



Starry night Christmas punch

>> By Michelle Sessions DiFranco | Photography by Philip Shippert

It's the official drink of the "Please join us for refreshments after Mass" Catholic fellowship hour. Its translucent color has earned a reputation for satisfying the eye in contrast to its environment – the pale yellow cinder-block walls and brown tiles of the church basement. It's the one "refreshment" that sits in the large glass bowl, positioned next to the stale chocolate chip cookies. Yes, I'm talking about the ubiquitous party punch we've all stood in line for at one time or another, at a first Communion or confirmation celebration.

There are thousands of variations of the sugary sweet beverage, ranging from the red fruity kind with the floating marshmallows to the sparkling citrus with foamy sherbet (which tends to look a bit unappetizing after it's sat out too long). Whatever the flavor, it has been quenching the thirst of parched party-goers for decades.

As we approach the Christmas season, consider this recipe for your holiday celebration. It is yet another

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variation of the universal party punch but with a visual twist; a little added garnish to remind us to also quench our spiritual thirst, as we anticipate in joyful hope for the coming of Christ. The star-shaped oranges and apples are not just decorative, but intended as a symbol of the star that

led the faithful to the place of Christ's birth. And I promise you, the flavor of this punch is a lot less ... peculiar ... than the typical 'after-Mass gathering' variety.



Starry Night Christmas Punch

Ingredients:

- 1 3-ounce package of strawberry gelatin
- 3 cups boiling water
- 3 cups cold water
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 can frozen lemonade
- 1 can frozen orange juice
- 1 2-liter of citrus soda
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- 2 oranges sliced (1/4" thick)
- 2 green apples sliced (1/4" thick) with seeds removed
- Smaller-sized star cookie cutter (2.5 inches or less)

>> In a large freezer/microwave safe

container, dissolve gelatin and sugar in boiling water. Add frozen lemonade, frozen orange juice and cold water and continue to stir until completely dissolved. Cover container and freeze overnight.

Remove from freezer 1 hour before serving.

Press cookie cutter into the apple and orange slices holding it firmly

down until outer pieces of fruit are gently removed. This will assure less breakage of the fruit shapes. Set aside.

Right before serving, place semi-frozen mixture in large punch bowl and break up into slushy chunks with wooden spoon. Pour sodas right over the slush mixture and place star-shaped fruit slices in the punch. Enjoy!

More ideas:

Want it green? Make the following substitutions:

- Lime gelatin instead of strawberry
- Frozen lemonade instead of orange

juice (2 total)

- 2-liter of citrus soda instead of orange (2 total)
- Use star-shaped apples only

>> For added color, throw in ½ cup of drained maraschino cherries