

The Oxen

Christmas Eve, and twelve of
the clock.
'Now they are all on their
knees.'
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside
ease.

We pictured the meek mild
creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us
there
To doubt they were kneeling
then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas
Eve,
'Come; see the oxen kneel,
'In the lonely barton by yonder
coomb
Our childhood used to know,'
I should go with him in the
gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

—Thomas Hardy



How to turn out a holiday classic in one third of the time

Family traditions are what holiday celebrations are made of. Treasured recipes handed down through the generations are an important part of these traditions.

In years gone by, long hours of preparation and cooking time were necessary to serve these

specialties. Today's busy cooks, who want to keep family customs alive but do not have time to fuss, can get help from their Mirro pressure cooker.

Steam cooking under pressure is fast and easy, requiring only one third the time of conventional methods. For in-

stance, a steamed fruit pudding usually takes four hours of cooking time, but it takes only about one hour in the pressure cooker.

Step-by-step

With the following step-by-step guidelines from the Mirro test kitchen, revive a family tradition or, better yet, start one yourself.

DICKENS' PLUM PUDDING

- ¾ cup butter or margarine
- ½ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon ground cloves
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup milk
- 1 cup seedless raisins
- ½ cup chopped, mixed candied fruit
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons water
- 2 tablespoons dark rum

Cream butter with ½ cup sugar until light.

Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition.

Toss flour, baking powder, spices and salt to mix.

Add to egg mixture alternately with milk, blending well after each addition.

Stir in raisins and candied fruit.

Turn into a buttered 4-cup metal mold.

Cover with foil.

Pour 3 cups water into cooker.

Place mold on rack in cooker. Cover, place over heat and allow a small stream of steam to escape from vent tube for 20 minutes.

Set control at 15. When control jiggles, reduce heat and cook 40 minutes.

Run cold water over the cooker to reduce pressure instantly.

Dissolve 2 tablespoons sugar in the water; add rum.

Pierce pudding with a long-tined fork or cake tester and baste with rum sauce.

Serve warm.

8 servings.



ONE OF YOUR BEST TOOLS in making the most of precious holiday preparation minutes is a pressure cooker. Easy steps in making the 60-minute Dickens' Plum Pudding include: 1. pudding mix is steamed in a buttered aluminum mold; 2. with the rack in position in the cooker, add water; 3. place the foil covered mold on the rack in the cooker; 4. cover, allowing steam to escape for 20 minutes before placing the control over the vent.



Age-old customs, traditions shape contemporary holiday

For all of the many symbols of Christmas—a welcoming wreath upon a door, gaily wrapped packages spilling out from under a tree, twinkling lights dancing upon tinsel—seldom is the special significance of the holiday season obscured.

From large cities to remote country villages in lands both near and far, a spirit of good cheer prevails among the people.

There is great excitement as age-old customs are followed in preparation for the holiday celebration. And, though the customs may differ from land to land, the holiday sentiment remains much the same in many cultures.

Midwinter had always been a season of joyous celebration in ancient civilizations. The Romans paid tribute to their deity of agriculture, Saturnus, during the winter season of Saturnalia.

A Roman holiday

It was a week-long festival marked by processions, gift-giving, feasting and decorating the home with laurel and evergreens.

In winter also, the Hebrews celebrated the Festival of Lights, or Hanukkah, which is still observed today by people of the Jewish faith. It is a holiday which commemorates the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem by Judas Maccabeus in 165 B.C.

The Temple had been pillaged by the Syrian army, and only a small amount of sacred oil remained. Although it was judged to be enough to last for only one day, the oil burned for eight days. Therefore the Jews observe Hanukkah for eight days in honor of this miracle.

Winter rites

Similarly, wintertime festivities took place in early Egyptian and Greek civilizations. The Goths, Saxons and Druids of the northern lands all celebrated the arrival of the winter solstice with great feasting and sacred rituals.

These pagan rituals eventually melded with the Christian celebration of the birth of Christ, and the season's festivities took on an international character as Christianity grew in acceptance throughout the centuries.

At first, the Church resisted observation of pagan rituals but, failing in that attempt, it incorporated the forms into the Christian celebration.

Custom of gift-giving

Perhaps the most well-known and widespread of all Christmas traditions is the practice of giving gifts.

The early Romans made gifts to their emperors during Saturnalia; the three wise men, or Magi, brought gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh to the Christ child; and an Archbishop from Lycia brought the gift of faith to many.

This generous Archbishop from Asia Minor was the good Saint Nicholas, or Santa Claus, the patron saint of gifts and boys.

Children all over the world write to him at his home at the North Pole with their gift requests, a practice which has

been abstracted from a Germanic legend.

The symbols of Christmas are both sacred and secular. From special holiday cakes to the star on the Christmas tree, from sidewalk Santas to the scene of the nativity, the mix of pagan and Christian symbolism is thorough.

Celtic traditions

Kissing under the mistletoe stems from ancient Celtic tradition. Decorating the tree—in early times, with fruits and sweets—stems from an early Germanic worship of vegetation.

Sending Christmas greetings to friends and associates to express friendship and good-will first came about in Victorian England.

An English first

Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, introduced the first Christmas tree in England from his native Austria in 1841.

Centuries-old customs have been handed down in a spirit of heart-warming brotherhood. Children grow excited at the thought of Santa's visit, or the chance to sit on his knee at the local department store.

Singers both young and old venture out into the crisp night, filling the air with the sweet sounds of Christmas carols.

College students gather in the dorm lounge, surrounded by bowls of popcorn, needles and thread, red and green ribbons, and an eight-foot tree waiting to be decorated.

Heart-warming season

Very few hearts escape being touched by the spirit of Christmas. Bustling commuters don't seem as easily bristled during the holiday season.

The mailman steps a little lighter, despite the increased weight in his bag. Teachers give less homework. Mothers allow their babes an hour or two longer before bedtime.

Christmastime is time to take stock of the good things in life: the simple pleasures, the comforts, the blessings of family and friends.

Pleasures of memory

And, when the 12 days of Christmas have passed, and the decorations return to their boxes until next year, there is always the lingering pleasure in remembering all those smiling faces and dancing eyes, the true symbols of holiday happiness.