

Vintage Christmas Countdown



Vintage Christmas Countdown

Thank you for downloading the PDF version of Vintage Christmas Countdown.

Each day of December, up to December 25th features an article about the rich history of Christmas, with traditional recipes from over a hundred years ago, desktop wallpaper you can download to celebrate the Christmas season and links to Christmas gifts and goodies.

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Vintage Christmas Countdown

Foreword

Like all traditions, the celebration of Christmas is rich in symbols, music and rituals passed down through generations.

As time passes, the traditions remain but the original meaning or reason for them is lost or forgotten.

This cute little joke about trimming a turkey sums it up with a chuckle:

A man and his wife were at her grandmother's home for turkey dinner. He stood in the kitchen watching as his wife cut the end of the turkey off before she put it in the roaster. "Why did you cut the end of the turkey off", he asked. "I don't really know" she said, "We just always do it. You should ask Mom."

So he found her Mom and asked her. "Hmm, I've never really thought about it," She said, "you'll have to ask Grandma."

So he went and asked Grandma.

"Well, I don't know why they keep doing it, but I used to do it because I had to. When the girls were young, we lived in a house with a very small oven and I always had to cut the end of the turkey off so it would fit in the oven. "

So many traditions are like that. They once had a practical purpose or symbolized something that no longer exists but we like our traditions and we keep doing them year after year, generation after generation as shared rituals that are old and familiar.

This book explores the origins of many of our Christmas traditions, tracing them back to the practical reasons for them and to belief systems that once existed but have been lost to time.



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Author's Preface

*Do you believe in magic?
Can you feel it warming your heart light?
In every precious moment
It's a magic we all share, it's everywhere.
It's in your loved ones far away and
In your children's smiling faces on Christmas Day.
Merry Christmas!
May the magic light your way.*

My first Christmas memories are from Canada, watching the snow fall through the window behind our family's Christmas tree. With the lights down in the living room, the only light was from the lights of the tree, a warm glow of yellow, red and green. It was magical to me then and Christmas still has a special magic for me.

Throughout its long history, Christmas has always been a time of magic. There is nothing more magical than the birth of a child to a Virgin mother under a great star of wonder and a reindeer driven sleigh that flies through the night sky bearing gifts to children everywhere can only be magical.

Magic can be thought of as an act of will, our effort to shape our lives through our spiritual beliefs, our personal actions and through traditions and rituals.

Christmas is the time of year when we set out to spread good will. It is the time of year when we bless one another with our love and our best wishes and spread our magic, however humble, to those around us.

This book explores the traditions and rituals that are associated with that magic.

I hope you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed researching and writing it.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Sharlee Plett



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About the Illustrations

The illustrations featured with each article are from antique postcards, prints and book illustrations. Several of the images are from the Middle Ages. Most are from the Victorian and Edwardian period in the 19th and early 20th century.

These extraordinary images are scanned from the originals at high resolution and digitally restored and enhanced by hand

They bring the Christmas past to life with their rich imagery and scenes from life centuries ago.

The vintage desktop wallpaper that is featured throughout the book has been created from the vintage artwork by the author. You will need an Internet connection to access and download it.

More vintage art is available online at www.24kVintageArt.com, including one of the largest vintage Santa Claus postcard art galleries on the Internet, the original version of "The Night Before Christmas" with artwork by Thomas Nast and vintage greeting cards you can print from your own computer.

You'll also find Victorian and Edwardian period art prints, vintage website background images and web sets, and artwork you can use in greeting cards and scrapbooks. You'll enjoy the vintage children's books, Victorian recipes and the Victorian tea time library.

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December 1st

Yuletide - A Season of Celebration

Throughout Europe and into Eurasia, particularly in the Northern climates, winter has been a time of feasting and celebration, the time of yuletide. If you think about it, this actually makes good sense. By the end of November, all of the crops were in, and the deep cold of winter was setting in. Many areas had already seen their first snowfall and could expect to be snowbound until the following spring.

Even in the Midwestern United States, this is the pattern - the heavy work for farmers and livestock people is in the growing and harvesting months. Winter just doesn't allow for a great deal of outdoor work for agricultural people and you sure can't plant or harvest under a couple of feet of snow!



Most historians agree that Christmas probably grew out of Yule festivities. What they don't always agree on is just where the word Yule came from and how it evolved into Christmas.



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December 1st

Yuletide – A Season of Celebration Continued...

There is general agreement that Yule is derived from the Anglo-Saxon "Yula," or "Wheel of the Year" and that the Yule celebrations marked the celebration of both the shortest day of the year and the re-birth of the sun or that "Yule" was originally a Scandinavian word (in Finnish: "Joul"). Joul, they say, probably means 'feast', so "Yuletide" means the time or season of feasting. Yet another possibility is that Yule comes from hjol in Old Norse, which refers to the moment the sun begins to turn after it's low point on the shortest day of the year, typically around December 20- 21st. Since they both mean pretty much the same thing, it seems that Yule was likely the celebration of the end of the shorter and shorter days and the beginning of longer and longer days.

For those of us living in lower and warmer areas of the world, we just need to imagine how life must have been during the winter - bitter cold, short days and very little in the way of fresh food. It probably was real cause for celebration that the days were now becoming progressively longer.

Something to celebrate? Absolutely!



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December 2nd

Christmas Star

*Star of wonder, star of light,
Star with royal beauty bright,
Westward leading, still proceeding,
Guide us to thy perfect light.*

One of the earliest sciences of mankind was astronomy, for the study of the stars was used for measuring seasons, time, and for navigation. This was essential knowledge up until modern times and paying attention to the stars played a much greater role in times past.

The movements of the stars were also considered to be an important influence in the outcomes you could expect in your life, people visited astrologers in ancient Babylon and astrological symbols adorned medieval decor and buildings.

Stars were associated with prophecy, illumination and enlightenment and are often the symbol for our highest aspirations, the heavens above it. In early Christian art, the stars represented the actual Christian churches.

At Christmas time, many Christians place a star atop a Christmas tree, in remembrance of the three wise men following the star of Bethlehem to the place of the Christ child's birth in a lowly manger. The star is a beautiful symbol, even without it's association to Christianity, a symbol of light, just as Jesus brought light into the world for so many people through the ages.

The story goes that Martin Luther King, seeing the stars shining through the forest at night so beautifully, wanted to share it with his wife. He took a fir tree home and placed lit candles on it to simulate the stars shining through the forest trees.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 2nd

Lucia Day

In Sweden Lucia Day is on December 13. A woman or a little girl is dressed as Lucia, in a white dress with a red silk ribbon round her waist, and a crown with candle lights in her hair. Lucia is followed by a procession of little girls in white and "star boys" dressed in white with conical white hats with stars on them. The star boys carry stars on a pin in their hands. Lucia and her procession bring gingerbread cookies in the form of hearts and cakes that are named "lussekatter" and give them out to people.



Lussekatter (Lucia Buns)

1 cup milk, scalded
1/3 cup butter
2/3 cup sugar
Dash of salt
1 yeast cake, crumbled
1 egg, beaten
4 cups sifted flour
1 cardamon seed, crushed
Raisins

Mix milk into butter, sugar, and salt and stir until dissolved. Cool until lukewarm and add the yeast. Stir well and add egg. Gradually stir in flour and cardamon and beat thoroughly. Place dough in a greased bowl, cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled. Knead on a floured board for a few minutes. Roll out a small amount at a time and cut into 5" strips, about 1/2 inch wide. Form X's out of two strips on greased baking sheet. Brush with beaten egg. Cover and let rise for 1 hour. Bake in preheated 375° F oven for 15 minutes, or until lightly browned. Let cool on wire rack. Yield: 10 - 12 buns.

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December 3rd

Tracing the Origins of Christmas

All over the Internet, you'll find all kinds of theories that explain how our present time Christmas celebrations came into existence. Some trace Christmas back to Roman or pre-Christian European celebrations that celebrate the Winter Solstice, the day when the days stop getting shorter and begin getting longer. The idea is that the Christian Churches deliberately selected these earlier festival dates so people would accept the new traditions.



It seems very logical, but it's very easy to draw connections in the past, especially when you are working with clues gathered from information drawn from remnants of the past that reflect little of the teeming lives and cultures of our ancestors.

These findings are based on the type of history studies most of us learned in school, a snapshot of earlier times, mainly a study of the sequence of important or well documented information from the past. For the most part, it's a study of important people and events that affected large numbers of people. Kings, Queens, battles, major disasters, Church dates and so on.

But then, as now, the life of ordinary people goes on and is scarcely mentioned historically. If you think about, history is being made all the time in the evening news, but it really doesn't have all that much of an effect on our lives. It's interesting and sometimes appalling, but tomorrow we will take our children to school and plan our weddings and live our day to day lives. The big difference between earlier centuries and now is that we have mass communication systems capable of spreading information instantaneously to millions and millions of people and transportation systems that make it possible to be on the other side of the planet in less than a day.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 3rd

Tracing the Origins of Christmas Continued...

Before mass transportation and mass communication, people were much more isolated and life revolved around family, the local town and in very early times, the domain of the noble who owned the land you lived on. You lived and worked locally. Traveling anywhere took time, for you walked, traveled by horse or traveled by sea. News spread slowly, by word of mouth spreading out from town criers or community meetings, brought by seafaring traders and spreading out from central points like Churches or rulers.

Each family handed down its own traditions, mother to daughter, father to son, with each generation adding its own personal touch to meet the changes and challenges of their own generation. These traditions were the culture of much smaller groups of people, families, tribes, villages, and on a slightly larger scale the townships with Churches and markets, each a small pocket of culture and tradition.

Over time, the scale of group awareness has grown, with nations coming into existence with cultures that are "American" or "British" and so on. But if you really look past the mass media and educational systems, you'll find that even now, Christmas really lives in the heart of the family, and is a reflection of its values, beliefs and the communities to which it belongs, passed down through generations.

For the record, the word Christmas comes from the Middle English word Chistemasse and the Old English word Cristes maesse and is a contraction meaning "Christ's Mass".

