

Christmas Traditions In Other Countries

England

Christmas in England began in AD 596, when St. Augustine landed on her shores with monks who wanted to bring Christianity to the Anglo Saxons.

The children leave empty stocking or pillowcases hanging at the end of the bed. In the morning they hope it will be full of presents. Father Christmas delivers them during the night before Christmas. However, the gifts are not usually opened until the following afternoon.

The day after Christmas is called Boxing Day because boys used to go around collecting money in clay boxes. When the boxes were full, they broke them open.

One of England's custom is mummering. In the Middle Ages, people call mummers put on masks and acted out Christmas plays which are still performed in towns and villages.

The English enjoy beautiful Christmas music. They love to decorate Christmas Trees and hang up evergreen branches.

In the early times the only thing that people ate on the day before the feast was Frumenty, which is, a kind of porridge made from corn. Over the years the recipe changed. Eggs, fruit, spice, lumps of meat and dried plums were added. The whole mixture was wrapped in a cloth and boiled. This is how plum pudding began.

Christmas dinner was usually eaten at midday on December 25, during daylight. The traditional Christmas dinner is roast turkey with vegetables and sauces. For dessert it is rich, fruity Christmas pudding with brandy sauce. Mince pies, pastry cases filled with a mixture of chopped dried fruit.

France

Living in France, Christmas would be a little different than in the United States.

At one time they had a Three Kings Cake with a bean hidden in it. Whoever found the bean in their slice was made King, or Queen, for the day.

Children would go out looking for the Kings and take gifts of hay for the camels.

On Christmas Eve the children leave their shoes by the fireplace to be filled with gifts. Instead of a Santa Claus they call him Pere Noel. In the morning they also find that sweets, fruit, nuts and small toys have been hung on the tree.

Almost all of the French homes display a Nativity scene or crèche, which serves as the

focus for the Christmas celebration. The crèche is often peopled with little clay figures called santons or "little saints." In addition to the usual Holy Family, shepherds and Magi.

The craftsmen also produce figures in the form of local dignitaries and characters. The craftsmanship involved in creating the gaily-colored santons is quite astounding and the molds have been passed from generation to generation since the 17th century. Throughout December the figures are sold at annual Christmas fairs in Marseille and Aix.

On Christmas Eve, after their midnight mass, a great feast is served. The menu for the meal varies according to regions. In Alsace, goose is the main course, in Burgundy it is turkey with chestnuts, and the Parisians feast upon oysters. However in most areas the meal consists of poultry, ham, salads, cake, fruit and wine.

Germany

In some parts of Germany, people believe that the Christ Child sends a messenger on Christmas Eve. He appears as an angel in a white robe and crown, bearing gifts. The angel is called Christkind. There is also a Christmas Eve figure called Weihnachtsmann or Christmas Man, he looks like Santa Claus and also brings gifts.

The German people begin Christmas preparations on the eve of Dec. 6. They set aside special evenings for baking spiced cakes and cookies, along with gifts and decorations. One of the favorites are the little dolls of fruit which are traditional Christmas toys.

The children make their letters that are decorated with glue and sprinkled with sugar to make them sparkle. Then they leave their letters on the windowsills for Christkind, to find them.

Christmas trees are popular in Germany and some homes have several Christmas tree than can be seen glittering and glowing. They hang up advent wreaths of Holly with four red candles in the center. Each Sunday they light one candle saving the last for Christmas Eve. The children count the days until Christmas using an Advent calendar. Every day they open one window and find a Christmas picture inside.

In some homes a room is locked up before Christmas and on Christmas Eve the children go to bed but are woken up at midnight by their parents and taken to the locked room. When the door is opened they see the tree all lit up, with piles of parcels on little tables.

Ireland

There is little written about Christmas in Ireland. Ireland remembers the Christian elements of the festival particularly. However, these customs are steeped in the mysteries of older times.

Between the introduction of Christianity to Ireland in the 5th century, and the infiltration's from the English in the late middle ages, there is little written about Christmas in Ireland.

There are two customs in Ireland. Many homes in Ireland still today show a lighted candle in the window of their home on Christmas Eve. This custom is to show a light in the window to light the way of a stranger out after dark.

It goes back to most ancient times when the laws of hospitality were stronger and not abused.

To have a light in your window on Christmas Eve to welcome the stranger meant that you were welcoming the Holy Family too. To have no light meant that you shared the guilt of the Innkeeper

at Bethlehem who said, "No Room"! The candles are usually red in color, and decorated with sprigs of holly.

The other custom is of whitewashing out-houses and stores. At one time, it was the whole farm, inside and out. The women would scrub and polish everything till it shone, and the men would take a bucket of whitewash, or limewash, and purify everything in honor of the coming of the Christ child.

Christmas in Ireland lasts from Christmas Eve to the feast of the Epiphany on Jan. 6, which is referred to Little Christmas. Ireland's Christmas is more religious than a time of fun.

Irish women bake a seed cake for each person in the house. They also make three puddings, one for each day of the Epiphany such as Christmas, New Year's Day and the Twelfth Night.

After the Christmas evening meal, bread and milk are left out and the door unlatched as a symbol of hospitality.

Holiday Greetings



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