



TRANSCRIPT

Christmas can be a very special time, but it can also be a very stressful time. And given everything that has been going on this year, who knows what will unfold this holiday season? What if, for once, we just relaxed and gave ourselves permission to focus on what really matters. Welcome to the Calm Christmas podcast with me, Beth Kempton. Just like my book of the same name, I hope the Calm Christmas podcast inspires connection, belonging, self care, nourishment, and joy. And a little bit of festive magic.

What's special about Christmas? Well, I think hanging out the baubles on the Christmas tree.

And what's magical about Christmas? Sometimes when you put the star or the angel on the top it feels magical.

Hello, and welcome to Episode 10: A Christmas Wish. We're here. It's Christmas Eve. 2020 is almost over and the magic of Christmas is hovering. I wonder if you can feel it. Whatever kind of a year you've had, I'm so glad that you're here, taking a moment. Let's begin with some words from the gorgeous book village 'Christmas and Other Notes on the English Year' by Laurie Lee. There's something about Lee's writing that captures the essence of the season for me, even though his experiences took place in a time before I was born.

“Christmas in the country meant feasts and fires, a few brief days of excess, when even the poorest among us would confront the stern gods of winter with the bravest possible show of good living. Everybody was busy this morning, chopping wood, carrying in logs or sitting on the doorstep plucking ducks or geese. Now the time had come for us to go up to the woods and collect leaves for decorating the house. Among the black and bare trees we shook the snow from the undergrowth with frost-reddened singers, seeking the sharp-spiked holly, bunches of laurel and ivy, cold clusters of moon-pale mistletoe. With these, our sisters transformed the familiar kitchen into a grotto of shining leaves, an enchanted bower woven from twigs and branches sprinkled with scarlet berries. After tea, as darkness fell, we put on our coats and scarves, and tramped off with Mother to the town several miles down the wind-whipped valley. We always left the buying of our presents to this eleventh hour as part of the

season's dramatic crescendo, joining the rest of our neighbours who were all now heading from the shops to catch the last glitter of Christmas eve... Later that night, a cousin, who worked in the woods, would leave a splendid Christmas tree at our door. We would haul it inside, plant it in a bucket, and smother it with Chinese lanterns. Mysterious and sparkling, still dripping with melted snow, its feather branches filling half the kitchen, the tree was our Christmas crown. Everything was now ready for tomorrow. There was nothing to do except go to bed, curl up in our blankets and wait, each with his long stocking hanging on the bedpost, empty. Would there be a flash of red in the window, a snow-glint of beard and ermine, a whisper of sleigh bells on our rooftops as Father Christmas made his benevolent entrance? We suspended judgement and kept an open mind."

According to *The Book of Christmas* by Jane Struthers, our ancestors had many Christmas Eve superstitions. I thought I'd share a few of them here with you today. They're mostly about what you need to do today, on Christmas Eve, to ensure all sorts of good things next year:

If you want to ensure that you'll be at the peak of health throughout the coming months, apparently you must eat an apple at midnight tonight. Unless you're a child of course, in which case you absolutely must be asleep.

In Yorkshire in the north of England, beekeepers apparently used to talk to their bees on Christmas Eve and if they hummed in response, they could expect a good summer. So if you happen to keep bees maybe now's a good time to pop outside and see them.

Apparently bread baked on Christmas Eve carries healing powers and leaving a loaf of bread on the table on Christmas Eve guarantees a plentiful supply of bread the following year.

In a similar vein, if you have any fruit trees in your garden, hanging a stone from a branch of each of them apparently ensures a plentiful crop the coming year.

My favourite is the one that says you should eat a mince pie on each of the twelve days of Christmas to guarantee a happy year to come.

I have always loved Christmas Eve when anticipation is at its peak. As a child I remember lying in the armchair reading Christmassy tales, lifting my legs up so my mum could vacuum around me, as she always wanted the house to look at its best before we trashed it with all the scrunpled up wrapping paper and piles of presents on Christmas Day. By then we would have identified any early presents under the tree that might contain sweets or chocolate, using the old shake-it-and-see trick, and I'd be lying if I said there wasn't an occasion where I opened such a present from the bottom and snuck into the front room to sneak a few sweets here and there without anyone noticing until having to explain myself when I opened an empty box of Fruit Pastilles on Christmas Day. We'd often go to the park on Christmas Eve to run off our bubbling, energy cosy up with sweet treats to watch a Christmas to film, and chat excitedly about what Father Christmas might bring. I'd peer over the counter in search of sweet

snacks, as my mom did all her prepare ahead cooking on Christmas Eve, fire in the grate, sherry in a glass, Carol's from Kings playing on the radio.