As to December 25th as the birth date of Christ, there is a relatively simple explanation that seems to make sense. Simply take the date of the conception of Jesus Christ, which was thought to be March 25th in the early days of the Christian Church, and add nine months. You can read the full explanation at Touchstone Magazine: [Calculating Christmas](#)

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 3rd

Vintage Desktop Wallpaper "Christmas Morn"



Throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th century, Currier and Ives was a successful art print publishing house. They commissioned somewhere around 8,000 paintings and illustrations depicting current life and scenes, holiday illustrations and historical scenes.

By the time they closed shop, they had sold millions of prints.

One of their favorite subjects around Christmas time was winter scenes, like "Christmas Morn", which we are featuring as desktop wallpaper for today's Christmas countdown.

[800 X 600](#)

[1024 X 768](#)

[1280 X 960](#)

[1280 X 720](#)

p.s. These images are high resolution and they are BIG! So be patient while the image downloads!

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 4th

Here We Come a'Wassailing

*Here we come a-wassailing among the leaves so green;
Here we come a-wandering, so fair to be seen.
Love and joy come to you, and to you our wassail, too.
And God bless you and send you a Happy New Year*

*We are not daily beggars that beg from door to door;
But we are neighbours' children whom you have seen before.*

*We have a little purse made of ratching leather skin;
We want a little sixpence to line it well within.*

*God bless the master of this house, likewise the mistress, too;
And all the little children that round the table go.*

Wassailing can be traced back to ancient times, to the Celts and the Anglo Saxons. There are a number of explanations for the wassail tradition of going from house to house, eating, drinking, socializing and singing.

The first was agricultural. Ancient peoples lived very much at the mercy of the elements and having good weather and excellent crops could easily become a matter of life and death. Over time, they developed many rituals intended to ensure good crops, and wassailing was one of them. They would go from apple tree to apple tree in the winter, saluting and blessing the trees to help ensure a good crop of apples.

Here's a snippet of a song sung to the apple trees handed down through generations:

*Here's to thee, old apple tree!
Whence thou mayst bud,
and whence thou mayest blow.
Hats full! Caps full?
Bushel, bushel, sacks full!
And my pockets too! Huzza!*



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 4th

Here We Come A'Wassailing Continued...

The word 'wassail' comes from the Anglo-Saxon *Wes Hal* or *Ves Heill*, meaning "be well, and in good health." Wassailing may be the origin of our modern practice of toasting.

Another story explaining how wassailing started is that an Anglo Saxon woman named Rowen presented Prince Vortigen with a bowl of wine and said "Waes Hael!" After that, the Celtic people in the area took to going door-to-door singing to spread blessings for the next growing season. Each household they visited would offer them wassail, usually ale or cider. They would end up in the apple orchards, bless the apple trees and celebrate.

As you can see from the vintage postcard below, which is from the early 1900s, wassailing was very much alive and well back then. This postcard says:

*Cast dull care away
For here's to Xmas Day
Join the festive bowl
And be a Jolly Soul!*





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December 4th

Recipe for Wassail

From the 1600s

2 or 3 cinnamon sticks
3 blades of mace
4 cloves
1 teaspoon of nutmeg
1 ginger root
4 apples
4 oz. of sugar 1/2 pint of brown ale
1/2 pint of cider

Core the apples and sprinkle with sugar and water. Bake at 375°F/190°C for 30 minutes, or until tender. Mix ale, cider and spices together. Heat but do not boil. Leave for 30 minutes. Strain and pour over roasted apples. Serve in a punch bowl. Of course if you're planning on saluting more than a few wassailers--and they do tend to travel in packs-- you'll want to increase the recipe accordingly.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 5th

The Eve of Saint Nicholas

*Nicholas I beg of you
Drop into my little shoe
Something sweet or sweeter
Thank you, Saint and Peter!*

*Nicholas remember
Us on five December.
Fill our little shoe, do,
Thank you, Saint and Peter.*

In many European countries, December 5th is the Eve of Saint Nicholas, the Patron Saint of children and sailors. Instead of putting up Christmas stockings, children put out their shoes in hopes that Saint Nicholas will fill them with goodies. Only the children who have been good during the year can expect this, naughty children might find their shoes filled with twigs or in bygone eras, lumps of coal.



In Czechoslovakia, Saint Nicholas walks along the streets of cities and towns, accompanied by the Angel of Good and the Devil, representing evil. Dressed in costume, they stop children and ask them if they were good during the year. Children usually say yes and are given treats by the Angel.

In Switzerland, Saint Nicholas Eve starts off with a procession of men dressed in white sheets and wearing large cardboard bishop miters. They carry torches and dance through the streets. They are followed by Saint Nicholas, who is accompanied by dark-robed assistants. Behind them come hundreds of men in white shirts and neck ties with noisemakers, horns and whips.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 5th

The Eve of Saint Nicholas Continued...

Other countries have similar events throughout Europe, although each locale has their own traditions.

Behind these traditions is the real Saint Nicholas, universally known and loved for his kindness and charity. As the Bishop of Myra, he is thought to have attended the famous Church Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. and he has his own shrine in Myra, which is in Asia Minor, which dates back to at least the 6th century.

He is the subject of many legends and honored as a Saint by the Protestant Churches, Roman Catholics, and Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches. There are many Churches in Europe named after him and people from all walks of life claim him as their patron saint and protector.

His kindness and gift giving lives on in our modern day Santa Claus, in other parts of the world spreading the spirit of charity and belief in miraculous events during the Christmas season.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 5th

Champagne Cup - A Victorian Recipe

1 quart bottle of champagne
2 bottles of soda-water
1 liqueur-glass of brandy or Curaçoa
2 tablespoonfuls of powdered sugar
1 lb. of pounded ice
a sprig of green borage.



Put all the ingredients into a silver cup, regulating the proportion of ice by the state of the weather: if very warm, a larger quantity would be necessary. Hand the cup round with a clean napkin passed through one of the handles, that the edge of the cup may be wiped after each guest has partaken of the contents thereof.

Should the above proportion of sugar not be found sufficient to suit some tastes, increase the quantity. When borage is not easily obtainable, substitute for it a few slices of cucumber-rind.

Suitable for picnics, balls, weddings, and other festive occasions.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 6th

Saint Nicholas Day

December 6th is the official day of Saint Nicholas, who lived in the fourth century and died in 342 A.D. St. Nicholas began his religious life in a monastery, and was eventually selected as the Archbishop of the Church of Myra. The patron saint of children and sailors, he is best known for his acts of kindness and charity, and the role he played in many Christmas traditions throughout the world.

He is generally described as a gentle, dignified character and the traditions associated with him usually reflect that.



But there was a time when a great deal of tom-foolery was associated with his day, December 6th. This was the election of the "Boy Bishop" on December 6th, a practice that was carried out throughout English cathedrals and in schools. The Boy Bishop acted as a mock bishop throughout the Christmas season, presiding over parodies of various Church functions and ceremonies, through to December 28th. The parodies were ridiculous and funny and the Boy Bishop and his followers traveled about singing songs, spreading cheer and generally leading the festivities of the season. Often, a contribution, which was laughingly referred to as a "Bishop's subsidy" was demanded from their audience.

The Boy Bishop festivities fitted in perfectly with the older traditions of Yuletide festivities, which were characterized by feasts, celebrations, parties and general merry making. The Catholic Church regarded all of this with good humor and the clergy even participated in the silliness.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 6th

Saint Nicholas Day Continued...

When the Protestant Church established its influence in England, the Boy Bishop Festivities came to an end save for a few celebrations, and even these disappeared over time. But the older Yuletide traditions persisted, for many of them were not Church related and many predated the existence of the Christian Church in Europe.

Throughout the 15th century, the Protestant Church's influence grew and since Saint Nicholas was a Catholic Bishop, the celebrations and ceremonies related to him were discouraged. Since many of the Christmas traditions in Europe even predated Saint Nicholas, passed down through the generations, people simply were not willing to give them up. From a historical point of view, the problem seems to have been solved by merging the pre-Christian Yule traditions with Saint Nicholas traditions and dressing them up with a non-Catholic appearance, a more protestant appearance or Yule traditions.



One very old Yule tradition was the Lord of Misrule (see image at left), who is the Ghost of Christmas past featured in the Charles Dickens Christmas Carol. A very old Yule tradition was to elect an individual who would preside over the Yule ceremonies with as much ridiculous behavior and merriment as the Boy Bishop did. He was typically dressed in green, and wore a crown of holly, much given to eating and drinking and generally having a whale of a good time.

From all of this, we get the modern Santa Claus appearance and many names and traditions throughout Europe. There is Pere Noel in France, Sinterklaas in Holland, Father Christmas in England, Grandfather Frost in Russia, Kriss Kringle in Germany, Joulupukki in Sweden and many more. They were all fictional characters that engaged in gift giving in one way or another, had saintly and magical qualities, depending on the local lore from which they were drawn, merged with the Saintly and best loved qualities of Saint Nicholas. In most cases, these new saintly Christmas characters no longer dressed in Roman Catholic Church robes, and appeared in various colors and attire. They also arrived by various means - reindeer, goats, donkeys, by horse and horse drawn carriages and by ship.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 6th



Figgy Pudding A Traditional Recipe

1/2 pound of figs
1 1/4 cups of fluffy bread crumbs
1 cup of chopped blanched almonds or walnuts
1 cup of light brown sugar (scant)
1/2 cup of candied grapefruit peel
1/4 cup of candied lemon peel
3 tablespoons of melted butter
4 eggs, beaten
1/2 teaspoon of cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon of nutmeg

Chop the figs and mix with crumbs. Brown the almonds or walnuts. Mix with remaining ingredients. Put the mixture into a greased pot and steam 2 1/2 hours or bake in a 325°C oven for 1 hour. You can add soft grapefruit peel for a flavor variation. Serve with a brandy and cream sauce.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 7th

Santa's Reindeer

In America, Santa Claus travels through the night sky at magical speeds, drawn by a team of flying reindeer, visiting millions of homes and delivering gifts in a single night.

