

## Christmas folk tradition



The Bulgarian tradition on Christmas has knitted together three important rituals: the family festive meals on Christmas Eve, the rites of the male carol-singers and the holy fire of the Yule-log.

The legends of Christ's Nativity and an earlier myth of the Sun God are at the base of the Christmas ritual meals. They are arranged over straw on the floor echoing Nativity of Christ in the manger. A symbolic seat at the

festive dinner was provided for Virgin Mary. A ritual loaf was laid on the table with the name Bogovitsa dedicated to Sun God. In traditional beliefs, every year he regenerates on Christmas to visit humans on Christmas Eve descending on the boughs of the tree of life with its peak piercing the sky and its roots deep into the earth. The symbol of the tree of life is the Yule-log in the hearth. Burning throughout Christmas Eve, the Yule-log sends its powerful energy to the reborn Sun. This universal circuit gets in motion to produce a rich harvest. The abundant crops are depicted on the Bogovitsa ritual loaf. With its oval shape and other sun symbols, bread signifies fertility and wellbeing: generous fields and vineyards, as well as healthy and numerous livestock. The host ritually breaks up the bread handing pieces to each family member. Vegetarian meals laid on the table c



present symbolically fertility – corn, beans, red peppers stuffed with rice, onions, garlic, walnuts, fruit and red wine. The more the dishes arranged on the table, the richest the new harvest, traditional beliefs prescribe. And also that once the whole family is seated at the table, nobody is allowed to leave it.

Christmas carols echo in the air at midnight. At this point male carol-singers or waits in groups start their tour of the village. In the hours of secrecy preceding dawn they acquire magic powers and emerge as priests of wellbeing. With their vivacious ritual songs they bless the community for fertility, health and good times.

## *CZECH REPUBLIC*

### **Christmas Eve**



The first thing, which may surprise you, is the fact, that it is not Santa Claus who gives gifts to little kids in the Czech Republic, but Little Jesus. He comes to the house silently in the evening of 24th of December, without being seen by anyone and leaves all the gifts under the Christmas tree. When he is ready, before disappearing, rings on a little bell, and then kids run into the room, amazed what Little Jesus had left there for them. To thank him, kids (accompanied by the rest of the family) can sing some Christmas songs celebrating his nativity, and

then all the family has dinner.

The typical Czech Christmas dinner is very rich and for someone can be pretty unusual, compared with what is typical to eat for Christmas dinner in the U.K., the USA or other countries. In some families, they have a starter, which can be ham, cheese, some vegetable salad or so on, then usually comes a fish soup, made from a carp and some vegetable. The main dish is the most often a fish – a carp, accompanied with a homemade potato salad (consisting of potatoes, vegetable, and salad cream, also sometimes ham). Alternative main dish is so called “kuba”; an old Czech meal made from mushrooms and peeled barley. And after the main course, there is time for a desert, there are many kinds of homemade Christmas cookies, some families can also have an exotic fruits, nuts and so on.

There is also one old tradition in the Czech Republic, saying that one, who will not eat the whole day until the dinner, will see the gold little pig in the evening. But obviously, hardly anyone will manage not to eat anything until the dinner.

And after the dinner, there is finally the time, which kids are always expecting so impatiently – the time to unwrap the presents. The following days, 25th and 26th are (as well as 24th) national Holidays, and people mostly spent them with their families, and friends, visiting each other, having festive lunches together and having rest from ordinary days rush.

## *ITALY*

### **Christmas' eve**

On December 23rd, children dressed as shepherds with sandals, leggings tied with crossing thongs, and wearing shepherds' hats, go from house to house playing songs on shepherds' pipes and

December 24<sup>th</sup>

giving recitations. They receive money to buy Christmas treats. In cities like Rome real shepherds sometimes carry out the performance.

A strict fast is observed 24 hours before Christmas after which a meal with many dishes (but no meat) is served. The traditional Christmas' eve dinner, *Cenone*, is made up of

spaghetti and anchovies, an assortment of fish, fresh broccoli, tossed salad, fruits, and sweets.



## LITHUANIA

### CHRISTMAS EVE



**Kaledaiciai, one of Christmas Eve dishes in Lithuania**

Advent is waiting period for the Christ in Lithuania. It is a period from 30th October to 24th December. This **Christmas Eve** is special. That evening a master of the house near the corner of the table puts the first sheaf of rye harvest. Hay or straw are laid on the table. A white tablecloth is laid on the table and then, a small cross is put on it as well as a saucer with *kaledaiciai* on it. A mistress of the house brings 12 dishes such as bread, apples, nuts, herring served with mushrooms, herring served with onions and carrots, jelly made with potato flour, potatoes, mushroom soup, fried fish, kuciukai, beetroot salad, cakes made



with poppies and poppy soup. All dishes are made without salt. A plate and a spoon are put on the table for a stranger or ghost. All the family sits at the table. Hand in hand they tell a prayer „Our Lord”. Then a mistress of the house breaks *kaledaiciai* and gives to the family members, telling „My Lord, Holy Spirit, thanks for the last year and we wish a better, luckier and happier year“. After the dinner the mistress of the house collects the cutlery and puts it near the sheaf of rye harvest in order we will be together. On Christmas Eve we used to dress a Christmas Tree.

## SPAIN

### Christmas Eve

One of the most important Spanish Christmas traditions is to set a nativity scene and /or a Christmas tree at every home. On Christmas' Eve, it is usual for people to have a familiar dinner and to stay all together.

On these dates, lunches and dinners are different from the other ones and we cook more food than the average.

In Galicia, the traditional Christmas dinner used to be cod with cauliflower and farm-yard chicken together with some nougat if we could afford it.

Nowadays, we normally have a lot of seafood, fish, and of course, meat. We also include every king of national products such as nougat, shortbread and marzipan.

## ESTONIA

### Christmas Eve

