the hope of the coming spring when trees would bear fruit again.

Not knowing they were starting a tradition that would last for centuries, one German family brought a fir tree inside in 1605 and decorated it with paper roses, fruits and nuts, and candles. This idea spread quickly across all of Germany and then throughout the rest of Europe. German immigrants brought the idea to the United States in the early 1800s and used what they had to decorate the trees—usually nuts, fruits (especially apples), strings of popcorn and cranberries, paper chains, and even little pieces of metal foil or tin. Candles were too valuable in the new country, but the little pieces of metal would reflect light from the room and create a bit of a sparkle.

### GLASS ORNAMENTS

If you have ever wondered why a round ball is the traditional form of a Christmas tree ornament, wonder no more! A man named Hans Greiner, a glass worker, began making round, blown glass ornaments during the 1800s. They were called Baubles. Later, glass poured into molds created more affordable and available ornaments, and eventually plastic came into play and made ornaments not only more affordable but also less fragile. In the latter part of the 19th century, a bright young business man named F.W. Woolworth introduced America to the Bauble ornaments, and for a time, he sold more than \$25 million worth per year.



### TREE TOPPERS

Tree toppers are traditionally either a star that represents the star that the wisemen followed to find the Christ child or an angel representing the angel that brought the good news to Mary and the host of angels that proclaimed Jesus' birth to the shepherds. Some parents in the past have told their children that tinsel were pieces of angel hair that got caught in the branches of the tree.





## ORNAMENTS TODAY

Christmas tree ornaments today take on many, many shapes, sizes, and colors. They can be handmade or purchased, expensive and intricate, or rustic and simple. Many times they celebrate a big event or family change, like the birth of a new baby. Themed trees are also popular with all the ornaments being the same color—silver, blue, or white are popular—or perhaps the same motif such as antique toys or the beach.



**Here are some ideas** to make the Christmas tree tradition a meaningful way to build relationships with your family and community. If you would like to take this topic further:

- 1. Discuss what your family's tree looks like and why.**
- 2. Think about someone you know that may not have the resources to buy new ornaments, lights, or even a tree and find a way to help cover that cost.**
- 3. Make ornaments to hand out to everyone on your block that can also be used as a way to share the gospel.**
- 4. Make simple ornaments out of construction paper that are more winter-themed than specifically Christmas-themed and give them to residents at a nursing home so they can be displayed long after the Christmas season is over.**





## WOODEN NATIVITY ORNAMENT

### Instructions

*Step 1.* Line up the two taller pieces of clothespin “bodies” on the flat piece of wood/cardboard. The tallest is Joseph, and the middle size is Mary.

*Step 2.* On the flat piece of wood, in front of Joseph and Mary, glue down a bit of straw or raffia—this will be the “manger.”

*Step 3.* Then lay down the shortest piece of clothespin/peg on top of the straw—this is baby Jesus lying in the manger.

*Step 4.* Finally, glue one flat side of the spring type clothespin on the bottom of the board. The ornament can then be clipped onto a branch of your tree.

### *Supplies Needed*

- 3 small wooden body shapes you can purchase at craft stores – old style clothespins or wooden pegs or dowel rods cut into three different heights work well
- 1 regular, spring type clothespin
- 1 small flat scrap of wood or a piece of cardboard about three inches long
- a bit of straw or raffia
- glue, either a hot glue gun or craft glue
- small scrap of earth tone fabric (*optional*)





## CRYSTAL GOOD NEWS ORNAMENT

### Instructions

- Step 1.* Tie a large knot or place the cross or star charm, if desired, at one end of the string/wire. String the beads in this order over the knot or charm: clear, green, clear, white, clear, red, clear, black, clear, gold, clear.
- Step 2.* Tie off wire or string however you choose, leaving enough length at the top to make a loop to hang the ornament.
- Step 3.* Print out and share this description with whomever you give this ornament to:



The **GOLD BEAD** reminds us that - In the beginning God created a perfect world, and He said it was good.

The **BLACK BEAD** reminds us that - Death entered the world through Adam's sin, and humans were permanently separated from God.

The **RED BEAD** reminds us that - After many years Jesus came to earth, lived as a man, was crucified, died and was buried to pay the penalty for our sins.

The **WHITE BEAD** reminds us that - After three days Jesus rose from the grave, conquering death and lives now at the right hand of God.

The **GREEN BEAD** reminds us that - When you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and believe He has paid your sin debt, you receive the gift of eternal life that can never be taken away.

### SUPPLIES NEEDED

- approximately 12" length of thin jewelry wire or strong thread
- 1 bead of your choice of style in each of the following colors:
  - gold
  - black
  - red
  - white
  - green
- 6-8 smaller clear or metallic beads
- a cross or star shape charm or bead for the bottom (*optional*)

*Be sure to check out pages 26 & 27 for printable ornament descriptions!*





## ST. NICHOLAS—MAN OR MYTH?

**If you have thought that St. Nicholas** is the same as other fictional characters, you are missing out on a wonderful story! The man known as St. Nicholas to much of the world is the real person Nicholas of Bari, or Nicholas of Myra.

