

Feasts and Saint Days for the Month of December
1991 Book of Lesser Feasts and Fasts

Saint or Feast	Day	Ingredient	Recipe
Nicholas Ferrar	1		
Channing Moore Williams, Missionary Bishop in China and Japan	2		
John of Damascus, Priest	4		
Clement of Alexandria, Priest	5		
Nicholas, Bishop of Myra	6	Items shaped like boots or toy bags	Nikolausstieffel (Boots of St. Nicholas)
Ambrose, Bishop of Milan	7		
St. Thomas the Apostle	21		St. Thomas' Fingers
The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ	25	Yule Log, revellion meal	Buche de Noel, reveillon meat pie
St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr	26	Items shaped like horses	St. Stephen's Horseshoes
St. John, Apostle and Evangelist	27		
The Holy Innocents	28		

Menu

Reveillon meat pie
St. Thomas' Fingers
St. Stephen's horseshoes
Buche de Noel
Boots of St. Nicholas
Meringue Cake of St. Ambrose

History and Tradition

There are so many saints and feast days in the month of December that it is difficult to know where to start. Just considering Christmas Eve and Christmas Day alone, it is a daunting task to try to summarize all the traditional dishes. These are two of the most important meals of the year in the Christian calendar. There are literally hundreds of traditions regarding dishes, ingredients, and even number of places to be set and courses to be served depending on the country.

Rather than being overwhelmed by all the traditions, we will focus this month on just the traditions related to baking. We will look at baking traditions for the entire month, not just for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

Many of the ingredients are associated with various saints and feasts, starting with yeast which represents life and growth. Certain shapes, such as horseshoes, represent not only good luck but also a certain saint. Other traditions include hiding presents in the dough or making shapes (such as a Yule log) that represent Christmas traditions.

Keep in mind that not all baked goods are sweet. Certain traditions, such as the reveillon meal in French-speaking countries, call for the preparation of meat pies. Other traditions, such as suet pudding and mincemeat pies, are from medieval times where it was common to prepare pies that combined sweet and savory ingredients.

In preparing some of the dishes, you might want to remember that Advent is a minor fast period to allow us to prepare ourselves for the joyous feasting that accompanies the celebration of Our Savior's birth. In many countries, Christmas Eve is a fast day, requiring abstinence from meat, dairy, and eggs. The reveillon meal, which is represented by the meat pie in this menu, is typically enjoyed AFTER the midnight mass so is the meal during which the fast is broken.

The first celebration in December is of Deacon Nicholas Ferrar, who created a community in Little Gidding, England, that became known for fasting, private prayer and meditation, and writing stories and books that illustrated Christian faith. The community was also known as quite musical, preparing "harmonies" of the Gospels that were presented to King Charles the First. Deacon Ferrar inspired many Anglicans to participate in religious orders.

Channing Moore Williams is celebrated on December 2. Bishop Moore was assigned to Japan, where he was instrumental in translating parts of the Prayer Book into Japanese. He was a supporter and friend to Bishop Schereschewsky, his successor in China, who translated the Bible into Chinese.

John of Damascus, a priest whose feast is celebrated on December 4, is known for his writings in support of the use of sacred images, or icons. He argued that the images were not properly the subject of worship but of veneration. Without his writings, we would not be able to use religious images of saints or Jesus in our churches or homes.

Clement of Alexandria is celebrated on December 5. Clement was a very early Christian philosopher who wrote and spoke on two important issues in the early church – Gnosticism and the “right use” of wealth and material goods. He argued that salvation was of the world, not from the world. The Gnostics held that salvation was accessible only to a few who mastered secret and esoteric knowledge. Clement asserted that salvation was available to all through the Scriptures. Clement also argued that it was not necessary for a Christian to renounce all his or her worldly goods. The issue was how wealth was used, not whether it was all given away.

Nicholas of Myra, celebrated on December 6, is popularly known as Santa Claus. He was introduced to the New World by the Dutch colonists in New York. The round-faced, merry-looking old man wearing a red suit is a commercial invention of the U.S. in the 1800s. Despite the commercial re-interpretation, there are many food traditions associated with St. Nicholas. For this feast, we are preparing St. Nicholas’ Boots, which are meant to represent the stockings or boots that are filled with presents for good children.

Ambrose of Milan is celebrated on December 7. Ambrose was an early Bishop in Milan. He was a noted hymnist, author, preacher, and theologian.

St. Thomas the Apostle’s feast day is December 21. St. Thomas has always struck me as particularly Episcopalian in his views. He had doubts and questions but was always open to the possibility his doubts could be error and that his questions could be answered. His day is commemorated in this feast by an interesting pastry known as St. Thomas’ fingers.

December 25th is the Feast Day of the Nativity of Our Lord. Christmas, which is the short form of “Christ’s Mass” was assigned the date of December 25th in 336 A.D. Since the Bible does not mention a specific day for Jesus’ birth, this day was selected by theologians of the day. It coincided with a festival of the Sun that had been a tradition for many years, but the arguments for that day went beyond its correspondence with the existing feast day. We will celebrate December 25th with two traditional dishes; the meat pie from Quebec and the Yule log (or Buche de Noel) which is traditional throughout most French-speaking countries.