How Santa Claus came to be associated with reindeer is a subject of much speculation.



Most people believe that the reindeer came from the popular poem, A Visit From Saint Nicholas by Thomas Clement which was published in a newspaper in 1823. People loved the poem, the newspapers and media got behind it and it eventually became the most popular of the Santa Claus traditions.

Why reindeer? Some say that Clement was probably drawing on Danish traditions, where Santa is known as Julemanden and arrives in a reindeer sleigh with a sack full of gifts. In Denmark, Santa Claus has companion elves, known as Juul Nisse.

Another possible source of the reindeer legend is the reindeer people. These people migrated all over Eurasia and northern Europe using reindeer as their mode of transportation. They had many legends and myths, which they brought with them wherever they migrated. One of these cultures, the Suomi, believed in a shamanic figure named Väinämöinen. He was old and wise, wore a full white beard and had flying reindeer.

In another culture, the Saami, the shaman's drum is made of reindeer hide, decorated with various symbols. One of the symbols is a reindeer sleigh. The shaman would use the drum to enter a trance-like state in which he would travel out of body on a "reindeer vision" across the Milky Way.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 7th

Santa's Reindeer Continued...

The Saami were actually quite well known in earlier times, the Christian Churches discouraged their practices, thinking that they were demonic. The Shaman's experience was aided by drinking a powerful hallucinogenic made from mushrooms, to enhance the trance like state.

These reindeer people, like most hunter cultures, believed that all living things were of spirit and that they could enter the spirit world, communicate and gain valuable and essential knowledge to aid them in the hunt and in their endless quest for survival by living off the land.

A reindeer people legend is that reindeer were created by the sky god Hovki, for food and transportation and to lift the spirit of man up to the sun or the light. During the white nights of the Arctic, they would stretch a rope between two trees, symbolizing a gateway to the sky. Two bonfires were lit and aromatic herbs were used to make purifying smoke. The people would walk around the two bonfires, first clockwise, then counter-clockwise. This symbolized the death of the old year and the birth of the New Year. The elders would then pray for health, success in the hunt and healthy sons and daughters and during the prayers each person was said to be transported on the back of a reindeer towards a world of joy and plenty, where they were blessed and renewed. They would then dance in a circle in the direction of the sun and feast.

Closer to modern times, there was much enjoyable speculation as to where Santa Claus lived. It may be that since he had reindeer, he was thought to come from areas where reindeer lived, like the North Pole, Greenland, Lapland, Finland, Norway, and the far north. But it also may be that Santa Claus was thought to come from the far north, and since reindeer are used for transportation there, he ended up with reindeer.

One thing is certain, reindeer are associated with magical events and Santa Claus visiting millions of children in the space of a single night is definitely a magical event!

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 7th

Julgrot - Christmas Rice Porridge A Traditional Recipe

1 cup rice
2 quart boiling water
2 tablespoons butter
1 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoon sugar
5 cups milk
1 blanchd whole almond

Cinnamon or grated almonds
Sugar
Cold milk



Wash and drain the rice and add it to the boiling water. Bring back to a boil and cook, uncovered for one minute. Drain the rice thoroughly and add butter. Combine the rice, salt, sugar and milk in the top of double boiler. Cover and cook over gently boiling water until the milk is absorbed and the rice is tender - about 2 hours. Pour into serving bowl and add the almond. Sprinkle with cinnamon, sugar and grated almonds (optional) Serve the porridge with cold milk. Makes 8 servings.

From an old Swedish tradition: each person has to recite a poem before touching their porridge. The person that gets the single almond will marry during the coming year.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 8th

Christmas Bells

*I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play.
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of Peace on earth, good will to men.*

*I thought how as the day had come
The belfries of all Christendom
Had roll'd along th' unbroken song
Of Peace on earth, good will to men.*

*And in despair, I bow'd my head:
"There is no peace on earth," I said,
"For hate is strong and mocks the song,
Of Peace on earth, good will to men."*

*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."*



Around the world, the bells of Christmas peal, announcing that Christmas has come, that it is time for celebration and prayer. Some say that the ringing of bells is a throwback to very early cultures, which rang bells to drive away evil, but the real story of the bells of Christmas has a great deal more to it than that.

While it is true that bells were used for that purpose, in earlier times they had a vital role in the towns and villages that people lived in. Before pocket watches and clocks in people's homes, the towns and villages kept track of time using various methods.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 8th

Christmas Bells Continued...

Very early on, they used sundials, and later large mechanical clocks fitted into towers. The big clocks could only be seen at a certain distance, so the towers were outfitted with massive bells that tolled the time, called people to Church, and tolled for important occasions. They were also used as an alarm system because they could be heard for miles.

Each tower had its own bell with its own distinctive sound. The bell ringers developed a particular way of pattern of ringing the bell that let people know why the bell was ringing. The Churches used bells to call people to prayer and to announce important Church events, like Christmas. Very often they served the community for the other bell ringing functions.

There are many old traditions associated with the ringing of Church bells. One of the oldest was the ringing of the curfew. When the curfew rang, citizens were expected to extinguish their fires and stay at home. The bells tolled to call people to community meetings, to confession, and to signal the opening of the markets.

The "Passing Bell" was rung after death; with the way the bell is tolled indicating the deceased was a man or woman, adult or child. The Angelus bell was rung in the morning to awaken the community.

Bells were blessed before they were installed and they were named after the Virgin Mary or Saints and sometimes after their donors. As an example, the bells at Oseney Abbey in the 13th century were called Hautclere, Doucement, Austyn, Marie, Gabriel and John.

In England, bell ringing was developed into an art, with bell ringing societies. Multiple bells were used and rung in succession to create the "peal" of the bells. The bells were rung in such a way that no one tone repeated more than once. The more bells you had, the longer the peal of the bells. You'll still hear bells pealing for weddings and other important occasions. The most important occasion and the most distinctive was the pealing of the Christmas Bells, the signal that the joyous occasion had begun.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 8th

Christmas Desktop Wallpaper

Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!



[800 X 600](#) [1024 X 768](#) [1280 X 960](#) [1280 X 720](#)

p.s. These images are high resolution and they are BIG! So be patient while the image downloads!

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 9th

Holly and Ivy

*Green grows the holly.
So does the ivy.
Though winter's blasts blow never so high,
Green grows the holly.*

King Henry VIII Lyrics 1500s

Holly and ivy have been associated with the Christmas season for centuries in one way or another for both practical and symbolic reasons.

People have been decorating their homes with holly and ivy for centuries to celebrate Christmas. In earlier times, the holly served another purpose than decoration - it was thought that it could ward off evil, and bring luck to the household.

From a practical standpoint, holly and ivy have both served as food for livestock during hard winters and have been used for their medicinal properties. Ivy was used to brew ales before the cultivation of hops.

The various parts of the ivy plant have been, and are still, used to treat a variety of ailments including coughs, asthma, burns, bruises and skin rashes. Holly leaf concoctions were used to induce sweating, and for fevers, tonics, smallpox, pleurisy and rheumatism.





Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 9th

Holly and Ivy Continued...

Since they are both evergreen, they have both come to stand for everlasting life. In the Victorian era, a gift of flowers containing ivy expressed fidelity and symbolized eternity. Holly has long been a symbol of goodwill, peace, health and happiness.

In the middle ages, holly came to represent men, and ivy represented women as these poems from the Middle Ages describe:

*"O the Ivy O, she's the Queen of old,
And the Holly he is red.
Hang 'en high in the farm, and us won't come to no harm
Till the Christmas days be told."*

*Holver and heivy made a great party,
Who should have the maistry (mastery)
In londes (lands) where they go...*

Bright holly usually wins, as in the middle English carol:

*Nay! Ivy, nay!
It shall not be, iwis, (indeed):
Let Holy have the maistry, (mastery)
As the maner is.
Holy stond in the hall
Faire to behold: ivy stond without the dore
She is full sore acold.*

Holly also played a central role in Yuletide celebrations, representing the old year. During Yuletide celebrations, the Yule King, who presided over the Yule celebrations, was crowned with holly. The Holly King led the festivities, which celebrated the end of winter and the beginning of the longer and longer days of the year.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 9th

Glogg

A historic recipe from 1847

26 ounces red wine
13 ounces water
3 cloves
Raisins
Blanched almonds
2- 3 cinnamon sticks
Sugar to taste



Mix the red wine and water, three crushed cloves, a few pieces of cinnamon and some sugar. Heat these for a while before serving, but do not boil.

Glogg is a traditional drink of the Swedish & Finnish Christmas season Glogg is traditionally served in a small glass with a few almonds and raisins in it as well as the drink.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 10th

Oh Christmas Tree

*O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree
How lovely are your branches!
In beauty green will always grow
Through summer sun and winter snow.
O Christmas tree, O Christmas tree
How lovely are your branches!
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree
Your beauty green will teach me
That hope and love will ever be
The way to joy and peace for me.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas tree
Your beauty green will teach me.*

This Christmas, when you stand in the glow of the beautiful Christmas tree lights, you should thank your blessings that you are in a warm, snug home safe from the bitter cold of the winters people lived through when Christmas trees first found their way into people's hearts.

Historians have traced Christmas trees as far back as the 1400s in Germany. The first written mention of them was a law forbidding people from cutting evergreens down for Christmas. As with holly, ivy and mistletoe, evergreen trees were considered to be symbolic of life everlasting, for these plants remained green through the harshest winters. The halls were decked with holly and pine boughs during the Yule celebration.





Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 10th

Oh Christmas Tree Continued...

We don't give much thought to trees these days, but in earlier eras, they were vital to survival. They provided food, building material for ships and homes, wood for the fireplace, tannin for preparing leather, and herbal remedies. In many areas, there were laws passed to prevent wholesale cutting of trees, which became a problem throughout Europe. They would cut only branches from the trees, rather than cutting them down completely.

The trees also figured prominently in the religious practices of early Europeans. In their creation legends, the cosmic tree (the Axis mundi) bears all nine worlds of the Norse cosmos in its branches and among its roots. The trees were also sacred to the Celtic peoples, who believed that the boughs of trees could protect their homes from evil.

