

March 25th

BULGARIA

BLAGOVETS

BLAGOVETS is another important traditional custom of Bulgarians. On 25 March it was customary to prepare 40 sarmi (rice wrapped cabbage leaves), 40 stuffed peppers, and 40 crayfish, then to drink 40 gulps of wine or rakia. In some parts of the country on this day it was also customary to drink millet-ale.

BLAGOVETS is the last holiday in March. This is supposed to be the day of the first cuckoo, which heralds the end of the winter and the coming of the long-awaited summer.

On Blagovets Day people would get up early. They had to have a bite of bread and put a coin in their purses. The belief was that if they met a cuckoo on their way the year would be good.

To welcome summer and all its warmth, before Blagovets (25th March) all the yards would be thoroughly swept and the whole house thoroughly cleaned. This was the day when snakes were supposed to come out of hibernation. People lit fires in the hearth, before the garden gate or in the yard. To protect themselves from the snakes, the young men and women would jump over the fire, slightly singeing their feet. In some parts of the country they would walk around the house with burning torches for protection against snakes.

Another feature of Blagovets Day was the ritual driving of the snakes from the house. To do this, people would take the poker and tongs from the fireplace and hit them hard against each other in the yard, chanting: 'Be out all snakes and lizards, for the Blagovets Day!'

Blagovets was also the day when the bees were let out of their hives, and the hives themselves would be 'blessed' by the use of a flaming torch.

The holiday would end with a rich evening meal of many dishes with singing and merriment late into the night.



GREECE

March 25: Feast of Annunciation and Greek Independence Day

It is the day of the celebration of the beginning of the Greek revolution against the Turkish occupants in 1821. It is celebrated with military parades all over Greece.

It is also a feast which celebrates the day the angel Gabriel announced Mary the incarnation of the Christ.

In 1821, Greeks vigorously rose up against the oppressive Ottoman Empire which had occupied Greece for nearly four hundred years, embarking on the ultimately successful war of independence. Bishop Germanos of Patras boldly raised the Greek flag at the monastery of Agia Lavras, inciting the Peloponnese to rise against the oppressors. While the exact date probably was not March 25th, it did occur in late March and it was gradually associated with the religious feast of the Annunciation.

On this day in the Orthodox calendar, the archangel Gabriel appeared to the maiden Mary and announced the news: she was pregnant with the divine child. Bishop Germanos chose this day to deliver a different but not unrelated message: a new spirit was about to be born in Greece. The churches celebrate the Festival of the Annunciation with pomp, ceremony, and joy. The spectacle is especially vivid on the islands of Tinos and Idra (Hydra). Hydra, a maritime merchant power with a swift, well-maintained fleet, was a determined and effective supporter of the War for Independence, doubling the celebration there. You can also expect colorful religious ceremonies wherever the local monastery or church is named "Evangelisimos" or "Evangelistria", such as Panagia Evangelistria on Tinos.

Greek Independence Day is also celebrated by many of the Greeks of the diaspora, and large parades are becoming more common in United States cities where Greeks have made their homes, including Boston and New York City. Each year, the U.S. President marks the occasion with a proclamation reminding citizens of the contributions of Greece to democracy, and of the ongoing contributions of expatriate Greeks in their new communities throughout the world.