St. Stephen, Deacon and Martyr, is celebrated on December 26th. St. Stephen was one of the seven men chosen by the apostles to relieve them of the burden of serving tables and caring for women. He is mentioned in the first line of one of my favorite carols, “Good King Wenceslas looked out, on the Feast of Stephen...” December 26th is known as Boxing Day in England. On this day, the priest would empty the church alms box and distribute the money among the poor of the parish.

St. Stephen is also the patron saint of horses. In his honor we are preparing St. Stephen’s Horseshoes, a delicious pastry filled with ground walnuts and spices.

The last saint in December is St. John, who was “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He was the writer of his Gospel, three Epistles, and the Book of Revelation. According to

legend, Emperor Diomitian tried to kill him by having him drink a cup of poisoned wine. St. John blessed the cup, at which time the poison slithered out of the cup in the form of a snake. As a result, in many countries, on his feast day, there is a tradition of blessing the wine. Each member of the house receives a sip of wine, and the traditional blessing is “I drink to you in the love of St. John.” I have not included a recipe for this – any wine could be blessed although something from Chateau St. Jean (St. John), a Washington state winery would seem to be appropriate for the day.

French-Canadian Meat pie

2 lbs. ground pork
2 onions, finely chopped
1 clove garlic, finely minced
1 T finely chopped celery leaves
1 t savory
½ t sage
1/8 t ground cloves
2 bay leaves
1 t salt
Pepper
1 c boiling water
3-4 T dry bread crumbs
Pie dough for 2 9" two-crust pies

The filling:

- 1) Mix the pork, onions, garlic, celery leaves, savory, sage, cloves, bay leaves, salt, and a few grindings of black pepper in a large skillet. Add the boiling water
- 2) Simmer for about ½ hour, stirring frequently. The pork should be brown, not pink and the mixture fairly dry.
- 3) Drain off any excess fat. Taste for seasoning. Remove the bay leaves.

Assembling the pies:

- 1) Divide each pie crust into two pieces for a total of four pieces. Roll out two pieces and place inside 2 9" pie tins.
- 2) Sprinkle the bread crumbs in the two uncooked pie shells. Spread the meat mixture on top. Roll out the other two pieces. Cover each pie with a top crust. Seal and flute the edges and make steam holes in the top (you may wish to make the holes in the shape of a cross or some other symbolic shape).
- 3) Bake at 350 for 45 minutes or until the top crust is golden.

Substitutions:

- 1) use ½ pork and ½ beef or veal.
- 2) Substitute 1 t cinnamon and ¼ t nutmeg for savory and cloves.

St. Thomas' Fingers (makes about 40 fingers)

1 T dry yeast
½ c sour cream
1 lemon
2 c flour
1 c sugar
6 egg yolks
4 T butter
½ c powdered sugar
1 T cinnamon

- 1) Mix yeast with the sour cream and let stand for 5 minutes.
- 2) Wash lemon and grate peel finely into a bowl.
- 3) Add all other ingredients into the bowl and stir them together.
- 4) When the dough becomes only slightly sticky, knead for 5 minutes. (More flour may have to be added to make sure that the dough is firm).
- 5) Butter a baking sheet and roll dough out on it. With a pastry cutter cut dough into long fingers. Brush with melted butter. Mix powdered sugar with cinnamon and dust fingers thoroughly with the mixture.
- 6) Cover baking sheet with a towel and let the fingers rest in a warm place for about 40 minutes. Bake at 350 degrees for about 30 minutes, or until golden.

St. Stephen's Horseshoes (makes about 2 dozen horseshoes)

Dough

1 T dry yeast
½ c milk, lukewarm
3 eggs (med)
1 c sour cream
2 t lemon juice
2 T lemon rind, grated
1 c butter
5 c flour
½ c sugar
½ t salt
½ c shortening

Filling

1 ½ c walnuts, finely chopped
¾ c light brown sugar
1 egg
½ t vanilla
Grated rind of one orange
Grated rind of one lemon

To make the dough:

- 1) Sprinkle the yeast onto the warm milk and let stand for 10 minutes
- 2) Beat the eggs until light and fluffy. Stir in the sour cream, yeast mixture, lemon juice, and rind.
- 3) Cut the cold butter into small pieces. Combine the flour, sugar, and salt in a large bowl. Work the butter and shortening into the flour mixture using your fingers. The mixture should resemble coarse bread crumbs.
- 4) Add the moist ingredients to the dry ones in a bowl and mix well. If necessary, add a little more flour, just enough to make the dough soft and non-sticky. This may require a fair amount of additional flour, since it depends on the size of the eggs.
- 5) Knead dough briefly (3 – 5 minutes) and wrap it in waxed paper. Chill for at least one hour.

