

## BULGARIA

### St. Jordan's day (Epiphany) and St. John's day

In Bulgarian folk tradition, the New Year is welcomed in right up to January 7 – St. John's (Ivan, in Bulgarian) day. It is considered a continuation of the celebrations from the previous day – St. Jordan's day or Epiphany. The two are so similar, that in some regions they are given one common name – Voditsi (derived from voda or water).

The first day is known as male Voditsi, the second – as female Voditsi. The name comes from the traditional rituals involving water. Through them people, the earthly world and the universe are purified of the unclean forces, which have to be banished through the festive rituals on St. Jordan's and St. Ivan's day.

The Christian meaning of these two feasts is to mark the end of the period from the birth to the baptizing of Jesus Christ. The first of them is also known as Twelfth Day or Epiphany, because that was when Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan. The next day is dedicated to the prophet John the Baptist (in Bulgarian the name John is Ivan), who baptized Jesus. The belief has it that on the night before St. Jordan's day or Epiphany, the skies open up. Only the righteous can see this and whatever wish they make at this precise moment is sure to come true. It is also believed that at this moment, the water in all rivers, pools and springs is purified and sanctified. That is why anything immersed in these waters will also come out purified and sanctified.

That is why it is a tradition to perform a ritual throughout Bulgaria on St. Jordan's day – a priest throws a wooden cross into the waters of rivers or pools to purify them. Then young men jump into the icy water to retrieve it. It is believed that whoever finds the cross will be the healthiest throughout the new year.

On the next day – January 7, the Female Voditsi or St. Ivan's Day, the celebrations continue, and the rituals are still for health and prosperity. On this day unmarried girls go to all the houses in the village and sing songs of blessing. Every song includes well wishing especially for the person it is performed for – for the man - head of the family, for the wealthy farmer, for the good wife, for unmarried girls and boys, for children. Thus, for the last time in the long Christmas and New Year ritual cycle, the wishes for the New Year are expressed, in the hope that they will come true.



## SPAIN

### The Epiphany (The Day of the Three Wise Men)

All the children in Spain look forward the celebration of the festivity of The Three Wise Men. It is held on January the 6<sup>th</sup>. The previous evening, all the children are very anxious to see their arrival. In many places, they come on camels; in others, they come by helicopter or on boat.

During the parade, they throw sweets to the children.

As night approaches, nerves grow up. All the children go to bed very early, thinking about the Wise Men, but, moreover about the presents. In the early hours of January the 6<sup>th</sup>, parents get up and tell their kids that the Three Wise Men have already came. They are joyful and satisfied witness of the happy

January 6<sup>th</sup>

faces of their children as they unwrap the gifts they are being given for their good behaviour all along the year.

The Three Wise Men day is the typical day on which everybody buys the “roscón” (a big doughnut). The “roscón” is a very tasty desert which carries a small figure inside. If you find the figure while cutting the cake, it means good luck for you.



## ITALY

### Epiphany day

The Feast of the Epiphany, celebrated January 6 with a national holiday in Italy, and the tradition of La Befana are a big part of Italian Christmas celebrations. Epiphany commemorates the 12th day of Christmas when the three Wise Men arrived at the manger bearing gifts for Baby Jesus. The traditional Christmas holiday season in Italy lasts through Epiphany.

In **Vatican City**, following another Epiphany tradition, a procession of hundreds of people in medieval costumes walk along the wide avenue leading up to the Vatican, carrying symbolic gifts for the Pope. The Pope says a morning mass in **St Peter's Basilica** to commemorate the visit of the Wise Men bearing gifts for Jesus.



Tonight is the night Italian children hang up their stockings, waiting for them to be filled with gifts by *La Befana* on January 6 for *Epiphany*. Italy's traditional celebration includes the tale of a white-haired witch known as the "Befana" who arrives on her broomstick during the night of January 5 and fills the stockings with toys and sweets for the good children and lumps of coal for the bad ones. Epiphany is the 12th day of Christmas when the three Wise Men gave Baby Jesus their gifts. According to the tale, the night before they arrived at the manger they stopped at the shack of an old woman and invited her to come along but she was busy. Later, she decided to join them but got lost so she flies around on her broomstick each year on the 11th night, bringing gifts to children in hopes that she might find the Baby Jesus.



In Rome, following another *Epiphany* tradition, a procession of hundreds of people in medieval costumes will walk along the wide avenue leading up to the Vatican, carrying symbolic gifts for the Pope. The Pope will say a morning mass in St Peter's Basilica to commemorate the visit of the Wise Men bearing gifts for Jesus.

