

An Epicurean Christmas

Post by “Matt” of December 4, 2021 at 3:45 PM

Since the time I joined the online Garden (which is coming up to a decade) and started learning about Epicurus, I made a connection with why I believe Christmas really is a deeply Epicurean holiday. Especially from a secular perspective. The 25th of December (rooted in the Germanic Yule and Roman Saturnalia festivals) was a time of merriment during the dark days of winter. Lights and decorations abound and people prepare for a gathering of family and friends to exchange gifts and eat sumptuous food. The experiences are explicitly rooted in pleasure. From the time a person is a child the pleasures associated with this time of year are absolute evidence of the Epicurean position that pleasure is the driving force behind why humans do anything and why many of us look forward to gatherings with friends and family.

Post by “Joshua” of December 4, 2021 at 5:01 PM

Reading Poggio Bracciolini's account of the baths of Baden in Germany may give some support for your ideas, Matt. He felt at once isolated and enchanted when he saw the Germans at the baths living with such cheerful license, and wrote thus to his friend Niccolo Niccoli in Florence;

Quote

I have related enough to give you an idea what a numerous school of Epicureans is established at Beden. I think this must be the place where the first man was created, which the Hebrews call the garden of pleasure. If pleasure can make a man happy, this place is certainly possessed of every requisite for the promotion of felicity.

It is easy to see why the German traditions of Yule have been chosen and perpetuated, in favor of those more properly Christian.

Post by “Matt” of December 4, 2021 at 5:28 PM

Absolutely! It's interesting to take a step back and think about the traditions that really give me a pleasurable feeling. Living in New England in the cold weather, I derive pleasure from wood fires burning, decorated fir trees, candle lit windows, the smell of pine, cinnamon and peppermint. The gathering of friends and family at meals and the imbibing of spiked cider and nog. These particular aspects are in no particular way Christian, but for me make up a significant aspect of the holiday that I look forward to.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 5, 2021 at 1:20 PM

There is the enjoyment of procuring/creating all the sensory delights of the season, and for the enjoyable feelings of anticipation as the holiday celebrations near -- this for me was especially so back when I was married. My ex and I would go to his family of origin (his mom, siblings, nieces and nephews). It was always a very festive Christmas overflowing with abundance. And I have the fun memory of everyone sipping wine, laughing and playing "Apples to Apples" game.

It does seem that every holiday season causes me take stock regarding the kinds of friendships and emotional connections I have in my life. This year I find that I need to focus my mind more on the pleasures of making my living space cosy, rather than on emotional connections (it's complicated for me right now, because I am in an uncommitted "situationship").

This year I am going to fulfill my wish of making a gingerbread house, all from scratch, so it will be good and tasty enough to eat on Christmas day.

Post by “Don” of December 5, 2021 at 1:49 PM

[Quote from Kalosyni](#)

This year I am going to fulfill my wish of making a gingerbread house, all from scratch, so it will be good and tasty enough to eat on Christmas day.



Post a picture!

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 13, 2021 at 7:18 PM

Feeling very "Epicurean"...Here are some pictures of the gingerbread house I made.

Post by "Cassius" of December 13, 2021 at 8:14 PM

Wow that is nice! Thanks for the photos!

Post by "Matt" of December 13, 2021 at 10:09 PM

Very lovely house! I feel like Hansel and Gretel would have difficulty restraining themselves from indulging in a house that might look like that. ☺☺

I have a couple of oversized gingerbread man kits that I'm going to do soon. I'll post my terrible decorating skills here!

Post by "Pacatus" of December 20, 2021 at 1:42 PM

When I was 50, my wife and I mostly retired from the marketplace to what we called our "wildy garden": 20+ acres of forest, field and a quick-water creek; we lived in a 1940s cottage. We grew many of our own vegetables, planted fruit trees, and the like. We lived there for 15 years. We were far from our families and most of our close friends. Though occasionally they would come to visit, mostly we were on our own. (My wife did return to part-time teaching for a few years, and I did most of the household chores.) But we have always been best friends, and easy together.

Our main two Yule/winter solstice traditions then were to make a meal together for taking time over, and to "throw wishes on the fire." We had a good, stout fireplace (I enjoyed splitting a lot of wood each fall), and I would make a concoction of spices and alcohol - usually brandy or rum. We would throw spoonful into the flames, watch them flare up, and laugh.

Since moving from the country to the town, we will make the place cozy (as Kalosyni said), with our enclosed gas fireplace and some electric candles (no open flames allowed in our

apartment). We will visit some of her family for a few hours on Christmas eve. On Christmas day, we will make a meal together for taking time over - and will make a few lighthearted toasts. And be grateful for our happiness together.

Be well, all.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 4, 2023 at 9:43 AM

As we enter into the holiday season, I've been contemplating Christmas...which is a Christian holiday, but which has been taken over by western culture and has come to be a time to gather with family and friends to celebrate the beauty of winter and the joy of exchanging gifts, regardless of whether or not one is still Christian.

So something that perplexes me is the gift giving aspect, because it feels like an obligation. And yet I do get joy from giving gifts. And then there is the "worry" of what to buy or (make a craft item) that will please the recipients.

And I don't want to buy into the commercialisation of Christmas...not only the noisy advertising that urges you to "give really good gifts" to everyone, but which also includes the over-indulgences in Christmas sweets (external food stimulus rather than actual internal hunger).

So then this comes down to a personal decision, as to how far to take things, and to really ponder what brings pleasure and joy (without stressing out on things).

And then to consider that gift giving is a way to express gratitude and an act which reinforces the mutually beneficial ties of friends and family.

Post by “Kalosyni” of December 4, 2023 at 10:07 AM

Started some Christmas cheer early this year:



Post by “Eikadistes” of December 5, 2023 at 2:50 PM

We're dressing up for the occasion.