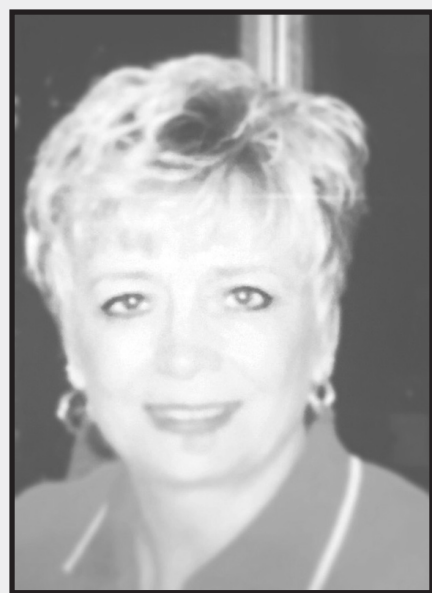


# Early Christmases in Appalachia



**Times Remembered**  
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Christmas time today brings to mind shopping till you drop and how much you spend, especially on Black Friday. Early Christmas's had very little commercialism.

In early days in Appalachian homes people took their bed down in the living room and replaced it with a huge tree whose top reached the ceiling. The tree was hemlock, white pine or cedar. I remember my Grandmother doing the exact same thing.

Very early decorations commonly

consisted of colored paper of chains and cutouts, popcorn on a string, holly berries, and cardboard stars covered with foil saved all year. Most did not have electricity; and there were no colorful lights.

The Yule Log, a huge "back-stick," or a "back log," was used in the fireplace that had been soaked in water for several days before Christmas; a tradition observed by some homes. As long as that log burned during the Christmas season the men were exempt from doing any farm work chores. (I suppose the women had to feed the farm animals and milk the cows). Also, a piece of the Yule Log was kept to begin the celebration of the following season.

There was lots of mistletoe and holly with beautiful red berries. Mistletoe was believed to be sacred, offered protection from evil, assured fertility and was credited with mysterious powers. Any young girl not kissed under the mistletoe would remain single the following year.

Santa Claus came down the chimney and delivered toys to the entire world in one night. Some thought children might become confused when they learned the true facts about Santa Claus: they might believe Jesus was a myth also. The appearance of Santa Claus was filled with great anticipation

akin to the Second Coming of Christ. When I think about Santa Claus, I wish it was possible for every little kid all over the world to receive gifts.

In those days children hung their stockings next to chimney where they were filled with oranges, apples, nuts and candy. All other gifts were put under the tree. If you were particularly bad through the past year, a knot was supposedly tied in your stocking which bore no gifts. That would be terrible. I've always heard of coal being placed in your stocking if you were bad.

Cookies, sparklers, firecrackers, whistles and hand carved toys were some of the gifts. Can you imagine a child today being happy to find any of the above mentioned items in their stocking?

There were lots of noise makers, such as horns, whistles, and drums. The men heated hickory coals red hot, poured water on them, then hit them with a hammer. This sound created sounds like a firecracker. Another noise maker was an inflated hog's bladder. This was tossed in the fire for a loud blast. Families were serenaded at Christmas with cow bells, plow points, spoons or anything that would make a noise. You were lucky if you had a real instrument to play music.

Neighbors, separated by some dis-

tance, communicated with one another on Christmas day by shooting rifles. Those who could afford the ammunition answered with another shot.

The messages told at Christmas is the birth of Jesus; that is why we celebrate Christmas. It is the reason for the season. But also another great message is one told about the shepherds. We read in the Bible that shepherds endure the heat and cold, the rain, and day and night. Therefore, they must keep close watch over their sheep to protect them from the wolves and other wild animals. When the shepherd rounded them up each evening, he held out his rod over each sheep and had it jump the rod; if it could not jump the rod, it was probably sick and needed attention. Also, at this time the shepherd counted each sheep. If one was missing, he did not sleep until he found it. But even more interesting was that each shepherd had a distinct whistle. His sheep recognized and heeded only his voice or whistle.

Another Christmas message is to remind us that the baby in the manger grew into the one known today as our good shepherd. He has a distinctive call. No matter how far away we may have strayed, he loves us and still seeks us and forgives of our sins. He never gives up on us. Thank God!

