



**Christmas traditions
in Poland**



Old Christmas traditions



Old Christmas traditions

For Poles, Christmas Eve is a time of family gathering and reconciliation. It's also a night of magic: animals are said to talk in a human voice and people have the power to tell the future.



Old Christmas traditions

The belief was born with our ancestors who claimed that 24th December was a day to mark the beginning of a new era. It was bolstered by sayings such as, "As goes Christmas Eve, goes the year." Hoping for a good 12 months, everyone was polite and generous to one another and forgave past grievances.



Old Christmas traditions

Polish rural residents are among the few who still keep up the old Christmas Eve customs. In eastern Poland it is still believed that girls who grind poppy seed on Christmas Eve can hope for a quick marriage.



Old Christmas traditions

After dinner, they leave the house,
and the direction of the first dog bark
points to where their future husband
will come from.



Old Christmas traditions

When going to Christmas Eve midnight mass, girls would blindfold each other and touch fence pickets. A straight and smooth picket would portend a resourceful husband, while a crooked and rough one was an indication of a clumsy and awkward spouse.



Old Christmas traditions

If a maiden wanted to learn about her future fiance's profession, she would go to a river, dip her hand in the water and pull out the first thing she touched. Wood meant a carpenter, iron-a blacksmith, leather-a shoemaker, etc.



Old Christmas traditions

Weather-forecasting superstitions were also popular. It was believed that if Christmas sees no snow, Easter certainly will-or "If the Christmas tree sinks in water, the egg rolls on ice."



Old Christmas traditions

Other sayings include, "A sunny Christmas Eve brings fair weather all year round"; "Stars that shine bright on Christmas Eve will make hens lay plenty of eggs"; "A shine on the birth of our Savior will be seen all throughout January."



Old Christmas traditions

The more daring diners would pull out blades of straw from underneath the table cloth. A green one foretold marriage; a withered one-waiting; a yellow one-spinsterhood; a very short one-an early grave.



Old Christmas traditions

Today, few people are familiar with Christmas Eve fortune telling, especially urban dwellers. Yet some old traditions can still be found among village people who tend to lead a more old-fashioned lifestyle, closely connected to nature and its cycles of death and rebirth.



Christmas today



Wigilia



Wigilia

Christmas Eve, Wagilia, is an important part of the Polish Christmas, in fact, the most important rituals are celebrated on this day. The very word Wigilia, which in Poland was formerly known as the day before a feast day is now used only as the day before Christ's birth.



Wigilia

The Wigilia supper is so special there is no other like it throughout the year. With cheerful feeling all members of the family partake of the Wigilia supper, which traditionally starts at dusk, when the first star appears.





Wigilia

As the day begins to darken and family members ready themselves for the evening meal, a child is sent out to look for the first star in the sky.

With the appearance of the first star, the Wigilia meal begins. A Christmas tree is already decorated.



Wigilia

After supper all the family gathers around the Christmas tree. They sing Christmas carols and open presents.

Traditionally carol singers go from house to house carrying a great paper star lantern, singing carols.

At the end of the evening, everyone goes to midnight mass.







Christmas eve supper



Christmas eve supper

The table for Christmas supper should be sufficiently large to accommodate the whole family.

A candle is placed in the centre of the table, the Holy Bible and "Oplatek".

A spare place is set at the table for a stranger or an absent member of the family, who may come unannounced.





Christmas eve supper

It was also customary to invite the lonely for the supper, because on Christmas Eve no one should be left alone.

Another custom that has survived till this day is putting a little hay on the table as a remembrance of Christ's birth in a stable.





Christmas eve supper

The traditional Christmas Eve supper consists of twelve dishes representing the twelve months of the year.

No meat is served during the supper, only fish, usually herring, carp or pike.





Christmas eve supper

Other traditional dishes appearing on the table include red barszcz, mushroom or fish soup, sauerkraut with wild mushrooms or peas, boiled or fried pierogi, Polish dumplings with a wide variety of fillings are among the most popular Polish dishes. For the Christmas Eve supper, pierogi are usually made with sauerkraut and mushrooms.











Christmas tree



Christmas tree

The modern Christmas tree as we know it today came to Poland from Western Europe at the end of the 18th century. Initially popular only in town, it gained popularity with peasants at the end of the 19th century. The first Christmas trees were decorated with apples, nuts, gingerbread, miniature loaves of bread and many colourful candles.



Christmas tree

The Christmas tree is not only a decorative ornament. It is also deeply symbolic:

-The triangular shape is that of the holy trinity pointing up towards God;

-Evergreen means forever eternal and green colour is associated with life;



Christmas tree

-Needles grow upwards like hands praising God;

-Candles and lights depict heaven and commemorate the souls of the deceased;

-Gifts under the tree are symbols of charity and love.





Christmas tree

In modern-day Polish homes, both in town and village, Christmas trees are decorated with factory-made colourful glass balls, ribbons and lights. But on many trees, these decorations are accompanied by the old-style traditional home-made ornaments which have been handed down from generation to generation.





Christmas tree

Under the Christmas tree presents are laid for family members and friends. These are wrapped in coloured paper and decorated with ribbons. Presents are exchanged and opened after the Christmas eve supper.







