

Christmas Two Thousand Years Later ~

Based on Christ's earthly beginning, we've garnered some Christmas traditions that still go on today. Sharing gifts and singing praises began when God shared His greatest gift with us and the angels sang about it.

Over the years we've added to those traditions: hanging stockings, decorating a tree, putting out beautiful lights, sending Christmas cards, enjoying candy canes, inhaling the delicious aromas of holiday baking, taking secretive shopping trips, and trying to get excited children to sit through the church cantata.

Those traditions warm our hearts (and sometimes weary our bodies). Along with, and often through, these treasured family traditions we pass down faith, hope, and love to generations to come.

Our lives have changed drastically since we were children, even in recent years. Technology has swooped in and we've grabbed it up, enjoying each new item and the ease of the freedom it brings. We have to change with the times. Even the Old Order Amish understand this, yet they still travel by horse and carriage and live without electricity.

The question becomes, what things will we refuse to let go of?

When I was young, homes had one corded phone, possibly two if the house had an upstairs. Most televisions received three to six stations, and someone had to get up and go to the set to turn the channel or adjust the volume or the antenna. The commercials bragged that shows would be presented "in living color!" Even at five I had smart remarks to that. "Living color? Big deal. Our set only gets black and white." My dad laughed and said one day we'd have a color set. I think I was a teen by the time we did.

The average family rarely ate a meal outside of someone's home—either a relative's or a neighbor's. I don't remember going to a restaurant until I was sixteen years old and had a job. Even when we were on a trip away from home, my mother packed a picnic basket that lasted for several meals. Mom made our clothes and canned food for the winter from the bounty of the summer garden. My parents were born at the beginning of the Depression and weren't free of its effects until they were nearly through high school.

I'm dating myself, aren't I? That's okay. I don't mind. I can hear my mother's voice inside my heart saying I've earned my wrinkles and gray hair, and I don't care who knows my age. I'm grateful to have been born and grateful to thrive or at least survive every day of the time God gives me.

My life isn't like my parents' lives were. I'm sure yours isn't like what your parents' were. In some ways it's better, easier, more convenient. In other ways, it's harder, more stressful and fast-paced. The fabric with which we were made might be looking rather threadbare.

Since life never stays the same for any of us, it's important to hold on to eternal truths. Hold on to the One who is the same yesterday, today, and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Hold on to the One who

freely shares wisdom that guides us through each new day (James 1:5). Hold on to the One who gave us good traditions like communion and fellowship (1 Corinthians 11:2).

Traditions help us pass our faith and hope on to the next generation, despite the constant changes that alter our daily lives. Holiday traditions mold us, and years later we draw strength from them. Having some things that we do each year gives us an opportunity to strike gold (in the heart or mind; spiritual or emotional). When loved ones are ministered to, they can tuck the memory of it into their hearts.

Whatever traditions fit your family, you will be grateful later on that you took the time, energy, and forethought to establish them and keep them.

Here are some recipes you might enjoy this holiday season—and may even use to create some new traditions of your own.

Salt Ornaments

submitted by an Old Order Amish family

2 cups salt
2 cups plain flour
1 teaspoon powdered alum, if desired (Alum is used for drying and hardening the mixture.)
1- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup water

Mix ingredients. Using a rolling pin, roll to $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch thickness. Cut with cookie cutters. Dry in 200-degree oven, turning to dry on second side after first hour. Press decorations into mixture before drying. Paint ornaments after they cool.

Overnight Blueberry French Toast

Submitted by an Old Order Amish family

This is a favorite because it can be made the night before.

12 slices of your favorite loaf bread cut in 1-inch cubes
8-ounce package of cream cheese cut in $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cubes
1- $\frac{1}{2}$ cups fresh or frozen blueberries (or canned, drained)
12 eggs
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup maple syrup
2 cups milk

Place half of the bread cubes in a buttered 9x13-inch baking dish. Top with cream cheese cubes, blueberries, and remaining bread. Beat eggs, syrup, and milk, and pour evenly over bread. Cover with foil and refrigerate overnight. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bake covered with foil for 30 minutes. Remove foil and bake another 15–30 minutes until top is golden brown.

Christmas Whoopie Pies
Submitted by an Old Order Amish family

For cake, mix the following:

2 Duncan Hines devil's food (chocolate) cake mixes
4 eggs
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup vegetable oil

Batter will be stiff. Drop by teaspoonful onto ungreased cookie sheet. Flatten slightly. Bake at 350 degrees for 8–10 minutes.

For icing, beat together:

8-ounce package of cream cheese
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter
3 to 4 cups powdered sugar (more if needed)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of vanilla

Divide icing into two separate bowls; mix red food coloring with one half and green food coloring with the other half. Place a generous tablespoon of filling on the flat side of one cookie, then top with another cookie. They should look like yo-yos.

Cindy Woodsmall is a *New York Times* and *USA Today* best-selling author whose connection with the Amish community has been featured on *ABC Nightline* and on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*. She is also a veteran homeschool mom of seventeen years who no longer holds that position. She is the author of six novels, two novellas, and *Plain Wisdom*, a work of nonfiction coauthored with her dearest Old Order Amish friend. Cindy lives in Georgia with her husband, three sons, and two daughters-in-law, and she's looking forward to holding her first grandchild, who is due this December.