



***La Befana vien di notte
Con le scarpe tutte rotte
Col vestito alla romana
Viva, Viva La Befana!***

***The Befana comes by night
With her shoes all tattered and torn
She comes dressed in the Roman way
Long life to the Befana!***

Truth be told, Christmas is not over in Italy until La Befana makes her yearly rounds the night before the Feast of the Epiphany on Jan. 6. For Italians, this is not only a day to commemorate the visit of the Three Kings to Bethlehem, it is for children a holiday much bigger than Christmas because of the much-anticipated visit from a kindly old witch dressed in tattered clothes whose name is derived from epifania, the Italian word for epiphany.

There are countless stories as to how the Befana became part of Italy's Christmas tradition. Many believe her legend dates back to ancient Rome. According to oral tradition, she rides around on her broomstick delivering candy and toys to good little boys and girls because of a regrettable decision she made.

It seems that the Magi stopped at her neat-as-a-pin house, asking her to join them in finding the newborn king, but she was too busy sweeping her cottage to go with them. That is why she is always depicted with a broom.

Regretting that decision, she is still flying around trying to find the Christ Child, and her visits to Italian children are an attempt to locate him.

by Mary Ann Esposito

On Jan. 6, Italians continue their celebration of the new year (Capodanno) with good food, including Befana cake, which in keeping with tradition contains a fava bean. Whoever is fortunate enough to get the slice of cake with the bean is



Photos by Matthew Rosso

crowned king or queen for the day and will be the recipient of good luck in the year ahead. Lentils — another symbol of good luck because they resemble small coins — are also served on this day, along with zampone (pork sausage).

In the past, countless Italians embraced the new year by literally getting rid of the old, throwing furniture, clothing, etc., out the windows onto the streets below, where it all succumbed to a bonfire, signaling the passing of the old and the arrival of the new.

Buon Capodanno!

Viva LA BEFANA!

TORTA DI BEFANA

New Year's Cake

- 1-1/4 cups raisins
- 1/2 cup diced, candied lemon peel
- 1/2 cup diced, candied orange peel
- 1/4 cup brandy (optional)
- 1 package active dry yeast
- 1/2 cup warm water (110-115 degrees)
- 5 cups plus 2 tablespoons unbleached all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest
- 1 stick unsalted butter cut into pieces, softened
- 2 large eggs
- 1/2 cup warm milk
- 1/2 cup chopped almonds
- 1 dried fava or other large dried bean
- 1 egg yolk
- 2 tablespoons coarse brown sugar

Put raisins in a bowl, cover with warm water and set aside. In another bowl, mix the citrus peels with the brandy and set aside.

In a medium-sized bowl, dissolve the yeast in warm water. Add one cup of the flour and mix until a ball of dough is formed. Fill a large bowl two-thirds full with warm water. Place the ball of dough in the water, cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the "sponge" rise in a warm place until doubled, about 20 minutes.

In a food processor, combine four
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