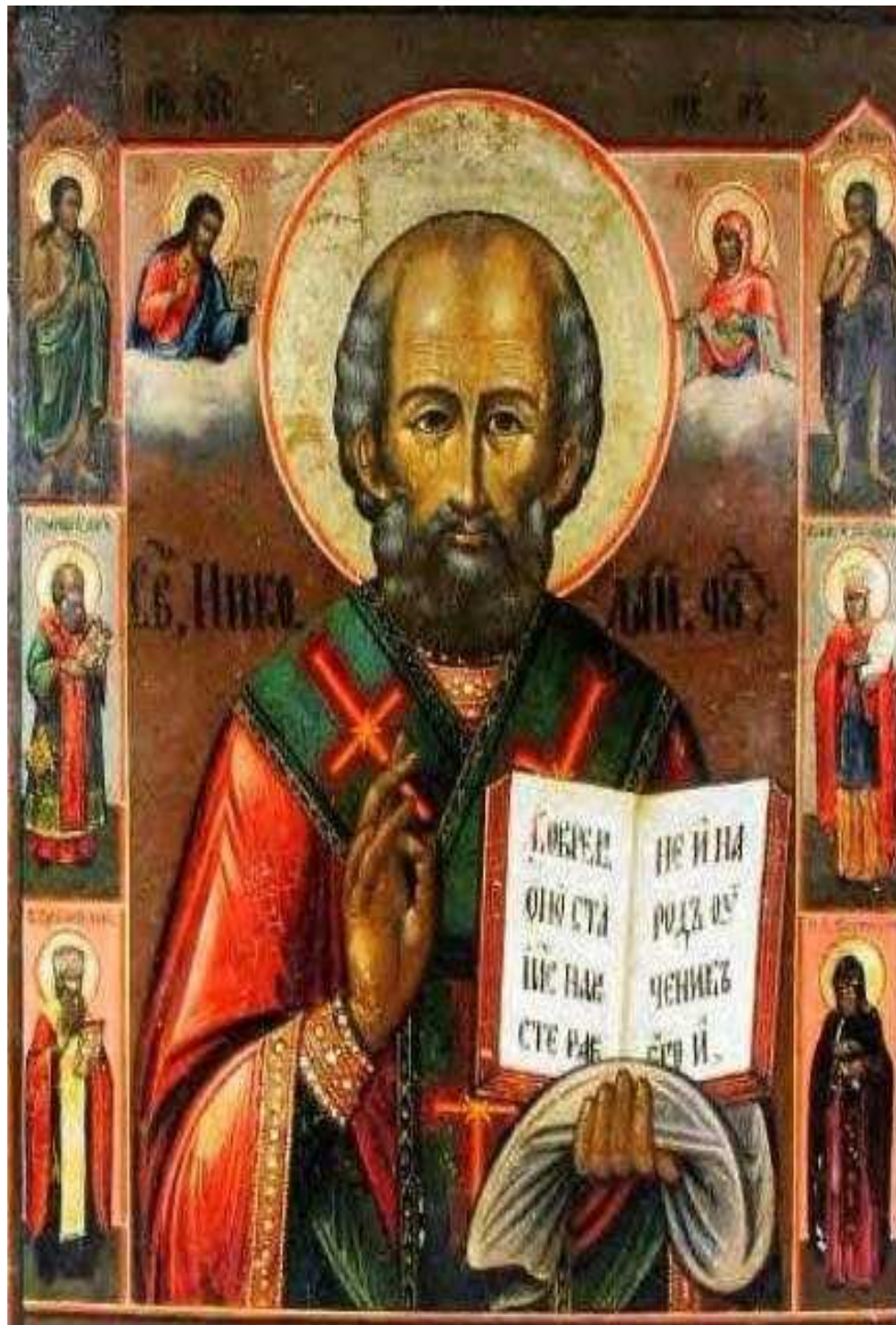
Santa Claus



Santa Claus

The legend of Santa Claus dates all the way back to the 4th century when a child named Nicholas was born.

As a grown-up he became bishop of Myra in Lycia, a province of the Byzantine Anatolia, now in Turkey, where, according to legend, he only did good deeds.





Santa Claus

He had a reputation for secret gift-giving, such as putting coins in the shoes of those who left them out for him, and thus became the model for Santa Claus. In Poland Santa Claus brings gifts twice a year. First on the 6th of December on his name-day and then on the 24th of December on Christmas day.





Christmas wafer

A black and white photograph of a Christmas tree branch. A white ribbon is draped across the branch, and a small bell ornament hangs from it. The background is a textured, dark surface, possibly wood or a wall. The text is overlaid on the image in red.

Christmas wafer

The word "Oplatek" derives from the Latin word "Oblatum", meaning sacred bread. Made of unleavened dough, it first began to be used in the 10th century as a liturgical wafer. In Poland the tradition of baking wafers in engraved metal forms, and of using these wafers for sacral and secular purposes dates back to the Middle Ages.



Christmas wafer

The wafer-sharing ritual is accompanied by mutual wishes of health and prosperity in the coming year. At Christmas time, it is now also sent to absent members of the family and close fiends.









The end