To make the filling:

- 1) While the dough is chilling, chop the nuts (walnuts, pecans, hazelnuts, or whatever combination you prefer).
- 2) Combine the light brown sugar with the egg, vanilla, and rinds. Stir in the nuts.

To make the horseshoes:

- 1) on a lightly floured surface, roll the dough out to about 1/8 inch thickness and cut into rectangles about 4" X 6".
- 2) Brush the rectangles with some melted butter and sprinkle lightly with the filling. Roll each rectangle up, starting on the long side. Form the roll into a horseshoe and place on a lightly greased baking sheet. You may brush the top with cream (optional)
- 3) Bake in a preheated oven at 375 for about 15 minutes or until the horseshoes are nicely browned. After they are taken from the oven, they may be sprinkled with powdered sugar or glazed with a mixture of lemon juice and powdered sugar.

Buche de Noel (Christmas Log)

This is essentially a jelly roll with some decorations for the season. It is a fun afternoon project for the family.

Sponge Cake

4 eggs, separated, at room temperature

1 c sugar

¼ c hot water

Grated rind of one lemon

1 t lemon juice

½ t vanilla

1 c sifted flour (sift first, then measure)

1 t baking powder

¼ t salt

- 1) Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Grease a jelly-roll pan (10 X 15"). Line the pan with parchment paper and grease the paper.
- 2) Beat the egg yolks until light and lemon-colored. Gradually add the sugar, beating until very thick. This should take a total of 5 – 7 minutes. Beat in hot water, lemon rind, lemon juice, and vanilla.
- 3) Resift the flour and baking powder. Gradually beat into the egg mixture.
- 4) Whip the egg whites until stiff but not dry. Fold gently but thoroughly into the batter.
- 5) Pour batter into jelly-roll pan. Bake for 12-15 minutes, or until top is lightly browned.
- 6) Remove cake from oven. Sprinkle lightly with rum (3 -4 T total) and with powdered sugar.
- 7) Spread a clean, damp kitchen towel on the counter. Cover it with waxed paper. Invert the cake onto the waxed paper. Peel the paper off cake. Trim the edges if too crusty.
- 8) Roll up the cake along the long side using the towel and waxed paper. Let it cool at room temperature for at least 20 minutes.

Mocha cream icing

4 egg yolks

1 ¼ c sugar

1/3 c water

2 t vanilla

2 t powdered instant coffee

2 oz unsweetened chocolate, melted, cooled to spreadable consistency

3 sticks unsalted butter at room temperature

- 1) beat egg yolks until light-colored and thick
- 2) Combine sugar and water in a saucepan. Cook to the soft-ball stage – about 234 on a candy thermometer.
- 3) Beating constantly (and being VERY careful, the sugar is hot and can burn) pour the sugar into the eggs. Continue beating until the mixture is cool. Stir in the vanilla extract, coffee, and chocolate. Gradually beat in the butter.
- 4) Cool icing slightly in the refrigerator.

Assembling the cake:

- 1) Unroll the cake. Spread it with ½ of the icing. Roll it back up as tightly as possible (without the wax paper and towel inside).
- 2) Chill for several hours. Keep the icing refrigerated as well.
- 3) Trim the ends of the cake on the diagonal. Use the scraps and place on top of the cake to look like knotholes. Ice the knotholes.
- 4) Using the tines of a fork, make marks on the surface of the cake to look like bark. You can also use a spatula to give the cake a shaggy bark look.
- 5) You can make meringue mushrooms, marzipan holly leaves and berries, and chocolate leaves. Do not use actual holly berries as they are poisonous.

Boots of St. Nicholas

Dough

1 t dry yeast
1 t sugar
 $\frac{3}{4}$ c milk, lukewarm
4 c flour
5 T butter
5 T sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ t vanilla
1 egg
1 pinch salt

Egg Wash

1 egg yolk
1 T milk

Decorations

Sesame and poppy seed, almonds, sunflower seeds, nuts, powdered sugar, gumdrops, mints, etc.

- 1) Mix yeast, 1 t sugar, and milk in a bowl until yeast is dissolved and let it stand for 15 minutes.
- 2) Add the flour to the bowl, melt the butter. Add sugar, vanilla, egg, salt, and melted butter to the flour. Work to a smooth dough first by stirring and then kneading. Put in a warm place until doubled in bulk.
- 3) Make a cardboard template by drawing a boot about 14" tall on a piece of poster board. Roll out the dough about $\frac{1}{2}$ " in the shape of an L. Put the template on top and cut the dough into the shape of the boot. Transfer the boot to a greased baking sheet.
- 4) Make an egg wash by mixing the egg yolk and milk. Brush the boot with the egg wash. Shape the rest of the dough into the rim and heel of the boot. Brush again with egg wash and put on seeds, almonds, or nuts.
- 5) Preheat oven to 400. Bake the boot about 25 minutes or until golden brown.
- 6) After it is cool, you may want to decorate the boot further by mixing powdered sugar and milk to a paste and using it as a paste to stick on additional sweets.