The pine tree, which is the favored tree for the Christmas Yule tree, is an especially valuable tree. Laplanders removed the bark from Scotch pines and hung the strips of the inner bark under their eaves to dry. They used the dried bark for dog and cattle feed or in times of need would grind it and make it into a type of bread. Another extremely valuable use of the Pine tree was to make pine tea, which was very high in vitamin C, vitally needed during the cold winter months. The seeds of all of the different types of pine trees can be eaten, so can the bark from young twigs. If the stocks of hay for livestock ran out, they could be fed pine branches.

In the mid 1400s, popular plays, called Mystery Plays, were performed by the Church. The plays were about the fall of man from the garden of good and evil. Pine trees were decorated with apples and used as props in the Mystery plays. Historians have traced the practice of decorating Christmas trees to the Mystery Plays.

By the 1600s, Christmas trees were very popular in Germany and people had taken to decorating them. They were usually small table sized trees and were decorated with roses from colored paper, wafers, cookies, candies, apples and other treats. It's possible that the practice of putting Christmas presents under the Christmas tree started with the practice of hanging little items from the trees along with the treats, which were given out to family and guests.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 10th

Oh Christmas Tree Continued...

In England, Christmas trees became popular after Queen Victoria's husband Albert, who came from Germany, made a tree part of the celebrations at Windsor Castle. This is still one of the most famous Christmas tree sites in the world.

During the Victorian era, people went all out decorating their Christmas trees. Mass production of tinsel and Christmas tree lights and candles made the trees even more popular and beautiful. People were proud of the beauty of their Christmas trees and households spent a great deal of time fashioning and hanging decorations.

So, when you trim your Christmas tree this year, think of the blessings of your life and of the beautiful symbolism of joy and life it has brought to so many throughout its long history.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 10th

Candied White Pine

From New England

At one time New Englanders candied the peeled new shoots of white pine, gathered while still tender. Peel the shoots and boil them until they are tender. Drain off the water then boil them for 20 minutes in equal parts of sugar and water. Drain off the liquid, partly dry the shoots and then roll them in granulated sugar.

p.s. If you are brave enough to try out this recipe, drop us a line and let us know how they taste!

p.p.s. We have a fine collection of Victorian Christmas dessert recipes - Christmas Cake, Plum Pudding, Spotted Dick and more...

[Visit the Vintage Recipe Pages](#)



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 11th

Christmas Cards

Christmas cards are a relatively new invention, but the practice of exchanging cards goes back to the 1400s when men and women placed their names in a hat to choose who would be their Valentine for the year. New Year's cards were also exchanged as early as the 1400s.

By the 1800s, more cards were being exchanged, but it was more common to use illustrated envelopes in which handwritten greetings were sent, like the envelope to the right.



Historians agree that the first known Christmas card was designed in London in 1843 by John Calcolt Horsely at the request of Sir Henry Cole. It seems that Sir Henry was behind in getting his season's greeting out, so asked Horsely to hand color 1000 cards for him with a seasonal message.

The first Christmas card's inscription read: "merry Christmas and a happy New Year to you." "Merry" was then a spiritual word meaning "blessed," as in "merry old England." Of the original one thousand cards printed for Henry Cole, twelve exist today in private collections.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 11th

Christmas Cards Continued...

Horsely's Christmas card was designed to try to please everyone. In the center we have people celebrating with food and drink. On either side we have acts of charity. During the Victorian era, too much celebrating was frowned upon so the card struck a happy medium. The message on the card was Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you. Just to clarify, back then "merry" actually meant "blessed" rather than a wish for gaiety and cheerfulness so the card wasn't quite as celebratory as we might think.

The cards went over really well, probably because Victorians were already using calling cards for their social visits. They also would have appealed to the Victorians great love of collecting cards for their journals and scrapbooks. At the time, many businesses issued collectible trade cards (like the card to the right) with all kinds of interesting images on them and their advertisements on the back. They were really popular.



By the 1850s, greeting cards had become much less expensive because of advances in printed as well as the introduction of the penny stamp in 1840 in England. Germany followed suit and soon greeting cards were being sent by the thousands and thousands all over Europe and beyond.



Louis Prang Card - 1876



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 11th

Christmas Cards Continued...

Greeting cards and penny postcards really didn't catch on in America until 1875, when a publisher named Louis Prang started producing cards in America. In the early 1900s, the postcard laws allowed printing of just an image on the front with the writing only on the back and the "Golden Age" of postcards began, millions of postcards were exchanged and there was a postcard collecting craze was in full swing.

Now the greeting card industry has grown to a multi-billion dollar industry. In the U.S. alone, over two billion Christmas cards will be exchanged and Christmas is the number holiday for sending greeting cards!

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 12th

Mistletoe

*Sitting under the mistletoe
(Pale-green, fairy mistletoe),
One last candle burning low,
All the sleepy dancers gone,
Just one candle burning on,
Shadows lurking everywhere:
Some one came, and kissed me there.*

Walter De La Mare 1800s

Many centuries ago, the Celtic peoples of Europe believed that the mystical powers of mistletoe were strong enough to force enemies to lay their weapons down and call a truce. So they hung mistletoe over their doorways during the Yule season to bring peace and goodwill to all who entered.



Mistletoe was a plant sacred to the Celtic peoples as a magical plant with the power to heal disease, enhance fertility, ward off evil, make poisons harmless, and generally bring good luck and blessings. In fact, the word mistletoe means "All-Heal."

As it turns out, mistletoe does have some powerful healing properties. Per the National Cancer Institute: *"Extracts of mistletoe have been shown to kill cancer cells in the laboratory and to boost the immune system (the complex group of organs and cells that defends the body against infection or disease). For this reason, mistletoe has been classified as a type of biological response modifier (a substance that stimulates the body's response to infection and disease).*



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 12th

Mistletoe Continued...

But even without its magical and healing properties considered, it's easy to see why mistletoe would have been regarded with some mystery. It is an unusual plant which grows in the branches of trees as a semi-parasite. In the dead of winter, when the tree has no leaves, the mistletoe hangs bright green in clumps, for like holly and ivy it is an evergreen. It particularly favors oak trees, which were the most sacred of the early European people's trees.

Mistletoe also figured prominently in Norse legends. The legends tell that mistletoe came from Frigga, the Norse God of Love, who wept at the loss of her son and as she wept, her tears turned to mistletoe berries. The mistletoe berries brought her son back to life. After that, any time anyone walked under a tree bearing mistletoe, Frigga would kiss them.

During the middle ages, mistletoe was banned as an altar decoration in Christian Churches because of its association to earlier religions. An exception was the Cathedral of York, which at one point would hang mistletoe in the sanctuary, a symbol of Christ, the Divine Healer.

As with most Christmas traditions, people continued to pass their traditions down, and that included mistletoe. The mystical and religious meanings were forgotten for the most part, but the kiss under the mistletoe, the symbolism of goodwill and friendship, happiness and good luck persists even today in many homes.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 12th

Traditional Gingerbread Recipe From the 1814 Rappite Cookbook

1/2 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup shortening
3/4 cup molasses
1 & 1/2 cup flour
3/4 teaspoons soda
1 & 1/2 teaspoon ginger
1/8 teaspoon salt



Cream the shortening, add sugar and mix well. Add eggs and beat well. Sift dry ingredients together and add alternately with sorghum molasses and hot water. Bake at 375 for about 25 minutes.

Vintage Desktop Wallpaper

Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!

[800 X 600](#) [1024 X 768](#)
[1280 X 960](#) [1280 X 720](#)

p.s. These images are high resolution and they are BIG! So be patient while the image downloads!



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 13th

Christmas Tree Ornaments

I have been looking at a merry company of children assembled round that pretty German toy, a Christmas Tree. The tree was planted in the middle of a great round table, and towered high above their heads. It was brilliantly lighted by a multitude of little tapers; and everywhere sparkled and glittered with bright objects. There were rosy-cheeked dolls, hiding behind the green leaves; and...sugar-plums; there were trinkets for the elder girls, far brighter than any grown-up gold and jewels...there were teetotums, humming tops, needle-cases, pen-wipers...real fruit, made artificially dazzling with gold leaf; imitation apples, pears, and walnuts, crammed with surprises; in short, as a pretty child, before me, delightedly whispered to another pretty child, her bosom friend, "There was everything and more."

-Charles Dickens, Household Word



Believe it or not, it is entirely possible that Christmas tree ornaments descended from witch balls in the early 1800s. A Witch Ball is a hollow glass ball, which was traditionally hung above doors and windows. The belief was that the beauty of the witch ball would attract and trap evil spirits, spells from witches and negative energy. Witch balls placed on Christmas trees protected the presents on and underneath the Christmas tree.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 13th

Christmas Tree Ornaments Continued...

Another possible origin of decorating Christmas trees begins with Martin Luther, who noticed how beautiful the stars were shining through the forest trees. He placed candles on a Christmas tree to mimic the beauty of the starlit sky through the forest and in remembrance of the Star of Bethlehem, which led the three Wise men to the birthplace of Jesus Christ.

It's also well known that the Church used Christmas trees decorated with apples as props in the mystery plays of the Middle Ages. These were enactments of the story of the garden of good and evil, often presented during the Christmas season.

As far as Christmas tree decorating as we know it today, an English visitor to Strasbourg Germany in the early 1600s reported seeing Christmas trees decorated with wafers and golden sugar twists. We also know that that markets in Germany in the 1600s sold wax ornaments and shaped gingerbread that people could buy to decorate their Christmas trees and tinsel was invented in Thuringia in the early 1600s by shredding pieces of real silver into delicate ribbons.

By Victorian times, it was the fashion to decorate the Christmas tree. It was a source of pleasure and pride in one's home to have a beautifully decorated tree. Glass-bead garlands, gilded tin bugles and blown glass ornaments became very popular. A winged angel gilded in pure tin topped many a Christmas tree by the mid 1800s.