Through the years he has become associated with the Christmas season due to his kindness and generosity... and his name! Nicholas was the Bishop of Myra, a city in what we now know as Turkey, in the 4th century—that means sometime during the 300s AD. Nicholas was imprisoned and most likely tortured during the persecution of Christians. It is believed that Nicholas attended the first Council at Nicea (325 AD), a pivotal event in Christian history.

Nicholas was known and loved because of his kind and generous heart. His reputation for generosity was a source of many stories. One story involves marriage during that time in history. Girls needed dowries, or some kind of financial asset, to be married. Nicholas gave gold to at least three extremely poor young women so that they could marry and not have to enter into a life of crime to survive. He is known for his generosity and concern for poor children, and unmarried young women. It is said that at night he would often slip small gifts or money under doors, through open windows or even leave it in shoes left outside the entryway of a home.

Sincere admiration of Nicholas' character lasted for generations, and thousands of churches are named after him in Europe. After the Reformation, his popularity waned in most countries. One notable exception was Holland, where his legend continued as well as his name, St. Nicholas, which in Dutch is Sinterklaas. They celebrate Sinterklaas on his feast day which is December sixth. Dutch immigrants carried this tradition with them when they settled in the American colonies. Many believe that Sinterklaas, a kind and generous man who loved God, is the origin of the legend of Santa Claus.

**How can we be like** Nicholas during this Christmas season?

- 1. Give a gift to someone in your neighborhood, church, or family without the person knowing who gave it to them.**
- 2. Support programs in your church or community that helps to feed or clothe children in need.**
- 3. Find a service you can perform for a person in need in your community.**







## CHRISTMAS CAROLING

The custom of singing outdoors during the Christmas season began in Medieval times in Great Britain. It wasn't always the happy, festive celebration that we know! "Christmas Waits," troupes of players and singers, would perform in the streets to raise money, sometimes less than melodiously, and not always appreciated. It was traditional for towns to have their own Wait, which they paid to play at events, and to wake townspeople on dark winter mornings like a community alarm clock. You can imagine mixed feelings about those early-morning songfests!

Victorian England reawakened the practice of singing traditional hymns and cheery songs while walking from door-to-door, or performing in the public square. Caroling in modern times recalls a bygone era, bringing families and neighbors together in joyful celebration.

Christmas hymns and carols reach all around the world, spreading the message of Jesus in a way few other evangelistic efforts have achieved. Here are a few favorites and their unique origins.

### CHRISTMAS SONG HIGHLIGHT #1

"*In the Bleak Midwinter*" is a poem by Christina Rossetti, published in 1904 in *Poetical Works*. She was home educated, and a prolific writer! Ms. Rossetti published many poems and books of prose, and a book of prayers. Some of her shorter poems are still memorized by children today. A few of her poems have been set to music. "In The Bleak Midwinter" is treasured as a hymn for the Christmas season, capturing the melancholy of winter and contrasting it with the quiet joy that came in the stable at Jesus' birth.

*In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,  
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

## WASSAILING

Wassailing brings to mind a favorite, warm Christmas drink, and indeed it does have its basis in sharing hot, spiced cider door-to-door. Wassailing began as a festive evening for peasants to interact with the landowners. Families of poor sharecroppers would visit landowners, sharing homemade wassail, and perhaps a cheerful song. The landowners would share small gifts, promise favor for the coming year, and perhaps invite families in for a meal. Sadly, strife and unrest between classes eventually saw this custom reduced to gangs of vandals forcing their way into wealthy citizens' homes, ransacking the premises until they got free food and drink.

Here is a recipe for Wassail to try today! May it warm your home and fill you with gratitude for the many blessings we enjoy today.

[www.sugarandsoul.co/slow-cooker-wassail](http://www.sugarandsoul.co/slow-cooker-wassail)







## CHRISTMAS SONG HIGHLIGHT #2

*"Tell Out, My Soul"* reveals the heart of Mary, recalling the words of the Magnificat from Luke chapter one. Surprisingly modern, it was written by Bishop Timothy Dudley-Smith in 1962. He felt he did not have musical ability, and nearly did not submit his poem for publication! He went on to write nearly 400 hymns, and is still living today!

*Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings give my spirit voice;  
tender to me the promise of his word;  
in God my Savior shall my heart rejoice.*

## CHRISTMAS SONG HIGHLIGHT #3

*"O Holy Night"* was based on a French poem from 1843. We nearly missed having this beautiful hymn as part of our Christmas hymnary! The French church banned the song because of rumors the composer, Adolphe Adam, was Jewish. The rumors remain unsubstantiated. In spite of being banned, it became a beloved Christmas tradition in France. There is a heartwarming account of soldiers on opposite sides of the front lines in the Franco-Prussian war of 1871 calling a cease-fire and singing "O Holy Night" together. An unusual link to U.S. history lies in the verse, "Chains shall He break for the slave is our brother, And in His name all oppression shall cease." In 1855, the English translation of the hymn affirmed the growing abolitionist sentiment in the United States. It remains a treasured part of Christmas celebrations around the world.