Evening brought the ritual of putting out a mince pie and small glass of brandy for Santa and a carrot for his reindeer. Then taking our stockings from where they were hung by the fireplace to put on the ends of our beds. Family friends put round for hugs and mince pies on the way to Midnight Mass, and we would stay up as late as we were allowed before having The Night Before Christmas read to us and the lights turned out. Lying there in the dark, head full of wonder, was the best and the worst as I wished I had a time machine to wind time forward until the presents magically appeared under the tree.

These days we make Christmas Eve all about my eldest daughter because her birthday falls on Christmas Day so it gives us an opportunity to make it special for her and then to all enjoy Christmas Day together. We often do a treasure hunt and exchange early gifts of new pyjamas and a Christmas story or two. When the children have gone to bed Mr. K and I usually cook a lovely candlelit dinner, reflect on the year gone past and share what we're grateful for.

Personally, I also love to have a quiet moment alone where I light a candle and give thanks for the gift of motherhood and all the matriarchal figures in my life. Anglo Saxon pagan celebrated December the 24th as Modranicht, Night of the Mothers, which resonates particularly strongly with me as I was in labour on Christmas Eve a few years ago. I'll never forget the arrival of our first child in the early hours of Christmas Day in the middle of a raging storm, and I love to think about that as I breathe in the quiet that settles on Christmas Eve.

I wonder what Christmas Eve means for you and how you'll spend it this year? I'm glad to say that there's nothing to do to get ahead this week because Christmas is almost here. What's done is done. What's not done, isn't done. Instead let's take a moment to breathe deeply, inhale the atmosphere the season and listen to this gorgeous poem by Maya Angelou. This was read by the poet at the lighting of the National Christmas Tree in Washington DC on December 1st, 2005 and shared in her book 'Celebrations: Rituals of peace and prayer'.

Thunder rumbles in the mountain passes / And lightning rattles the eaves of our houses. / Floodwaters wait in our avenues.

We tremble at the sound. / We are thrilled by / its presence. / It is that for which we have hungered. / Not just the absence of war. But true Peace. / A harmony of spirit, a comfort of courtesies. / Security for our beloveds and their beloveds.

We clap hands and welcome the Peace of / Christmas. / We beckon this good season to wait awhile / with us. / We, Baptist and Buddhist, Methodist and / Muslim, say come. / Peace. / Come and fill us and our world with your / majesty. / We, the Jew and the Jainist, the Catholic and the Confucian, / implore you to stay awhile with us / So we may learn by your shimmering light / How to look beyond complexion and see / community.

It is Christmas time, a halting of hate time. / On this platform of peace, we can create a / language / To translate ourselves to ourselves and to each other.

At this Holy Instant, we celebrate the Birth of Jesus Christ / Into the great religions of the world. / We jubilate the precious advent of trust. / We shout with glorious tongues the coming of hope. / All the earth's tribes loosen their voices / To celebrate the promise of Peace.

We, Angels and Mortals, Believers and / Nonbelievers, / Look heavenward and speak the word aloud. / Peace. / We look at our world and speak the / word aloud. / Peace. / We look at each other, then into / ourselves, / And we say without shyness or apology or / hesitation:

Peace, My Brother. / Peace, My Sister. / Peace, My Soul.

Snow falls upon snow, falls upon snow / to avalanche / Over unprotected villages. / The sky slips low and gray and threatening.

We question ourselves. What have we done to / so affront nature? / We interrogate and worry God. / Are you there? Are you there, really? / Does the covenant you made with us still / hold?

Into this climate of fear and apprehension, / Christmas enters, / Streaming lights of joy, ringing bells of hope / And singing carols of forgiveness high up in / the bright air. / The world is encouraged to come away from / rancor, / Come the way of friendship.

It is the Glad Season. / Thunder ebbs to silence and lightning sleeps / quietly in the corner. / Floodwaters recede into memory. / Snow becomes a yielding cushion to aid us / As we make our way to higher ground.

Hope is born again in the faces of children. / It rides on the shoulders of our aged as they / walk into their sunsets. / Hope spreads around the earth, brightening / all things, / Even hate, which crouches breeding in dark / corridors.

In our joy, we think we hear a whisper. / At first it is too soft. Then only half heard. / We listen carefully as it gathers strength. / We hear a sweetness. / The word is Peace. / It is loud now. / Louder than the explosion of bombs.

And so Christmas Eve is here and the skies will be sprinkled with magic tonight. I'll be back on Monday with a special edition of the podcast to inspire you in the Hush. But until then I wish you a Calm Christmas, however you choose to spend it this year.

May you know you were loved.

May you let others know you love them.

May you be safe and offer shelter.

May you be open to your sadness. And welcome joy.

May you receive whatever you need.

Wishing you a calm Christmas and a Happy New Year.

You've been listening to the Calm Christmas podcast with me, Beth Kempton. For more inspiration and ideas. cosy up with a copy of my book, Calm Christmas and Happy New Year: A little book of festive joy. It's available now from all good bookshops or listen to the audiobook read by me. Wishing you a calm Christmas and a Happy New Year.