Victorian Christmas trees were usually tabletop trees. They were often decorated with little gifts that we now consider to be stocking stuffers. Homemade ornaments were very common. Popcorn strings, paper ornaments, ribbons, small toys, nuts, fruits, candies and hand made ornaments of Christmas cards and doilies were very popular as well.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 13th

Tree Decoration Advice from 1901

Just in case you want to try your hand at decorating your Christmas tree with traditional Victorian era decorations, here are some tips from period books and magazines:

Advice on Christmas Tree Decorating from 1901: *"Do not forget to have some form of jewelry for the tree, bracelets or necklaces, not of gleaming precious stones nor yet of gold or silver, but of toothsome nut kernels and delicious, dark rich raisins. With needle and strong thread string first a peanut, then a raisin, a peanut, a raisin, an almond, a raisin, a filbert, a raisin and so on, using as many kinds of nuts as you deem best. The boy or girl receiving the novelty will be charmed and later may devour the queer beads one by one as they are pulled from the string."*

Holly, where it can be had, is of course the special tree of the season. Its leaves bent into various curves, its thorny points, and its bundles of coral-red berries, make it the prince of evergreens for decorative purposes. It is a good plan to strip off the berries, and use them strung in bunches, as the berries get hidden when the sprigs are worked into wreathes and devices, and the berries bent into little bunches, dotted about the festoons here and there, look very effective.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 13th

Spiced Pomander Balls Traditional Victorian



Victorians hung spiced pomander balls throughout their homes and on their Christmas trees. Here's how to make them:

- Apple or orange
- Whole cloves
- Ground cinnamon
- Orris root (optional)
- Ribbon or other trim
- Pins
- Adhesive tape or a thimble
- Paper bag
- Scissors

Push the cloves into the apple or orange with your thumb. (Protect your thumb with a thimble or by wrapping adhesive tape around and around it to protect it.)

Place the covered apple or orange in a bag filled with with ground cinnamon and orris root and shake it until it is thoroughly powdered..

Place the apple or orange in a warm dry place and let it dry - this takes about two weeks. Turn it from time to time so it doesn't become flat on any one side. The pomander will shrink as it dries.

Place ribbon, lace or other decorative trims at the top of the pomander.

Use a ribbon hanger or a ribbon loop to hang the pomander on your tree.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 13th

Pop-Corn Balls

Pop-corn balls look tempting on a Christmas tree. They are easy to make, a safe ornament when the tree is to be lighted with candles, and they taste very good, indeed. Have the fire clear and hot, with no flames, and put in the popper at one time only enough corn to cover the bottom a single kernel deep; shake the popper constantly while the corn is over the fire until it has all popped. Then boil one-quarter of a cupful of molasses with a little sugar until it hardens in the water, remove from the fire before it turns brittle and pour it over two quarts of corn. Mix well and make into balls about the size of lemons, suspend the sweet, white ornaments from the twigs, and use the remaining corn for a different decoration. String a lot of the flower-like kernels with a large needle and strong thread, loop the strands from branch to branch, and the snowy ropes will lighten up the foliage beautifully."



FROM: "CHRISTMAS TREE DECORATIONS, Good to Eat & Good to Look Upon".
From "The Delineator" December 1901.

Victorians also liked to collect beautiful postcards. They would cut them into shapes, decorate them with lace, ribbons, beads and other bric-a-brac and hang them as ornaments.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 14th

Maskers and Mummers

*Then came the merry maskers in,
And carols roared with blithesome din.
If unmelodious was the song,
It was a hearty note, and strong;
Who lists may in their murmuring see
Traces of ancient mystery;
White shirts supplied the masquerade,
And smutted cheeks the visors made;
But O, wht maskers richly dight,
Can boast of bosoms half so light!*

-Sir Walter Scott

Maskers and mummers, in one shape or form, have entertained in the streets of towns, at festivals and at the great tables of the nobility as long as there has been a Christmas season. They would dance, sing carols, and put on plays for their audiences. Some of the performances were carefully rehearsed affairs, but most were impromptu play acts of great hilarity, often poking fun.



Masques were originally themed costume balls; the costumed guests would perform a dance and then invite the other guests to dance with them. Henry VIII and Queen Elizabeth of England loved dancing. When Henry VIII took the throne, masques had been banned. Henry lifted the ban, for he loved high living and parties so they found new life under his reign. Henry loved the masque so much that he even wrote a song about it.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 14th

Maskers and Mummers Continued...

Masques generally started right after dinner and continued throughout the night, followed by more feasting. Sometimes the festivities were really wild, with tables being knocked down.



Mummers performed short plays and skits, usually some kind of parody. They would dress up as well and entertain the guests. In some areas, mummers would arrive at the door of households singing songs and performing, expecting wassail or some kind of treat in exchange.

Mummers and maskers were probably originally a part of the Yule celebrations, as described in this report from a few centuries ago - *At Christmasse there was in the Kings's house, wheresoever hee was lodged, a lorde of misrule, or mayster of merry disportes; and the like had ye in the house of every nobleman of honour, or good worshippe, were he spirituall or temporall.--Stow.*

You can still see maskers and mummers at modern day Christmas festivals. They dress up in period costumes, sing, dance and entertain as they have for countless centuries. Check your local newspaper, they generally announce the performances.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 14th

Pottage of Cherries

From: a Book of Cookrye 1591

To make pottage of Cherries. Fry white bread in butter til it be brown and so put it into a dish, then take Cherries and take out the stones and frye them where you fried the bread then put thereto Sugar, Ginger, and Sinamon, for lacke of broth, take White or Claret Wine, boyle these together, and that doon, serve them upon your Tostes.



Vintage Desktop Wallpaper

Today's desktop wallpaper download is a vintage Christmas postcard, circa early 1900, showing dancers and displaying Walter Scott's poem.

To download: Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!

[800 X 600](#) [1024 X 768](#)
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p.s. These images are high resolution and they are BIG! So be patient while the image downloads!

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 15th

Christmas Superstitions

Christmas is a time of traditions passed down generation to generations. In past eras, it was also a time to ensure good luck and prosperity in the coming year. Maybe these superstitions and omens are just that, but some of them are just plain fun and good excuse to relax, eat and enjoy the Christmas season.

Yule Fire

The Yule fire must burn continuously throughout the twelve days of Christmas for good luck in the coming year.

Any difficulty lighting the Yule fire is a bad omen for the coming year.

Keep a piece of the Yule log from the previous year for good luck.

The Yule log should be lit by a piece of the log used on the previous Christmas. Once that is done, no evil spirit can then enter into the house.





Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 15th

Christmas Superstitions Continued...

Decorations

Hang mistletoe all over your house to keep evil spirits away.

Bring holly in to the house at Christmas time for good luck and to protect against witches and thunder.

Bring both holly and ivy in to the house in equal measures to ensure a balanced and harmonious home.

Smooth holly means the wife will be the master of the household. Prickly holly means the husband will be the master.

Make sure you take down your Christmas decorations before January 6th. It's bad luck to keep them up after Twelfth Night.

Christmas Dinner

Keeping the plough underneath your dining table during the Christmas season brings good luck.

Make sure that you include a dish with mushrooms in it, for mushrooms bring health and strength.

Tie string around the legs of the Christmas dinner table to keep burglars and thieves away in the New Year.

You must also eat mince pie at Christmas dinner so you won't have bad luck in the coming year.

For good luck, everyone must clean their plates at Christmas dinner and no one can leave the table until everyone is finished.

Always set the Christmas dinner table for an even number of guests.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 15th

Christmas Superstitions Continued...

Christmas Dinner

Put a pot of honey on the table to protect against evil spirits.

The more you eat at Christmas Eve dinner, the more pleasure you'll have in the future.

Foods

Three sips of salted water before Christmas dinner brings good luck.

Everyone in the household should participate in making the Christmas pudding. It should be stirred three times by each person and each time they see the bottom of the pot, they should make a wish.

You must eat plum pudding during Christmas for good luck, and the more the better.

You'll have good health for the entire year if you eat an apple on Christmas Eve.

You will have as many happy months in the coming year, as the number of houses you eat mince pies in during Christmas time.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 15th

Christmas Superstitions Continued...

Shoes and Clothing

Burning your old shoes during the Christmas season prevents bad luck in the coming year.

Laundering a Christmas gift before giving it to the recipient removes all of the good luck of the present.

Don't wear new shoes on Christmas Day.

Place your family's shoes side by side on Christmas Eve to prevent family quarrels.

Never give anyone shoes for a Christmas present.

Posset

A Traditional English Christmas Eve Drink

During the Victorian era, each caroling guest was offered a posset cup and a piece of apple pie or tart on Christmas Eve.

4 cups milk
4 tablespoons sugar
4 slices toast
1 teaspoon cinnamon
4 cups of beer (preferably ale)

Heat the milk, sugar, and toast in a saucepan, nearly to a boil. Stir the cinnamon and beer into a punch bowl. Remove the toast and stir the hot milk mixture into the ale. Serve in mugs while warm. Serves 8-10.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 15th

Vintage Desktop Wallpaper

Today's desktop wallpaper download is a vintage Christmas postcard, circa early 1900, showing two children and their dog walking in the snow.

To download: Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!

[800 X 600](#)
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p.s. These images are high resolution and they are BIG! So be patient while the image downloads!

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 16th

More Christmas Superstitions

More Christmas superstitions from times past. In past eras, Christmas wasn't just a time to celebrate, it was a time to ensure good luck and prosperity in the coming year. Maybe these superstitions and omens are just that, but some of them are just plain fun and will give you a good excuse to kiss as often as possible under the mistletoe.

Things to Do for Good Luck and Prosperity

If you do not give a gift to someone on Christmas Eve you run the risk of being poor.

Leave a Christmas candle burning in a window all night to bring good luck in the coming year.

To make your trees fruitful, tie wet bands of straw around their branches on Christmas Eve.

Never throw holly leaves on a fire.

Try to eliminate all of your debts before the year ends. Ending the year in debt means another whole year of debt.

Don't lend anything to anyone on New Year's Day.

Don't kiss under the mistletoe after all the berries have dropped off.





Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 16th

More Things to Do for Good Luck and Prosperity

Throw open the doors to the house at midnight on Christmas Eve to let any trapped evil spirits out.