If you're closer to northern Italy, try the province of Treviso for bonfires whose sparks are said to tell the future of the year just begun. Milan celebrates the tradition of the Three Wise Men, and a parade include the figures of the three kings, passes from the square in front of the Duomo, to the Sant'Eustorgio Basilica in the Navigli area of the city.

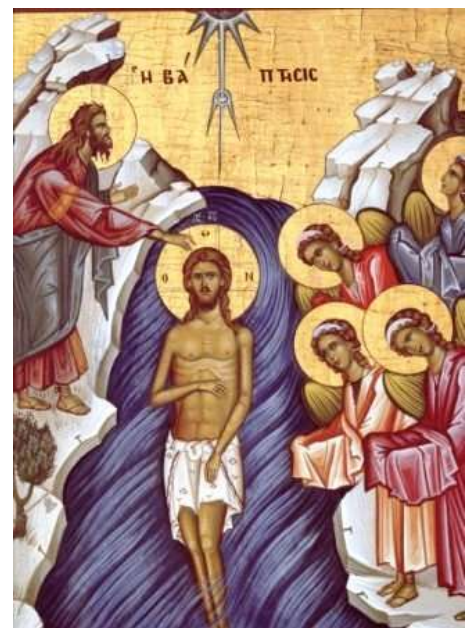
## GREECE

### The Epiphany

It is the feast of Ayía Theofanía, or Fóta, which celebrates the baptism of Jesus Christ. During Epiphany, waters are blessed and evil spirits are banished. At lakeside, seaside or riverside locations, the priests throw a cross into the water and young locals dive to compete for the privilege and blessing of finding it.

Epiphany in Greece is known as Theofania or Fota. The first sanctification of the Epiphany (The Enlightenment) takes place in church on the eve of the holiday. Afterwards, the priest goes from house to house holding a cross and a basil branch. As he walks through each house, he uses the basil to sprinkle (bless) all the areas of the home.

The big sanctification takes place the following day, January 6, the day of the Epiphany in Greece. A long procession is formed and follows whatever road that leads to a body of water - the sea, a river or even a reservoir. Up in front of the procession are the cherub icons, followed by the priests dressed in their best holiday splendor, then the VIPs, followed by all the people. In the bigger cities, the procession becomes more elaborate with the addition of music and military contingents. At the end of the sanctification ceremony a priest throws a cross into the water, thus blessing the waters. Then, those who dare - mostly the younger people of the village - jump in the usually icy water and compete in retrieving the cross. The one who brings the cross up to the surface will enjoy good luck and health for the entire year.



EPIPHANY (THE DAY OF THE THREE KINGS)



**The Three Kings and a star (a photo taken from a newspaper „Musu laikas“, 01/09/2009)**

The Three Kings - Kaspar, Melchior and Balthasar- were wise men, who were watching the movement of celestial bodies. Suddenly, bright star appeared in the sky and disturbed the serenity of these men, because the prophecy declared that such a luminary appearance would coincide with the coming of the Redeemer. Thus, the wise men decided to visit the baby and having chosen the gifts for the baby - gold, incense and Miro - went on the trip. Baltazar's gift was Mira, Melchior's gift – gold and Kasparas' gift – incense.

In the Catholic Church's liturgy 6th January was devoted to remember the event described in the New Testament – the three wise men from the East came to Jerusalem to visit a baby - the king of the Jews. When they found him with his mother Mary, they gave gifts - gold, incense and Miro.

The Wise Men -Kaspar, Melchior and Balthasar- later were called kings. The Kings were depicted with the crown and gifts in their hands. There has been a tradition on 6th January to write the first letters of the Kings by consecrated chalk on each house front door - K + M + B. Lithuanians believed that the inscription would protect their homes from the devil and thunder.

One of the most interesting traditions of this day – walking of the "three kings" with the star, wishing joy by singing and collecting donations. The Three Kings used to wear white scarfs and paper crowns on their heads. Having left their horses for their "servants", "Kings" (usually two whites and one "black"), used to pop in the farmhouses, sing the songs in Latin or Lithuanian, then write the letters by chalk, and welcome the whole family by saying: "Let Jesus Christ be honored! The three kings have come and brought the gifts to the Lord. Maybe you give us something?". The Three Kings were usually treated; young girls used to give them a towel, wool gloves, sometimes cash as a present. A housewife used to bring sausages. Sometimes the "kings" walked with "symbol of death" with the scythe and scales for weighing, human good and bad works.

January 6<sup>th</sup>

*ESTONIA*