*O holy night, the stars are brightly shining  
It is the night of the dear Savior's birth.  
A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices  
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.*

## CHRISTMAS SONG HIGHLIGHT #4

*"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day"* was inspired by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem from the Civil War in 1863. Mr. Longfellow had faced personal sorrow in addition to witnessing the unthinkable treachery of war. His poem is a timeless refrain of hope that sustains the human heart, even in the face of tragedy. We can imagine families in war-ravaged regions of the world today, facing what they had planned to be a festive holiday season, listening to Christmas bells and remembering that God still lives, and is still on His throne.

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men."*

Christmas carols connect us to our history as we recall the poignant moments that inspired their writing; they draw us together in celebration of the hope of Jesus birth; and they are our legacy to the next generation to remind them of our God who is grander than time, yet loves us enough to enter our time as a tiny baby.





## ADVENT SEASON

### The Advent Calendar

Advent has a Latin origin, meaning “the coming” or “coming toward.” For Christians, Christmas is a very special time of year. It represents the celebration of God’s greatest gift to humanity—Jesus, the Son of God, born in human form. The significance of Christmas led to the tradition of Advent, a period of preparation leading up to the celebration of Jesus’ birth.

The practice of marking the days leading up to Christmas began with chalk on believers’ doors. Historians believe the first printed Advent calendar was created in Germany in the late 19th century, featuring 24 tiny sweets on cardboard. A sweet would be taken off and eaten each day. This idea later evolved to include little wooden structures with shuttered windows with pictures for children to open each day as they anticipated the arrival of Christmas.

Advent calendars are often used today without any true understanding of the history or meaning behind them. Christian parents can use this tool as an opportunity to teach their children about the salvation and hope that Jesus brings.



There are multiple styles of advent calendars for purchase, but here are some ideas for homemade advent calendars:

#### MINI GIFT BOXES

Create 24 small gift boxes or envelopes, each containing a small treat, trinket, or a handwritten note. Arrange them in a decorative fashion on a wall or board.

#### TOILET PAPER ROLL CALENDAR

Save empty toilet paper rolls or small cardboard boxes. Decorate and fill each one with candies or tiny gifts, then stack or arrange them in the shape of a tree or a calendar grid.

#### CLOTHESPIN CALENDAR

Attach 24 decorated clothespins to a string or ribbon. Clip a small numbered bag or envelope onto each clothespin, and put a surprise inside each one.

#### ADVENT CALENDAR WREATH

Make a wreath from greenery, and attach small envelopes or pouches with daily surprises hidden inside. As you open them, the wreath becomes more beautiful.

#### MAGNETIC CALENDAR

Create 24 small magnetic envelopes or pockets. Stick them to a magnetic board or your fridge, and place treats or notes inside each one.

#### CHRISTMAS CAROL COUNTDOWN

Create a playlist of 24 Christmas Carols, one for each day. Write the name of each one on a little note. Number each one on the other side and arrange them on the fridge or the wall. Listen to a new carol together each day as you count down to Christmas.





## ADVENT SEASON SCAVENGER HUNTS

### *Indoors*

This does not have to be completed in one day. It is fun to keep looking throughout the Christmas season! Take a photo of each item as you complete the list.

- While at a store, find at least three different Nativity sets.
- Look for a pink tree ornament.
- Find a pair of shoes that have a Christmas theme.
- Find a snowflake decoration bigger than your head.
- Find at least three blankets in a pile.
- Find one messy place in the house and clean it up.
- Look for a Christmas card with a camel on it.
- Find and learn a Christmas song you have never heard before.
- Find a blue star used as a decoration.
- Match up a pair of socks that had been missing its mate.
- Find and read a Christmas book you have never read before.
- Look for a dog or puppy as part of a Christmas decoration.
- Think of a person that seems lonely and send them a card.
- Find three ways your family includes Jesus in your Christmas traditions.
- Find a new recipe that uses turkey.
- Color a Christmas drawing with a younger child.
- Find a Christmas tree smaller than your hand.
- Find mistletoe somewhere other than in your own home.

### *Outdoors*

This does not have to be completed in one day. It is fun to keep looking throughout the Christmas season. Take a photo of each item as you complete the list.

- Find an inflatable deer decoration.
- Find three outside nativity sets.
- Help a neighbor decorate their yard.
- Find a house with purple Christmas lights.
- Find a house with lights synchronized to music.
- Find someone wearing fur-lined snow boots.
- Find a car or truck decorated for Christmas.
- Find a palm tree decoration.
- Hear Christmas bells ringing.
- Find a snowman family.
- Find someone wearing a red scarf.
- Listen for the song "Silent Night" playing in a store.
- Find a dog wearing a Christmas sweater.
- Hold the door of a store open for an older person at least three times.
- Attend a church Christmas program.
- Find a gingerbread man taller than you.
- Shovel a driveway or walkway for three people.
- Sing Christmas carols to three different elderly people.