## Kitchen Diva by Angela Shelf Medearis Christmas Tradition Gets a Modern Twist

It seems like I was just planning and preparing our Thanksgiving dinner and now Christmas is upon us. If you want to change things up a little for your Christmas dinner, try modernizing an old traditional recipe. Recently, I've been reading about Christmas customs and holiday meals in Europe. I discovered a tradition called The Feast of the Seven Fishes, along with several delicious recipes for preparing fish. The fish is often used as a symbol of Christianity. Because of the persecution faced by the early church, when a Christian met a stranger in the road, the Christian sometimes drew one arc of the simple fish outline in the dirt. If the stranger drew the other arc, both believers knew they were in good company.

Preparing and eating seafood on Christmas Eve in celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ is an old European tradition with Italian roots. Many families abstain from eating meat and serve only fish or other types of seafood on Christmas Eve. This traditional holiday meal is called The Feast of the Seven Fishes. A typical feast features cod, eel, octopus, calamari, mussels, clams, shrimp and lobster.

This year, you might want to create a holiday dinner menu based on a variation of the Feast of the Seven Fishes. These recipes are budget-friendly ways to incorporate an ancient holiday tradition into a simplified, modern Christmas Eve dinner using just one pot or pan. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays, ya'll!

### CHRISTMAS EVE SEAFOOD PAELLA

- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 8 ounces (16 to 20) shelled, deveined shrimp
- 8 ounces squid (bodies), rinsed, patted dry and sliced into rounds
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 can (14 ounces) fire-roasted diced tomatoes, drained
- 1/4 teaspoon red chili flakes or cayenne pepper
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 1/2 cups Arborio rice
- 3 1/2 cups seafood, chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 bottle (8 ounces) clam juice
- 12 littleneck clams, scrubbed
- Parsley and lemon wedges, for garnish

1. In a deep 12-inch cast iron skillet, heat oil on medium-high until hot but not smoking. Add shrimp, squid, 1/2 teaspoon of the salt, 1/2 teaspoon of the



turmeric and 1/2 teaspoon of the paprika. Cook 2 minutes or until shrimp start to brown, stirring once. With slotted spoon, transfer the shrimp and squid to medium bowl.

2. Reduce heat to medium. Add the onion, tomatoes and the remaining salt, turmeric, paprika and the chili flakes or cayenne pepper. Cook 8 minutes, stirring often. Add garlic; cook 2 minutes. Add rice; cook 2 minutes, stirring.

3. To skillet, add broth and clam juice, stirring to distribute rice evenly in pan. Heat to boiling on medium-high. Boil, without stirring, 15 minutes.

4. Gently press the shrimp, squid and clams on top of the rice. Cover skillet with lid or foil; cook another 10 to 16 minutes or until the clams open and rice is just tender. Remove from heat. Let stand, covered, 10 minutes before serving. Garnish with parsley and lemons. Makes 6 servings.

### SPICY SEAFOOD STEW

- 2 pounds potatoes, peeled and diced (new potatoes, fingerling potatoes, red bliss or Yukon Gold)
- 1 pound carrots, sliced
- 1 small yellow onion, chopped
- 3 stalks celery, sliced
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- Juice and zest of 1/2 lemon
- 2 cups frozen corn kernels
- 1 jar (24 ounces) pasta sauce
- 1 1/2 teaspoons ground turmeric
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper

- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1 1/2 cups seafood stock or clam juice, or chicken or vegetable broth, or water
- 1 pound sea scallops, dry-packed or bay type, or 1 pound thin white fish filets (sole or flounder), fresh or frozen and thawed
- 1 pound uncooked shrimp (31-40 per pound); thawed, peeled and deveined
- 1 cup chopped parsley leaves
- 2 large lemons cut into wedges

1. In a 5 quart slow cooker, combine the potatoes, carrots, onion, celery, garlic, lemon juice and zest, corn, pasta sauce, turmeric, cayenne pepper, salt and black pepper. Stir to combine. Cook, covered, on low until potatoes are tender, 4 1/2 to 5 hours.

2. Stir in stock, broth or water, and the scallops or fish, and shrimp. Cook, covered, until scallops are opaque, and shrimp turn pink, about 4-6 minutes longer.

3. Sprinkle with parsley and serve with lemon wedges and warm crusty bread. Make 9 servings (about 2 quarts).

TIP: If you're peeling and deveining your shrimp, use the shells to make shrimp stock. Place the rinsed shrimp shells, 1 chopped carrot and stalk of celery, the onion skin and parsley stems in a large saucepan. Cover with 2 cups of cold water. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer uncovered for 30 minutes while preparing the recipe. Use the shrimp stock according to directions above.

## TIGER

by BUD BLAKE

