Elizabeth Bennet Darcy has invited her family to join her for her first Christmas after her marriage to Mr. Darcy. Older sister Jane, middle sister Mary and younger sister Lydia join Lizzy for the festivities.

*Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley* is an imagined sequel to Jane Austen’s novel, “Pride and Prejudice.” While it’s not necessary to know the story, characters or world of “Pride and Prejudice” to enjoy *Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley*, it can add depth to the understanding of it.

A brief summary of ‘Pride and Prejudice’

The news that a wealthy young gentleman named Charles Bingley has rented the manor of Netherfield Park causes a great stir in the nearby village of Longbourn, especially in the Bennet household. The Bennets have five unmarried daughters—from oldest to youngest, Jane, Elizabeth, Mary, Kitty, and Lydia—and Mrs. Bennet is desperate to see them all married.

After Mr. Bennet pays a social visit to Mr. Bingley, the Bennets attend a ball at which Mr. Bingley is present. He is taken with Jane and spends much of the evening dancing with her. His close friend, Mr. Darcy, is less pleased with the evening and haughtily refuses to dance with Elizabeth, which makes everyone view him as arrogant and obnoxious.
At social functions over subsequent weeks, however, Mr. Darcy finds himself increasingly attracted to Elizabeth’s charm and intelligence. Jane’s friendship with Mr. Bingley also continues to burgeon, and Jane pays a visit to the Bingley mansion. On her journey to the house she is caught in a downpour and catches ill, forcing her to stay at Netherfield for several days. In order to tend to Jane, Elizabeth hikes through muddy fields and arrives with a spattered dress, much to the disdain of the snobbish Miss Bingley, Charles Bingley’s sister. Miss Bingley’s spite only increases when she notices that Darcy, whom she is pursuing, pays quite a bit of attention to Elizabeth.

When Elizabeth and Jane return home, they find Mr. Collins visiting their household. Mr. Collins is a young clergyman who stands to inherit Mr. Bennet’s property, which has been “entailed,” meaning that it can only be passed down to male heirs. Mr. Collins is a pompous fool, though he is quite enthralled by the Bennet girls. Shortly after his arrival, he makes a proposal of marriage to Elizabeth. She turns him down, wounding his pride. Meanwhile, the Bennet girls have become friendly with militia officers stationed in a nearby town. Among them is Wickham, a handsome young soldier who is friendly toward Elizabeth and tells her how Darcy cruelly cheated him out of an inheritance.

“Mr. Darcy finds himself increasingly attracted to Elizabeth’s charm and intelligence.”

At the beginning of winter, the Bingleys and Darcy leave Netherfield and return to London, much to Jane’s dismay. A further shock arrives with the news that Mr. Collins has become engaged to Charlotte Lucas, Elizabeth’s best friend and the poor daughter of a local knight. Charlotte explains to Elizabeth that she is getting older and needs the match for financial reasons. Charlotte and Mr. Collins get married and Elizabeth promises to visit them at their new home. As winter progresses, Jane visits the city to see friends (hoping also that she might see Mr. Bingley). However, Miss Bingley visits her and behaves rudely, while Mr. Bingley fails to visit her at all. The marriage prospects for the Bennet girls appear bleak.

That spring, Elizabeth visits Charlotte, who now lives near the home of Mr. Collins’s patron, Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who is also Darcy’s aunt. Darcy calls on Lady Catherine and encounters Elizabeth, whose presence leads him to make a number of visits to the Collins’s home, where she is staying. One day, he makes a shocking proposal of marriage, which Elizabeth quickly refuses. She tells Darcy that she considers him arrogant and unpleasant, then scolds him for steering Bingley away from Jane and disinheriting Wickham. Darcy leaves her but shortly thereafter delivers a letter to her. In this letter, he admits that he urged Bingley to distance himself from Jane, but claims he did so only because he thought their romance was not serious. As for Wickham, he informs Elizabeth that the young officer is a liar and that the real cause of their
disagreement was Wickham's attempt to elope with his young sister, Georgiana Darcy.

This letter causes Elizabeth to re-evaluate her feelings about Darcy. She returns home and acts coldly toward Wickham. The militia is leaving town, which makes the younger, rather man-crazy Bennet girls distraught. Lydia manages to obtain permission from her father to spend the summer with an old colonel in Brighton, where Wickham's regiment will be stationed. With the arrival of June, Elizabeth goes on another journey, this time with the Gardiners, who are relatives of the Bennets. The trip takes her to the North and eventually to the neighborhood of Pemberley, Darcy's estate. She visits Pemberley, after making sure that Darcy is away, and delights in the building and grounds, while hearing from Darcy's servants that he is a wonderful, generous master. Suddenly, Darcy arrives and behaves cordially toward her. Making no mention of his proposal, he entertains the Gardiners and invites Elizabeth to meet his sister.