# "MERRY CHRISTMAS" AROUND THE WORLD

"Merry Christmas" is a common greeting in English, but it's expressed differently in various languages around the world. Do you know anyone from a different country? This year you can wish them "Merry Christmas" in their own language! If you are using this ebook digitally, be sure to click on each translation to hear it.

## Language — Greeting — Literal Translation

- Spanish** – "Feliz Navidad" – *Happy Christmas*
- French** – "Joyeux Noël" – *Joyous Christmas*
- German** – "Frohe Weihnachten" – *Merry Christmas*
- Italian** – "Buon Natale" – *Good Christmas*
- Portuguese** – "Feliz Natal" – *Happy Christmas*
- Netherlands Dutch** – "Vrolijk Kerstfeest" – *Merry Christmas*
- Swedish** – "God Jul" – *Merry Christmas*
- Norwegian** – "God Jul" – *Merry Christmas*
- Danish** – "Glædelig Jul" – *Merry Christmas*
- Finnish** – "Hyvää Joulua" – *Good Christmas*
- Russian** – "S Rozhdestvom" – *With Christmas*
- Mandarin Chinese** – "Shèngdàn kuàilè" – *Holy Birth Happy*
- Japanese** – "Merikurisumasu" – *Merry Christmas*
- Korean** – "Meri Keuriseumaseu" – *Merry Christmas*
- Arabic** – "Eid Milad Majid" – *Glorious Birth Feast*
- Hebrew** – "Chag Molad Sameach" – *Happy Birth Holiday*

С Рождеством  
(Russian)

圣诞快乐  
(Mandarin Chinese)

חג מולד שמח  
(Hebrew)

메리 크리스마스  
(Korean)

メリークリスマス  
(Japanese)

**These translations** give you a basic idea of the literal meanings of the phrases, but they may not fully capture the cultural significance associated with each greeting. Still, what a joy to think that when we are wishing each other "Merry Christmas" here, thousands upon thousands of people around the world are doing it too, in their own language! The good news of Jesus' birth is for all the people of the world.







# CHRISTMAS COOKIES & THEIR HISTORY

## Christmas means cookies and more cookies!

Learn the history of some of the most iconic Christmas cookies from around the world! Baking together creates treasured memories, so let the kids mess up the kitchen, and enjoy these recipes together!

### SPRITZ COOKIES

Spritz cookies are an iconic Christmas cookie because of their buttery and decadent flavor as well as their shapes. Since they are made with a cookie press, it is easy to make them into shapes that remind us of Christmas. Spritz cookies originate from the region of Europe known as Scandinavia, where they are a Christmas tradition. Interestingly, most people think the name comes from the German word spritzen, which means “to squirt.” This makes sense because the dough does kind of squirt out of the cookie press. Traditionally Norwegians would form the dough into the shapes of S’s and O’s, but now you are more likely to find them in the shapes of trees, stars, and wreaths.

[www.bettycrocker.com/recipes/classic-spritz-cookies/aa68df04-bd64-4f1b-8421-0df82064bca4](http://www.bettycrocker.com/recipes/classic-spritz-cookies/aa68df04-bd64-4f1b-8421-0df82064bca4)

### GINGERBREAD MEN

These delightful cut-outs are without a doubt a holiday classic in decorating as well as baking. While gingerbread has been around for centuries, the gingerbread man has a unique history dating back to the reign of Queen Elizabeth the First. At the time, it was common Christmas fare to have marzipan shaped like fruit, castles, and birds, but the Queen also had a Royal Gingerbread Maker. This creative baker made gingerbread men that were meant to represent foreign dignitaries as well as people in her court. As a bonus, since ginger is good for settling an upset stomach, gingerbread men were a helpful dessert after a large royal feast.

[www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/gingerbread-men-cookies/](http://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/gingerbread-men-cookies/)







## CLASSIC SUGAR COOKIES

Classic Sugar Cookies are a super simple recipe that contains only a few ingredients. It's almost impossible not to imagine this sweet, chewy treat when you think of Christmas, whether they are intricately decorated, covered with frosting and sprinkles, or adorned simply with sugar. Sugar cookies were created by German Protestant settlers in Nazareth, Pennsylvania around the middle of the 1700s and were known as Nazareth cookies. These simple cookies were so delicious that the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania recognized them as Pennsylvania's Official Cookie. Their simplicity made them extremely popular for kids to make. The short list of ingredients kept them popular as settlers moved across the United States, since they did not always have access to other baking ingredients.

[www.allrecipes.com/recipe/9870/easy-sugar-cookies](http://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/9870/easy-sugar-cookies)



## PIZZELLES

Pizzelles are a beloved Italian holiday tradition. This cookie originated in the Abruzzo region of Italy. These thin, waffle-like cookies are light and delicate, with a taste reminiscent of a waffle ice cream cone. The Italian word *pizza* means round and flat, and *elle* means small. So the word *Pizzelle* perfectly describes this holiday treat which is round, flat, and small. Pizzelles are so important in Italy that families would have their own pizzelle irons made. The design on the irons, that would be pressed into the cookies, would include things like family crests or special family dates. It's no surprise that these crispy cookies took no time to become a Christmas favorite!