It is unlucky to do any unnecessary work on Christmas Day.

It is lucky to kiss under the mistletoe and unlucky deliberately to avoid the opportunity.

Dance outside around a tree on New Year's Day to ensure luck in love, prosperity and good health for the coming year.

Eat something leafy and green on New Year's Day. That will bring prosperity during the year, and you won't have to worry about paying bills.

Omens

If the first visitor at your house on New Year's Day is a man with black hair, that's good luck. If your visitor has red hair, that's bad luck.

Placing a cherry tree branch in water at the beginning of Advent will bring luck if it flowers by Christmas.

Children born on Christmas day are especially fortunate.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 16th

Weather Forecasting

Whatever the weather is like on each of the twelve days of Christmas, starting on December 26th, is a forecast of what the weather will be like in the corresponding month of the coming year.

Snow on Christmas Day means Easter will be green.

If the winds blow on Christmas Day that means good luck.

Robins

Robins were very popular on vintage postcards. A practical explanation is that they represent the Victorian postmen, who wore red tunics. But the legends and superstitions are much more interesting. Robins were said to have brought fire to man. Their breasts are red because the fire scorched the robin's breast. Another legend is that the robin visited the Christ child in his manger in Bethlehem. When he got there the fire was going out and the blessed babe was getting cold. So the robin beat his wings to fan up the fire and while doing so scorched his breast.

Regardless of their association with Christmas, they are a beloved bird and you must never kill one for you will thereafter have bad luck. If you break a robin's eggs, something of your own will break.

Robins can also forecast weather. If a robin sings on top of a bush, there will be warm weather, if it sings from within a bush, it will be rainy.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 16th

Christmas Salad

Here's a Christmas salad you can make to ensure that you have something leafy and green, and mushrooms too at your Christmas dinner table for good luck and health.

- 4 cups cooked brussels sprouts, halved
- 1 cup cherry tomatoes, halved
- 1 cup raw mushrooms, sliced
- 1 cup vegetable oil
- 1/3 cup cider vinegar
- 1 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic salt
- 2 tablespoons minced green onion
- 2 tablespoons minced green pepper
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- 4 drops Tabasco sauce

Toss the tomatoes, mushrooms and brussels together. Shake oil, vinegar, salt, garlic salt and tabasco in a jar to mix very well. Pour the mixture over the vegetables and chill for 24 hours.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 16th

Vintage Desktop Wallpaper

Today's desktop wallpaper download is a vintage Christmas postcard, circa early 1900, of two beautiful children dressed in red and carrying holly and a small Christmas tree.

To download: Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!

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Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 17th

Medieval Christmas Feasts

*The boar's head in hand bear I
Bedeck'd with bays and rosemary;
And I pray you, my masters, be merry,*

*The boar's head, as I understand,
Is the rarest dish in all this land,
Which thus bedeck'd with a gay garland*

*Our Steward hath provided this
In honour of the King of Bliss,
Which on this day to be served is*

When you sit down for your Christmas dinner this year, you may be thinking that your heavily laden table may be a bit excessive. To learn the true meaning of excessive, you'd have to attend a medieval Christmas feast, when the feasting and merriment went on for up to fifteen days and the tables groaned under the weight of the twelve-course Christmas dinner!



There was good reason for celebration at Christmas time. No work was required for two weeks and besides the Christmas feast, there were several others.

The Christmas season brought with it the annual wild boar hunt, a dangerous but exciting sport that brought in the prized Christmas dish, wild boar. Also hunted were deer, geese, pheasant, swans, and other game. Peacocks, chickens, doves, cattle and other domesticated stock were also prepared for the great feast.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 17th

Medieval Christmas Feasts Continued...

The most prized and festive dishes were the Wild Boar, Roast Swan and Peacock, which were prepared to be both a visual and culinary delight at the tables of the nobility.

The Boar's head was stuffed and the head boiled for hours. It was then placed on a large platter and surrounded with slices of truffles and apples and strewn with rosemary. It was carried into the hall to a fanfare of trumpets.

The feathers of the swan and the peacock were carefully removed before roasting them. When the roasts were done, the feathers were put back over them to make a magnificent display on the table.

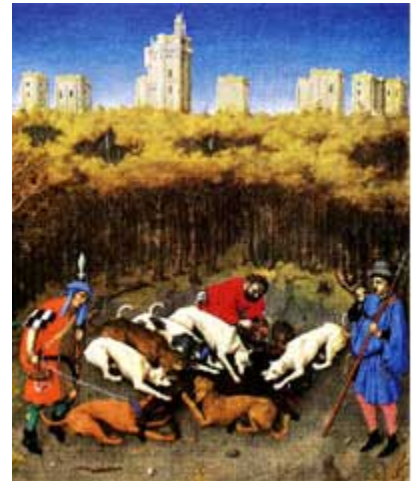
Peacocks were not always roasted; sometimes they were made into a pie called "cock and pie". The head, still feathered, would be placed at one end of the pie, the tail plumage at the other.

The best parts of the deer were served at the tables of the nobility, with the remaining parts, such as the liver, heart, feet and so on, going to the poor people, who called them 'umbles. The poor would make them into pie, which was called "humble pie".

Mince pies were made; a rich, spicy mixture of fruits and meats eaten with great relish, for eating them was thought to bring great fortune.

Christmas puddings of the time were a spicy type of porridge called "frumenty". This was a thick porridge with currants and dried fruit, cinnamon and nutmeg. This was considered to be a real treat.

In addition to the special dishes, there were meat pies, puddings, roast beef, geese, chicken, cakes, breads, sweets, and fruits, filling the table in twelve courses, complete with ale, mead and wine.





Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 17th

Perys in Confyte - 15th Century

Take hony; boyle hit a lytill. Do theryn sigure, poudyr of galentyn & clovis, brucet anneyce, safron, & saundris, & cast theryn the peris, sodyn & paryd & cutt in pecys, & wyn & venyger. Sesyn hit up with poudyr of canell so that hit be broun ynow.

Translation from Gode Cookery: Pears in Syrup: Take honey; boil it a little. Add sugar, spices, cloves, anise sauce, saffron, & sandalwood, & add the pears, boiled & pared & cut in pieces, & wine & vinegar. Season it with enough cinnamon powder that it is brown.

Modern Recipe from Gode Cookery.

3 lbs. pears, peeled, cored, & sliced
1/3 cup honey
1/3 cup sugar
1/2 tsp. of any of the following spices, separate or in combination: ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, cubeb, galingale, etc.
1 tsp. cardamom
1/4 tsp. ground cloves
1 tsp. anise seed, crushed, mixed with 1/4 tsp. sugar
few threads saffron (or few drops yellow food coloring)
) few drops red food coloring
1/2 cup red wine
1 tbs. cider vinegar
cinnamon (to garnish)

Boil the pears in water until just tender; drain and set aside. Add enough water (about a teaspoon or so) to the anise/sugar mixture to make a thin sauce. Bring the honey to a low boil; remove the scum as it rises to the surface. Add sugar, spices, anise sauce, & food coloring(s) and continue cooking until sugar is dissolved. Gently stir in pears and the wine & vinegar. cook for a few more minutes, until pears have warmed, then remove from heat. Serve hot or cold, garnished with cinnamon on top.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 18th

Jingle Bells and Carriages

*Dashing through the snow
In a one horse open sleigh
O'er the fields we go
Laughing all the way
Bells on bob tails ring
Making spirits bright
What fun it is to laugh and sing
A sleighing song tonight*

*Oh, jingle bells, jingle bells
Jingle all the way
Oh, what fun it is to ride
In a one horse open sleigh*

These days the sound of jingle bells heralds the arrival of Santa Claus and Christmas, with bellows of ho-ho-hos and a jolly welcome for the many little children who throng around him waiting to tell him what they want for Christmas.



In past eras, jingle bells could be heard down snowy lanes as horse drawn sleighs approached. They were actually there for a practical reason. They served as a warning signal to other sleighs and carriages as they came up to corners or drove through snow. In many areas, they were required by law. Sleighs are much more difficult to stop than wagons so having ample warning of another sleigh or carriage gave time to slow down and stop.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 18th

Jingle Bells and Horse Carriages Continued...

Horse bells go back for centuries in England. Single horse bells, which were called "crotals" adorned war horses in the Middle Ages and were a sign of wealth and state. People believed that the horse bells would bring good luck and prosperity and protect them from evil and poor health.



Jingle bells became more and more popular for horse drawn sleighs in the 1800s, when sleigh riding and racing became a popular form of winter entertainment. Winter sleigh racing was exciting, the horses' manes flying as they sped through the snow. In fact, winter sleigh sports inspired James Pierpont to write the song "Jingle Bells", which was originally called "One Horse Open Sleigh". He taught the new song to his Church choir and published it in 1857.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 18th

Vintage Desktop Wallpaper

Today's desktop wallpaper download is a restored and re-colored Currier and Ives print, entitled "Trotting Cracks on the Snow" from 1858, depicting the popular winter sport of sleigh racing.

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Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 19th

Christmas Rose

*Borage and Hellebore fill two scenes,
Sovereign plants to purge the veins
Of melancholy and cheer the heart
Of those black fumes which make it smart*

From Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy

The Christmas Rose flowers from December to April, it's beautiful white petals and deep green foliage standing out amidst the dull, leafless terrain of winter.

It really isn't a rose at all, but the Black Hellebore, a member of the hellebore family and one of the most poisonous plants in existence. The name "Hellebore" comes from the Greek elein (to injure) and bora (food), which roughly translated means injurious food. It is called Black Hellebore because of its dark colored rootstock.



It has been used medicinally in Greece around 1500 B.C., where it was called Melampode in reference to Melampus the physician who first employed it as a medicinal herb. Melampus used it as a purgative in treating mania. Herbalists used it throughout the centuries for curing madness, as a tranquilizer, and in a concoction washed onto walls to rid households of flies.

In ancient times, the Black Hellebore was considered to have a powerful ability to drive away evil spirits. People would bless their livestock with the Black Hellebore, to protect them from evil spells. Sorcerers were said to use hellebore to make themselves invisible by casting powered hellebore in the air.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 19th

Christmas Rose Continued...