Shortly thereafter, however, a letter arrives from home, telling Elizabeth that Lydia has eloped with Wickham and that the couple is nowhere to be found, which suggests that they may be living together out of wedlock. Fearful of the disgrace such a situation would bring on her entire family, Elizabeth hastens home. Mr. Gardiner and Mr. Bennet go off to search for Lydia, but Mr. Bennet eventually returns home empty-handed. Just when all hope seems lost, a letter comes from Mr. Gardiner saying that the couple has been found and that Wickham has agreed to marry Lydia in exchange for an annual income. The Bennets are convinced that Mr. Gardiner has paid off Wickham, but Elizabeth learns that the source of the money, and of her family's salvation, was none other than Darcy.

Now married, Wickham and Lydia return to Longbourn briefly, where Mr. Bennet treats them coldly. They then depart for Wickham's new assignment in the North of England. Shortly thereafter, Bingley returns to Netherfield and resumes his courtship of Jane. Darcy goes to stay with him and pays visits to the Bennets but makes no mention of his desire to marry Elizabeth. Bingley, on the other hand, presses his suit and proposes to Jane, to the delight of everyone but Bingley's haughty sister. While the family celebrates, Lady Catherine de Bourgh pays a visit to Longbourn. She corners Elizabeth and says that she has heard that Darcy, her nephew, is planning to marry her. Since she considers a Bennet an unsuitable match for a Darcy, Lady Catherine demands that Elizabeth promise to refuse him. Elizabeth spiritedly refuses, saying she is not engaged to Darcy, but she will not promise anything against her own happiness. A little later, Elizabeth and Darcy go out walking together and he tells her that his feelings have not altered since the spring. She tenderly accepts his proposal, and both Jane and Elizabeth are married.

https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/pride/summary/
History of Christmas

It's hard to imagine now, but at the beginning of the 19th century Christmas was hardly celebrated. Many businesses did not even consider it a holiday. However by the end of the century it had become the biggest annual celebration and took on the form that we recognise today.

The transformation happened quickly, and came from all sectors of society.

Many attribute the change to Queen Victoria, and it was her marriage to the German-born Prince Albert that introduced some of the most prominent aspects of Christmas. In 1848, the Illustrated London News published a drawing of the royal family celebrating around a decorated Christmas tree, a tradition that was reminiscent of Prince Albert’s childhood in Germany. Soon every home in Britain had a tree bedecked with candles, sweets, fruit, homemade decorations and small gifts.

In 1843, Henry Cole commissioned an artist to design a card for Christmas. The illustration showed a group of people around a dinner table and a Christmas message. At one shilling each, these were pricey for ordinary Victorians and so were not immediately accessible. However the sentiment caught on and many children - Queen Victoria’s included – were encouraged to make their own Christmas cards. In this age of industrialisation colour printing technology quickly became more advanced, causing the price of card production to drop significantly. Together with the introduction of the halfpenny postage rate, the Christmas card industry took off. By the 1880s the sending of cards had become hugely popular, creating a lucrative industry that produced 11.5 million cards in 1880 alone. The commercialisation of Christmas was well on its way.

Another commercial Christmas industry was born by Victorians in 1848 when a British confectioner, Tom Smith, invented a bold new way to sell sweets. Inspired by a trip to Paris where he saw bon bons – sugared almonds wrapped in twists of paper – he came up with the idea of the Christmas cracker: a simple package filled with sweets that snapped when pulled apart. The sweets were replaced by small gifts and paper hats in the late Victorian period, and remain in this form as an essential part of a modern Christmas.

Decorating the home at Christmas also became a more elaborate affair. The medieval tradition of using evergreens continued, however the style and placement of these decorations became more important. The old custom of simply decking walls and windows with sprigs and twigs was sniffed at. Uniformity, order and elegance were encouraged. There were instructions on how to make elaborate synthetic decorations for those residing in towns. In 1881, Cassell’s Family Magazine gave strict directions to the lady of the house: “To bring about a general feeling of enjoyment, much depends on the surroundings... It is worth while to bestow some little trouble on the decoration of the rooms.”

Gift giving had traditionally been at New Year but moved as Christmas became more important to the Victorians. Initially gifts were rather modest – fruit, nuts, sweets and small handmade trinkets. These were usually hung on the Christmas tree. However, as gift giving became more central to the festival, and the gifts became bigger and shop-bought, they moved under the tree.