[www.allrecipes.com/recipe/15289/pizzelle-italian-tradition](http://www.allrecipes.com/recipe/15289/pizzelle-italian-tradition)

## SHORTBREAD COOKIES

Shortbread cookies are basically a more crumbly, melt-in-your-mouth version of some sugar cookies you may have had. While they are sweet, they sometimes have other spices added to them; but either way, they have been around for a very long time. Shortbread cookies first originated in Scotland and are often attributed to Mary, Queen of Scots. Shortbread is usually dated back to the 16th century, but some historians think shortbread cookies could date all the way back to the 12th century. Scottish shortbread is an improved version of medieval biscuit bread, where the yeast was replaced with sugar. Both versions were originally made from leftover dough and were allowed to bake slowly as the ovens cooled down. Shortbread cookies, because they have so much butter in them and were therefore expensive to make, were a luxury saved for special events, like Christmas and weddings.

[www.kingarthurbaking.com/recipes/shortbread-cookies-recipe](http://www.kingarthurbaking.com/recipes/shortbread-cookies-recipe)





### PFEFFERNUSSE

Pfeffernusse (pronounced “feffer-noose”) are delicious spice cookies. This combination of spices captures the iconic taste of Christmas! Pfeffernusse have been around since the 1850s, with both Dutch and German origins. In the Netherlands they are linked to the December feast of Sinterklaas, and the Dutch word for this cookie is Pepernoten. Both Pfeffernusse and Pepernoten translate to “pepper nuts.” Though the cookies are not actually made with nuts, they are probably called that because traditionally they were not much bigger than a nut. Recipes have changed over the years to include ingredients like anise, molasses, and honey to make the cookies sweeter. However, they are supposed to be on the hard side, all the better for dipping into whatever warm beverage you cuddle up with on a cold winter’s night.

[www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/pfeffernusse-cookies](http://www.tasteofhome.com/recipes/pfeffernusse-cookies)

### WHITE CHRISTMAS SLICE

White Christmas Slice is a Christmas treat that comes to us from the Land Down Under! Many of Australia’s Christmas traditions are heavily influenced by English customs, since it was originally colonized by the British Empire. However, since Christmas in Australia falls during their summer season, a unique Australian flair can be found in their celebrations! This festive “cookie” requires no baking, ideal for a warm Australian Christmas, yet it includes colors and flavors associated with their Northern Hemisphere roots. The White Christmas Slice might be the only “white Christmas” Australian children see! Here is a recipe modified with ingredients and measurements commonly used in the States.

[itsnotcomplicatedrecipes.com/white-christmas-slice/#recipe](http://itsnotcomplicatedrecipes.com/white-christmas-slice/#recipe)







## FOUR DISHES TO ADD GLOBAL FLAIR

**The United States has often** been called a melting pot of cultures. That's because most of the settlers of the US came from other nations, largely different parts of Europe; that means that many other cultures are represented in our holiday traditions. Here are a few Christmas foods that are traditional in other countries and may well be part of your personal heritage. Or you can make them part of a new Christmas tradition.

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### LE PLATEAU DE FROMAGE (OR CHEESE PLATTER)

Most of us know that French cuisine is known worldwide for rich dishes and beautiful presentation. This is one Christmas meal tradition that is decidedly French but easy to prepare and serve. It is called Le Plateau de Fromage or Cheese Platter. A holiday cheese platter in France includes a wide variety of cheeses, beautifully displayed and served with a variety of breads. This course of the meal is also often served with a simple green salad with a vinaigrette dressing for those who may want a lighter dish at this point of the celebration. Below are some cheese and bread suggestions that you may not have tried before that work well on a Plateau de Fromage.

#### *Cheese suggestions:*

Swiss, Havarti, gouda, brie, provolone, camembert, Gruyere, Jarlsberg, fresh mozzarella, Muenster, Roquefort. Try to find a cheese made from goat's milk or sheep's milk.

#### *Bread suggestions:*

Baguettes, croissants, brioche, fougasse, artisan rye breads, and artisan whole grain loaves. Soda breads are also interesting to eat with cheese



## FIGGY PUDDING

Have you ever sung the Christmas carol “We Wish You a Merry Christmas”? If so, then you have surely heard of figgy pudding! Why not try this centuries-old holiday treat this year? The best part, in my opinion, is the fact that figgy pudding is best made early - a week or more before Christmas - so that the flavors marry to make the perfect figgy pudding taste. This recipe does not use the traditional method of steaming it on the stove top but instead uses an easier steaming in the oven.

*Special Note: You may choose not to use the brandy. Brandy does have preservative properties so without it the figgy pudding will have to be stored in a refrigerator and has a shorter shelf life.*

### Instructions

*Step 1.* Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Grease an 11-cup Bundt pan.