According to Parkinson, 'a piece of the root being drawne through a hole made in the eare of a beast troubled with cough or having taken any poisonous thing cureth it, if it be taken out the next day at the same houre.'

Many historians speculate that the Black Hellebore probably became associated with Christmas because it blooms at Christmas time, and Christ as the rose is a common metaphor found in the Holy Bible. As well, Martin Luther King, the founder of the Protestant Christian movement, adopted it as his coat of arms and insignia.



Finally, here is a beautiful legend, adapted and written into story form in the 1500s by Lizzie Deas told of the Christmas Rose:

When the Magi laid their rich offerings of myrrh, frankincense, and gold, by the bed of the sleeping Christ Child, legend says that a shepherd maiden stood outside the door quietly weeping.





Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 19th

The Christmas Rose Legend Continued...

She, too, had sought the Christ Child. She, too, desired to bring him gifts. But she had nothing to offer, for she was very poor indeed. In vain she had searched the countryside over for one little flower to bring Him, but she could find neither bloom nor leaf, for the winter had been cold.

And as she stood there weeping, an angel passing saw her sorrow, and stooping he brushed aside the snow at her feet. And there sprang up on the spot a cluster of beautiful winter roses, -- waxen white with pink tipped petals.

"Nor myrrh, nor frankincense, nor gold," said the angel, "is offering more meet for the Christ Child than these pure Christmas Roses."

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 19th

Victorian Eggnog Recipe

From The Whitehouse Cookbook - 1887

Beat the yolks of twelve eggs very light, stir in as much white sugar as they will dissolve, pour in gradually one glass of brandy to cook the egg, one glass of old whisky, one grated nutmeg, and three pints of rich milk. Beat the whites to a froth and stir in last.

Vintage Desktop Wallpaper

Today's desktop wallpaper download is a collage of The Adoration of the Magi for the Spedale degli Innocenti (1488) by Domenico Ghirland and a Vintage botanical print of the Christmas Rose.

To download: Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!

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Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 20th

Kriss Kringle - The Christkindl

Kriss Kringle is most likely the English version of Christkindel or Christkindl, who is the Christ Child and the bearer of gifts for children in many areas of Europe. The Pennsylvania Dutch brought the Christkindl traditions with them when they immigrated to America. Historians speculate that Kriss Kringle came from an English speaking spelling and pronunciation of Christkindl.

Up until the 1500s, Christians throughout Europe associated Saint Nicholas, who was a Bishop of the Catholic Church, with Christmas celebrations. Saint Nicholas visited the children in his Bishop's robes with gifts and treats for good children.

Starting in the 1400s, and gaining popularity throughout the 1500s, the Protestant reformation finally developed into the various Protestant Churches which began to replace the Roman Catholic traditions with traditions of their own.



In many areas in Europe, the Feast of St. Nicholas was abolished and along with it the tradition of Saint Nicholas bringing gifts for children. Saint Nicholas was replaced by the Christ Kindl, which means "Christ Child" by Protestant adherents throughout Europe, notably in Germany and Austria.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 20thth

Kriss Kringle Continued...

In the 17th century, a Protestant Pastor complained about parents who continued to tell their children that Saint Nicholas had brought them gifts. He admonished them, saying that it is not a good practice because the Christ Child, not Saint Nicholas, gives all good things for body and soul.

In these communities, the messenger of the Christ Child evolved into a beautiful young child or an angel, crowned in gold, bearing a tiny "tree of lights" and gifts from the Baby Jesus.

Various traditions built up over time. In some places, the gifts were brought by the Christkindl, who entered homes through the keyhole of their door on Christmas Eve. In others, the gifts are brought in when the family has gathered around the Christmas tree. A young girl, dressed up in a white robe with golden wings brings the gifts in to the family, playing the part of the Christkindl. Sometimes a young boy will play the part, but it is usually a young girl.



Another tradition is that the Christ Child, Christkindl, comes riding on a gray mule on Christmas Eve. In some traditions, the Christ Child is accompanied by a helper, called Pelznickel, or "Nicholas with fur." In this tradition Pelznickel visited the children before bedtime, with the Christkindl leaving gifts while the children were asleep. In some communities, adults would dress up in furry outfits and fake beards and play the role of Pelznickel.

In Austria, children write their Christmas wishes on slips of paper and place them on the windowsill for the Christkindl. Morning finds the children checking to see if their slips were taken and hoping that they will receive the gifts wished for.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 20th

Kriss Kringle Continued...

As traditions throughout Europe melded into modern day Christmas imagery in the Victorian era, penny postcards and illustrations in various publications often showed the Christkindl as a small girl holding a Christmas tree while coming through the forest into a town, often riding a mule, and accompanied by Father Christmas version of Pelznickel.

The little slips of paper with gift requests on them have found their way into modern offices as Kriss Kringle exchanges, where everyone writes their name down on a slip, the slips are all placed in a box or bag, and then each person participating in the exchange picks out a slip. The idea is that you buy a small gift for the person on the slip you pick out.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 20th

Stuffed Baked Apples (Bratäpfel) Traditional German Christmas Dessert

For the filling you need:

1-2 tbs butter

1-2 tbs sugar

2 tbs of raisins (soaked in rum)

1 pkt vanilla sugar

Raspberry jam

Mix the ingredients together and stuff the apples with this mixture. A little rum can be poured into the baking dish. Bake in preheated oven until soft (30-45 minutes at 400-425 degrees). Serve warm with whipping cream or ice cream.

Vintage Desktop Wallpaper

Today's desktop wallpaper download is a vintage postcard from the early 1900s showing the Christkindl angel riding a deer from the forest, with Pelznickel at her side.

To download: Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!



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Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 21st

Christmas Grain and Bread

*Oh little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by
Yet in the dark streets shineth, the everlasting light
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.*

If you look up the name Bethlehem in a Hebrew dictionary, you will find that it comes from the word beth, which means house and lehem, which means bread. So it literally means "house of bread." This doesn't really make a great deal of sense until you take into account that astrology played a very important part in the beliefs and symbology of earlier centuries.

In ancient astrology, the Virgin Mother, who symbolized Virgo, was poetically referred to as the house of bread. This was likely because the most prominent star in the Virgo constellation is Spica, which was sometimes considered to represent an ear of wheat in Virgo's hand and so perhaps, in early times, this was representative of the symbol of the divine bread coming down from heaven.



Grain also figures importantly in the Eucharist, "the Heavenly Bread, the Life of the whole world, which is in all places and endureth all things" and wheat and bread have been central symbols of the divine soul in man into antiquity. Jesus spoke of bread bringing eternal life to all who ate of it, telling his disciples, that those who share in it would have eternal life.

In ancient times, bread and grain representing life was widespread, with many associated traditions. Life was very much agricultural and grain was one of the most important crops. In the tiny seeds kept for the spring harvest, was life that would bear crops in the New Year.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 21st

Christmas Grain and Bread Continued...

In many communities, the last sheaf of grain from the harvest was thought to represent the life spirit of the entire field. People carefully saved the last sheaf, keeping the grain and the straw. They made the grain into porridges, puddings or cakes for Christmas and would weave the straw into small figurines.

In Europe, they grow Christmas wheat, planting the wheat seeds in a plate which is kept moistened. In earlier times, the new shoots of wheat were the symbol of the new harvest. The care of the wheat was carried out with a joy of anticipation of Christmas, and with mindfulness of the of spiritual rebirth and the spiritual aspect of Christmas. The new shoots of grain were used to decorate the nativity scene or the Christmas table.



In Eastern Europe, grain sheaves have been used as traditional decorations for the Christmas Supper. In some areas, straw is strewn on the floor under the Christmas table in memory of the stable in which Jesus was born. In some areas of Poland, coins were dropped into the straw for children to find.

There are other grain related traditions that can be traced back to the early Middle Ages. Sheaves of oat stalks and seeds are tied with a red ribbon. The sheaves are placed outdoors for birds to feed on, usually up in tree branches. In Sweden, small straw figures are made and thrown into the yards of friends and neighbors. Another custom is sprinkling parched wheat on the doorstep of houses, or throwing it on the Yule log.

Sheaves of wheat and straw found their way onto the penny postcards of the late 1800s and early 1900s, with angels or Father Christmas carrying wheat and straw strewn nativity scenes.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 21st

Christmas Grain and Bread Continued...

Grain has graced the Christmas table with all manner of traditional cakes, puddings and desserts as long as anyone can remember, and still does today, so when you sit down to your Christmas table this year and eat the bread goods, think of the rich legacy of tradition it represents.

Vintage Desktop Wallpaper

Today's desktop wallpaper download is a vintage postcard from the early 1900s showing the Nativity scene. The Baby Jesus is in the Madonna's arms, with three shepherds in attendance.



To download: Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!

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Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 21st

Traditional Italian Panettone

3 cups sifted all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1 teaspoon ground cardamom
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
2 large eggs
2 egg yolks
3/4 cup granulated sugar
1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon butter, melted and cooled
1 cup milk
1 1/4 cups golden raisins
1/2 cup coarsely chopped dried fruit (such as peaches, papaya, pineapple, or bananas)
1/4 cup coarsely chopped blanched almonds (about 1 ounce)
1 1/2 teaspoons grated orange peel
1/2 teaspoon grated lemon peel

Garnish; confectioners' sugar

Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Grease two 16-ounce coffee cans or two 6 x 4-inch panettone molds.

Mix together flour, baking powder, cardamom, salt, and ginger. Beat together eggs, egg yolks, and sugar at medium speed until thick and pale yellow. Beat melted butter into egg mixture. Alternately add flour mixture and milk to egg mixture. Stir in raisins, dried fruit, nuts, orange peel, and lemon peel. Spoon batter into prepared cans, dividing evenly. Place cans, batter-side up, on a baking sheet. Bake panettone until top is golden brown and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean, 1 hour and 5 minutes. (If necessary, cover cans with aluminum foil toward end of baking time to prevent overbrowning).