The Christmas feast has its roots from before the Middle Ages, but it’s during the Victorian period that the dinner we now associate with Christmas began to take shape. Examination of early Victorian recipes shows that mince pies were initially made from meat, a tradition dating back to Tudor times. However, during the 19th century there was a revolution in the com-
position of this festive dish. Mixes without meat began to gain popularity within some of the higher echelons of society and became the mince pies we know today.

The roast turkey also has its beginnings in Victorian Britain. Previously other forms of roasted meat such as beef and goose were the centrepiece of the Christmas dinner. The turkey was added to this by the more wealthy sections of the community in the 19th century, but its perfect size for a middle class family gathering meant it became the dominant dish by the beginning of the 20th century.

While carols were not new to the Victorians, it was a tradition that they actively revived and popularised. The Victorians considered carols to be a delightful form of musical entertainment, and a pleasure well worth cultivating. Old words were put to new tunes and the first significant collection of carols was published in 1833 for all to enjoy.

The Victorians also transformed the idea of Christmas so that it became centred around the family. The preparation and eating of the feast, decorations and gift giving, entertainments and parlour games - all were essential to the celebration of the festival and were to be shared by the whole family.

While Charles Dickens did not invent the Victorian Christmas, his book “A Christmas Carol” is credited with helping to popularise and spread the traditions of the festival. Its themes of family, charity, goodwill, peace and happiness encapsulate the spirit of the Victorian Christmas, and are very much a part of the Christmas we celebrate today.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/victorianchristmas/history.shtml

A note about entail...

The basis of wealth, status and power in nineteenth century England was fundamentally land, as it had been for centuries. And the overriding concern of the great landed families who dominated English life was to maintain their influence and affluence down through the years by transmitting their enormous landed estates intact, generation after generation, to their descendants. A way to do this had, in fact, been found, and it had two elements. The first was the right of primogeniture, which meant that all the land in each generation was left to the eldest son instead of its being divided among all the children. The second was entail, which meant that sufficient restrictions were put on what could be done to the estate by that eldest son to ensure that when he died his eldest son in turn would inherit the estate intact...

...What if all the children were girls? This, it will be remembered, is the problem of poor Mr. Bennet in “Pride and Prejudice.” With daughters, as we have seen, the family name might disappear if they inherited the property, so what should be done in this situation? Quite often, the answer was that the deed of settlement or will entailing the property would provide for a lateral pass to another branch of the family that did have a young male.

From “What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew” by Daniel Pool
OUR CAST


GREG BALLA* (Fitzwilliam Darcy) Off Broadway: Straight, Blue Man Group. Other NY and Regional: You Can’t Kiss a Movie (HERE Arts), Power Plays (New Dramatists NYC)

RACHEL CLAUSEN* (Jane Bingley) Regional Theater: Love’s Labour’s Lost (Queen of France) with Elm Shakespeare, Beowulf (Warrior) with Trinity Rep, USA (Isadora Duncan) with Breadloaf Acting Ensemble and A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Macbeth (Titania and Witch) with Camden Shakespeare Festival.

LOGAN JAMES HALL* (Charles Bingley) was last seen as Jim O’Connor in The Glass Menagerie (PTC). A few favorite theater credits include: Fulton Theater’s Venus In Fur (Best Actor in a Play; Broadway World) and Red (Ken), Vermont Stage’s Sex with Strangers (Ethan Kane) and North Carolina Theater Center’s wit (Jason Posner).

JESSICA NAIMY* (Lydia Wickham) Broadway: Honeymoon In Vegas. National Tour: South Pacific

JAMEN NANTHAKUMAR* (Arthur de Bourgh) Recent Credits include: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum (Pittsburgh Public Theater), Under the Bodhi Tree (NY), The Fantasticks (Pittsburgh Public Theater), LUDO’s Broken Bride (NY), The Light in the Piazza (NY).

EMILY NASH (Elizabeth Darcy) is a senior in the Actor Training Program at the University of Utah.

SAVANNAH MOFFAT (Anne de Bourgh) is a senior in the Actor Training Program at the University of Utah.

ELIZABETH RAMOS* (Mary Bennet) Off-Broadway: The Surgeon and Her Daughters (Cherry Lane Theatre, Dir. Adrienne Campbell-Holt); The Idea of Me (Cherry Lane Theatre, Dir. Jose Zayas); A Month in the Country (Classic Stage Company, Dir. Erica Schmidt).

*Member of Actor’s Equity Association