*Step 2.* Melt the butter in a medium saucepan set over medium heat. Continue cooking until the butter turns golden brown, then transfer to a heatproof container and refrigerate until solid, about 1 hour.

*Step 3.* In a medium bowl, pour the boiling water and brandy over the figs and soak until softened, about 30 minutes. Coarsely chop 1/2 cup of the figs, and set aside. Place the remaining figs and the soaking liquid in the bowl of a food processor and puree until smooth.

*Step 4.* Combine the chilled brown butter with the sugar and beat until combined. Add the eggs one at a time, and mix until combined. A stand mixer will make this a bit easier. Add the fig puree, flour, baking powder, cinnamon and salt, and beat on low speed until smooth. Stir in the chopped figs. Pour the batter into the prepared Bundt pan, then cover tightly with foil and secure with a rubber band.

*Step 5.* Place the Bundt pan in a 12-by-17-inch deep roasting pan and set on the bottom rack of the oven. Pour 2 inches of boiling water around the Bundt pan, then cover the entire roasting pan with foil. Bake until the pudding is firm to the touch and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, about 1 hour 15 minutes.

*Step 6.* Cool the pudding for 10 minutes, then invert the Bundt pan over a plate to unmold the pudding. Sprinkle the pudding with confectioners’ sugar and cut into slices to serve.

To store, seal in an airtight container or wrap well with plastic wrap. Store in a cool place while allowing the pudding to age about 1 week.

Indiana Association of Home Educators | [iahe.net](http://iahe.net)

### Ingredients

- 1/2 cup (1 stick) butter, plus more for greasing
- 1 cup boiling water, plus more as needed
- 1 pound dried figs
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 3 eggs
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Confectioners’ sugar, for dusting
- 3 tablespoons brandy (*optional*)

*Recipe Courtesy of Sarah Zorn*







## JAMAICAN OXTAIL

Have you ever eaten Oxtail? Even though it can be a pricey cut of meat, people who live in Jamaica will tell you it is worth every penny. Due to the fact that it is more expensive to serve, it is often saved for special occasions and is a holiday favorite.

### Instructions

- Step 1.* Place oxtail in a shallow dish. Combine soy sauce, Worcestershire sauce, salt, sugar, garlic and herb seasoning, browning sauce, paprika, cayenne pepper, and black pepper together in a small bowl.
- Step 2.* Rub both sides of oxtail with soy sauce mixture; discard any excess.
- Step 3.* Heat vegetable oil in a large, deep skillet over medium-high heat. Sear oxtail in hot oil until golden brown, about 3 minutes per side; transfer to a plate and set aside.
- Step 4.* Sauté carrots, celery, onion, and garlic in the same skillet until softened, about 5 minutes. Add beef broth, thyme, rosemary, and bay leaf; bring to a boil. Add oxtail, with its juices, and butter. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer until oxtail is fork tender, about 3 hours.
- Step 5.* Uncover skillet and increase heat to high. Cook, stirring occasionally, until sauce reduces and thickens, about 5 minutes.



### Ingredients

- 2 ½ pounds oxtail
- 1 tablespoon soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 tablespoon white sugar
- 1 tablespoon garlic and herb seasoning (such as Spike®)
- 1 teaspoon browning sauce (such as Grace®)
- ¼ teaspoon ground paprika
- ¼ teaspoon ground cayenne pepper
- ¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 carrots, thinly sliced
- 2 stalks celery, thinly sliced
- 1 onion, chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 cups low-sodium beef broth
- 1 bunch fresh thyme
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter

*Recipe courtesy of All Recipes*



## GREEK CHRISTMAS BREAD

If you travel to Greece at Christmas you will most likely be treated to Christopsomo, a traditional Christmas bread that literally translates to “Christ’s bread.” Greek Christmas bread, often decorated with a cross or X over the top, is usually prepared the day before Christmas Eve and is served at the Christmas table. This bread holds a very special place in Greek homes and is prepared with great care. The head of the household cuts the pieces of the bread by hand, as it is said that no knife should be used.

### Instructions

*Step 1.* Sprinkle yeast, 1 cup flour, and 1/4 cup sugar over milk in a medium bowl. Cover, and let stand for 1 hour.

*Step 2.* Combine remaining 7 cups flour and 1 1/2 cups sugar, the anise seeds, salt, orange zest, and mastic gum if desired. Make a well in center of mixture, and add milk mixture, melted butter, and eggs. Mix together ingredients using your hands. Once combined, turn out dough onto a lightly floured surface, and knead, adding more flour if needed, until smooth and supple, about 15 minutes.

*Step 3.* Transfer dough to a lightly oiled bowl. Cover with plastic, and let rise in a warm place until doubled in volume, 1 1/2 to 2 hours.

*Step 4.* Butter two 9-inch springform pans. Punch down dough, divide in half, and roll each half into a 24-inch-long log. Coil each log into a mounded circle (similar to a snail shell). Transfer each to a prepared pan. Cover with plastic, and let rise until doubled in volume, 1 1/2 to 2 hours.