Slide loaves from cans. Transfer to a baking sheet. Bake panettone until crusty, 10 minutes more. Transfer loaves to a wire rack to cool. Dust with confectioners' sugar. Makes 2 loaves

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 22nd

Christmas Candles

*Now are lit a thousand Yuletide candles
'Round this darkened Earth
And a thousand, thousand gleaming rays
In Heaven's deep-blue firmament*

*And tonight, over city and country
Treads Yuletide's joyous tidings
Of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ,
Our Saviour and our God.*

*Star of Bethlehem,
O! let your gentle light
Shine with hope and peace
Into every home and dwelling.*

The beautiful lines of today's featured Christmas poem, from the Swedish Christmas carol "Nu Tändas Tusen Juleljus" perfectly expresses the beauty of Christmas and the hope and faith of millions of people around the world as they light their Christmas candles.

Candles have always represented the light shining in the darkness, illumination, and enlightenment. The soft glow of candlelight brings a special magic to any occasion and particularly to Christmas.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 22nd

Christmas Candles Continued...

From the Middle Ages through to the Victorian era, candles have adorned Christmas scenes and trees, symbolizing the Star of Bethlehem and the light of all life, Jesus Christ.



The Advent wreath is graced with candles and is rich with symbolism and ritual. The advent wreath is always formed into a circle, a circle with no beginning and no end, the symbol of the infinite and the symbol of God.

The wreath is made from evergreens, symbolic of eternal life and the immortality of the soul, and of Jesus Christ who lives, never to die again.

But the richest symbolism of the advent wreath is in the candles which are lighted one by one, each week of the Advent season until all four are burning continuously. On Christmas day the fifth, and final candle, which is pure white, is lit.

As each additional candle is lit, the wreath serves to remind that the birth of the Jesus Christ, the Light of the World is coming closer. The white candle on Christmas Day is lit in remembrance and in honor of the birth of the Christ Child.

In the Christian tradition, three of the advent wreath candles are purple, which symbolizes hope, peace, and love. The fourth candle is pink, which represents joy. The final candle, is the Christ candle, which is white.

The purple candles are lit on the first, second, and fourth Sundays of Advent. The pink candle is lit on the third Sunday and the white candle on Christmas day.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 22nd

Christmas Candles Continued...

On December 13th each year, a young woman in white, wearing a crown of blazing candles brings a tray of coffee and buns and to waken her family in the darkest hour of the night. She is representing Saint Lucia, who symbolizes light and growth for all creatures, great and small as she brings her light into the darkness as she emerges out of the darkness. So begins the day of the festival of lights in Sweden.



In many homes throughout the world, a lighted candle is placed in a front window on Christmas Eve, a symbol of welcome to Mary and Joseph, who could not find their way to shelter.

Embraced by people of every faith, belief and locale, the solitary flame of a candle touches our hearts, for almost all of us have seen candles used to bring their special symbolism and light to our ceremonies and special occasions, perhaps a candlelight vigil, to come together in prayer or as we share our Christmas festivities.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 22nd

Dundee Cake

Traditional Scottish Christmas Cake

8 oz butter
8oz sugar
4 egg
10 oz flour
Orange rind
1 tsp. baking powder
Pinch of salt
2 oz ground almonds
1 lb dried fruits
4 oz candied peels
Blanched almonds



Line an 8" pie pan with baking parchment. Preheat the oven to 325 F.

Thoroughly cream the butter and sugar together. Slowling beat in the eggs, adding a little flour to prevent curdling. Stir in orange rind to taste.

Sift the flour, baking powder and salt together. Fold the flour mixture into the creamed mixture and add the almonds, fruits and candied peels.

Spoon into the pie tin, smoothing the surface and indenting the center slightly so it won't rise higher than the sides. Place blanched almonds on top and brush the top with beaten egg white.

Bake for about 3 hours or until stick comes out clean.

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 22nd

Vintage Desktop Wallpaper

Today's desktop wallpaper download is a vintage postcard from the early 1900s showing Santa Claus trudging through the snow at sunset towards a lighted Church.



To download: Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!

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Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 23rd

Christmas Carols

*The minstrels played their Christmas tune
To-night beneath my cottage-eaves;
While, smitten by a lofty moon,
The encircling laurels, thick with leaves,
Gave back a rich and dazzling sheen,
That overpowered their natural green.*

William Wordsworth

Christmas carols, song and dance, may have the longest history of the traditions associated with the Christmas season. The word carol comes from the old French "carole", which means a kind of dance and from the Latin word, "choraula", a dance to the flute, and even earlier to a Greek word meaning the same thing.

It seems that carols started out as ring dances, a group type of dance in which people danced in a ring to the music of the time. Chaucer and other old writers refer to carols as songs with dancing, which were entertainments at Christmas feasts. Minstrels and troubadours would also perform songs to entertain the guests at the celebrations.

During the 12th Century, St Francis of Assisi inspired the composers of the time to write Christmas music for church services. These were much more solemn and there was no dancing associated with them.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 23rd

Christmas Carols Continued...



By the end of the 13th century, carols were very popular at Christmas time, both as religious works and folk type songs associated with the Christmas season in general, notably the practice of singing for wassail.

Christmas carols were thought to be far too frivolous mid 1600s and so they were banned, along with most Christmas celebrations. Caroling still continued, but not in public places, gradually returning to favor. By the Victorian era they had once again become popular.

The Victorians loved Christmas caroling, and in the weeks before Christmas the streets filled with many groups of music makers and carolers. People wanted Christmas songs and many new carols were written, orchestras and choirs started up and Christmas music was carried into homes, Churches and Christmas celebrations.

The vintage postcards of the late 19th century and early twentieth century often portray carol singers walking through the snow, going house to house, angels singing with song sheets and groups of children singing Christmas songs.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 23rd

Vintage Desktop Wallpaper

Today's desktop wallpaper download is a vintage postcard from the early 1900s showing young boys singing Christmas Carols.



To download: Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!

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Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 24th

Christmas Eve

*Whilst shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.*

All over the world on Christmas Eve, that great light of humanity, that spark of spirit and love that we all share, shines brightly in our homes, in our acts of kindness and our celebration of Christmas, as we seek to bless and honor the people in our lives and our spiritual beliefs with our religious services, our gifts to one another and our good wishes for all.

There is a deep meaning to the word Christmas, found in the original meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words, from which it is formed, a meaning that transcends all religions and all beliefs.

Most Biblical scholars translate the Hebrew word Mashiah, which means "the Anointed of Yah" to the Greek "Christos" which means "the Anointed of the Lord. In Hebrew, the "iah" in Messiah is "Yah", the first syllable of short form of the name of God, Yahweh or YHVH.

This is because the Greeks have no word or equivalent for Yah, which means: "He who brings into existence whatever exists." Yah is the first letter of in the Hebrew alphabet, which is called Yod. Yod represents a mere dot, a divine point of energy and is considered the starting point of God in all things - the spark of spirit in everything.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 24th

Christmas Eve Continued...

Mass comes from the the Greek word "maza", a common bread. It may have been borrowed from the Hebrew word "mazza" which means unleavened bread. Bethlehem is a Hebrew word and may be pronounced and spelled differently in languages other than Hebrew, but the meaning, "House of Bread" remains the the same.

The mass of many Churches celebrates the Eucharist. The word Eucharist comes from the Greek word eucharistia, which means thanksgiving, for Jesus gave thanks to God when he broke the bread with his disciples. In Churches around the world on Christmas Eve people attend services and masses, to bless and be blessed.



Through the long history of Christmas, people have come together in recognition of all that is holy and is sacred to them. When you trace these words, you find that the word holy comes from a common Indo-European root, hailo- or kailo- which means "free from injury or whole", to it's probable meaning in pre-Christian times, "inviolable, inviolable." Whether a prayer, or wishes, or simply a love for one another, Christmas is a celebration of life in all its diversity.



Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 24th

Especially for Christmas Day, our vintage wallpaper for December 24th is the Madonna with the newborn Christ Child.



To download: Select the link that best fits your computer monitor. When you see the image in your browser, simply right-click on the link and select "Set as Background". Merry Christmas!

[800 X 600](#)

[1024 X 768](#)

[1280 X 960](#)

[1280 X 720](#)

p.s. These images are high resolution and they are BIG! So be patient while the image downloads!

Vintage Christmas Countdown

December 25th



'Neath thy soft touch of Peace and Love
Oh come glad Day our Hearts to move
To truer Friendship - wide Good will
For those who climb with us life's hills

Merry Christmas!

Vintage Christmas Countdown

Victorian Christmas Recipes

Do you enjoy baking? Then you might enjoy these Victorian period recipes, including Christmas cake, Gingerbread, Sugar Mice and Sugar Plums.

[See the Victorian Christmas Recipes](#)



Vintage Santa Claus Greeting Cards

Now available! Unique, professional quality vintage Christmas greeting cards you can print from your own computer!

[See the Greeting Cards](#)



Vintage Santa Claus Postcard gallery!

This is one of the largest collections of Santa Claus postcards from the late 1800s to the early 20th century. Santa didn't always wear red and he wasn't always a jolly old fellow!

[Visit the Santa Claus Gallery](#)



Vintage Christmas Countdown

Christmas Shoppe

Santa Claus Letter Kit

Print out letters from Santa Claus for the kids this Christmas!

The kit includes Santa Claus stationary, sample letters and instructions on how to mail from the North Pole

[Learn More About the Santa Kit](#)



Personalized Musical Jewelry Boxes

An elegant combination of beauty and practicality, these personalized musical jewelry boxes feature a lustrous piano gloss finish and high quality ceramic tile inlay top with your choice of classic vintage art, timeless melodies and your personal message for a unique, exquisite gift that is sure to please.

[Browse the Jewelry Boxes](#)



About 24kVintageArt.com

24kVintageArt.com brings paper prints and postcards from bygone eras to high-resolution life with the help of cutting-edge digital scanning and imaging technology. These images are available for viewing in online galleries, or are reproduced as printable greeting cards, desktop wallpapers, clip art, canvas transfers, mugs and other gift and decor items.

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