*Step 5.* Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Brush egg wash over tops of loaves, and sprinkle with sesame seeds. Bake until golden brown, about 45 minutes. Transfer pans to a wire rack, and let cool for 15 minutes. Run a knife around edge of pans, and remove bread. Let cool completely on wire rack.

*Special Note: Mastic gum, also called mastiha, is the dried resin of a Mediterranean tree. Grind it on a microplane zester or in a spice grinder. Christopsomo can be stored, wrapped in plastic, at room temperature for up to 3 days.*

### Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon plus 1 ½ teaspoons active dry yeast (two ¼-ounce envelopes)
- 8 cups unbleached bread flour, plus more for surface and more if needed
- 1 ¾ cups sugar
- 2 cups whole milk, warmed
- 2 teaspoons ground anise seeds
- 1 teaspoon coarse salt
- 1 teaspoon finely grated orange zest
- 1 teaspoon ground mastic gum
- 4 ounces (1 stick) unsalted butter, melted, plus more for pans
- 5 large eggs, lightly beaten
- Vegetable oil, for bowl
- 1 large egg yolk, lightly beaten with 1 tablespoon whole milk, for egg wash
- 3 tablespoons sesame seeds

*Recipe Courtesy of Martha Stewart Living, 2009*







## GIFT IDEAS – THE GIFT OF YOU!

**Giving and receiving gifts** at Christmas is a long-standing tradition across the world. Many believe the tradition started because the wisemen brought gifts of Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh to the Christ child. Others attribute the practice to St. Nicholas, the 4th century Bishop who gave generously to those in need. Some might point out the similarities of certain pagan gift-giving festivals that could have transferred the idea to the Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus. However the custom started, gift-giving at Christmas is a beautiful way to remind our children of the selfless gift of Jesus.

Gift giving in modern times can sometimes be stressful, driven by clever marketing and high pressure sales. Let's take a look at gift giving from a different perspective. The idea behind giving a gift is to bless the person receiving the gift, to make them smile. It's easy to think that to give a really good gift you have to spend a lot of money, but that simply isn't true. The best gift you can give is yourself, so this Christmas season think of who needs a bit of you?



### GIVING TO YOUR FAMILY

Your family certainly needs you, so start there. Children can give their parents the gift of a willing attitude, or perhaps a coupon book for their willing help doing odd jobs around the house. Parents can give their children a loving and patient response and maybe also a coupon book that gives them coupons for extra hugs, special activities together, or even dinner out with mom or dad. Kids can give their parents the gift of cleaning their bedrooms every week without complaint. Parents can give them a gift certificate that entitles them to skip one chore a month just because! You can give aunts, uncles or grandparents extra time together, or help with a chore—this can be done as a family or as individuals. Cousins might enjoy a special pizza/movie night of their choosing.







### GIVING TO YOUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS

You see your friends and neighbors often, and you might want to find a simple way to bless them at Christmas. A good suggestion is to look for a need that you can fulfill. For instance, if you know someone who doesn't have time to cook, you could bake muffins or a loaf of bread and wrap it up along with some local raw honey. If you have a neighbor who loves to grow flowers, but her health is slowing her down, then you could offer your helping hands for a spring planting day. If there is a single parent in your circle of acquaintances, you could offer four hours a month of free child care for the year.

### GIVING TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Christmas is an ideal time to share the love of Christ with your community. Many people visit nursing homes at Christmas time. Consider expanding this opportunity to visit throughout the rest of the year! Could your family or homeschool group visit a nursing home and sing songs with the residents once a month from March through September? Perhaps you could offer to help wrap gifts for the residents; many elderly people deal with stiff or sore joints and small motor skills can be a challenge. Arrange a time to show up with a supply of gift bags, wrapping paper, tape, and scissors and residents can bring gifts to you to wrap for them.

### GIVING OF YOURSELF

Look at the skills you have, and how you can bless others. Even the smallest skills can be huge to someone else. If you can sew, you can tighten up loose buttons and torn hems for your aunt. If you can play an instrument, you can serenade a sick neighbor. If you are good with computers, you can design and print greeting cards and help your grandmother mail them. If you like Pinterest, you can look up ideas for seasoning mixes and make small batches to share with your cousins. If you like crafting, look at what is popular this year and fashion your own version of it to give to your friends. If you like nature, learn how to build terrariums and create little landscapes in a jar for your siblings. The only limit is your imagination, not your budget!





### SERVICE PROJECTS

Christmas service projects offer numerous benefits to both individuals and communities, making them a heartwarming and meaningful tradition during the holiday season. Serving others during the Christmas season is a way for us to show the love of Christ to others in a tangible way.

During a time when materialism often takes center stage, service projects give us an opportunity to teach our children valuable lessons in empathy, gratitude, and kindness. Whatever stage of life your family may be in, there are service projects that will fit your needs and abilities. Take some time to pray about how your family can bless others this Christmas season.

### HOLIDAY CARD MAKING

Organize card-making sessions where participants create handmade cards to send to nursing homes, hospitals, or troops overseas. If you do this as a family or co-op, adults and older children could help write messages while younger children add pictures and decoration.

### ADOPT A FAMILY

Provide gifts, food, and essential items to a less fortunate family in your community. Sometimes churches organize these, and you could join in on theirs.

### TOY DRIVE

Collect new and gently used toys for underprivileged children and distribute them to local charities or hospitals. If you are ambitious, you could host a community-wide toy drive event to encourage participation.

### FOOD DRIVE

Collect non-perishable food items for local food banks or shelters. They usually struggle to keep up with the demand and appreciate every donation that comes in.

### CAROLING AT SENIOR CENTERS

Visit nursing homes or senior centers to sing carols, spend time with residents, and distribute small gifts or cards. This is a fun activity to do with a few other families.







### HOMELESS CARE PACKAGES

Assemble care packages with essentials like blankets, socks, toiletries, and snacks for the homeless. They can be as simple as a ziploc bag filled with a few supplies. You can keep these packages in your car and distribute them to individuals living on the streets.

### ADOPT A FAMILY

Provide gifts, food, and essential items to a less fortunate family in your community. Sometimes churches organize these, and you could join in on theirs.

### LETTERS TO TROOPS

Write heartfelt letters or create care packages for active-duty military personnel stationed away from home during the holidays. Collaborate with organizations that can help with delivery.

### VOLUNTEER AT A SHELTER

Offer to serve a meal at a local shelter or soup kitchen. Invite friends and family to join you in volunteering.

### BLANKET AND WARM CLOTHING DRIVE

Collect blankets, coats, gloves, and other warm clothing items to distribute to those in need. You probably already have organizations in your area doing this, and you could join them in this effort.

These Christmas service project ideas can be tailored to suit the needs of your family and the interests and resources of your community. Pick one and dive in, enjoying the blessings that come from serving and blessing others.







# A CHRISTMAS READING LIST

As the winter chill arrives and the sights and sounds of Christmas fill your home, there's no better time to snuggle up with a cup of cocoa and lose yourself in the joy-filled world of Christmas books.

From timeless classics to contemporary gems, you are sure to find a story here to lift your spirits and point you to the one we celebrate in this very special Christmas season.

## YOUTH/ADULT CHAPTER BOOKS

- Ben Hur: A Tale of the Christ by Lew Wallace
- Circle C Christmas Collection by Susan Marlow
- A Grandma for Christmas by Alta Halverson Seymour
- Jotham's Journey (1st in trilogy) by Arnold Ytreeide
- The Seed of Faith: A Christmas Miracle by Daniel Petronelli
- Tales of a Paperboy: A Christmas Story by Andrew J. Mair



## ADULT CHRISTMAS FICTION

- The Christmas Candle by Max Lucado
- An Indiana Christmas by Bryan Furuness
- Winter Days with the Moodys (Moody Family Series) by Sarah Maxwell



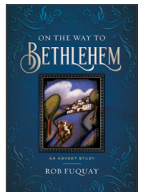
## FAMILY ACTIVITIES & DEVOTIONALS

- The Advent Storybook: 25 Stories Showing Why Jesus Came by Laurie Richie
- The Giving Manger: A Christmas Family Tradition by Allison Hottinger
- The Soul Felt Its Worth by Cameron Frank & Preston Norman
- Waiting Here for You Advent Study by Louie Giglio



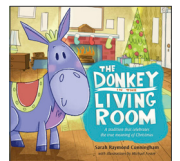
## TEEN/ADULT CHRISTMAS NONFICTION

- Christmas Story: Told Through Paintings Metropolitan Museum of Art by Richard Muhlberger
- On the Way to Bethlehem by Rob Fuquay
- The Promise and the Light by Katy Morgan
- Stories of Christmas Cheer: Tales and Tails from Hearth to Hound by Bob Bridge
- The Women of Christmas: Experience the Season Afresh with Elizabeth, Mary, and Anna by Liz Curtis Higgs



## PICTURE & BOARD BOOKS

- The Carpenter's Gift by David Rubel
- The Christmas Owl: Based on the True Story of a Little Owl Named Rockefeller by Gideon Sterer, Ellen Kalish, Ramona Kaulitzki
- The Donkey in the Living Room: A Tradition that Celebrates the Real Meaning of Christmas by Sarah Cunningham
- God Gave Us Christmas by Lisa Tawn Bergren
- The Nativity in Art for Children by Mary L. Cooney



\*Parents should use their own discretion when choosing books for their family.





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The **GOLD BEAD** reminds us that - In the beginning God created a perfect world and He said it was good.

The **BLACK BEAD** reminds us that - Death entered the world through Adam's sin and humans were permanently separated from God.

The **RED BEAD** reminds us that - After many years Jesus came to earth, lived as a man, was crucified, died and was buried to pay the penalty for our sins.

The **WHITE BEAD** reminds us that - After three days Jesus rose from the grave, conquering death and lives now at the right hand of God.

The **GREEN BEAD** reminds us that - When you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and believe He has paid your sin debt you receive the gift of eternal life that can never be taken away.

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