









## EUROPEAN CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

### Christmas Advent Calendar – what we learned:

1. **ITALY** – Xmas begins with **Dec. 8<sup>th</sup>**, the feast of Christmas officially begins on December 8, celebrated with the feast of the Immaculate Conception this day most families decorate the Xmas tree
2. **GREECE** – Greeks traditionally decorate a **sailboat** instead of a Xmas tree 
3. **LITHUANIA** – The Xmas wreath tradition came from Germanic lands and was made of wicker and spruce branches (έλατο) and dried fruit and 4 candles 
4. **SLOVAKIA** – They make Christmas **wafers** as a starter for the Christmas dinner. On them they usually put garlic, honey, and walnuts. 
5. **ROMANIA** – December 5<sup>th</sup> children **clean their shoes for St Nicholas** can put small gifts and sweets in them. They go door to door to sing the first carol (The Star which proclaims the birth of Jesus)
6. **POLAND** – They decorate the Christmas tree, and it symbolizes the tree of knowledge of good and evil (from the bible). The red baubles symbolize apples. 
7. **Spain (Catalan)** – “**Escudella**” is a rich broth (soup) is made for the Xmas feast. It is made of several kinds of meat and giant pasta shells. It is served as the first course of the Xmas dinner. The meats are served for the second course along with chickpeas and vegetables. 
8. **ITALY** – At Xmas we can see men playing the bagpipes. They are called “**Pipers**” and they are dressed as shepherds. In the tradition of the Italian Christmas, the shepherds used to go down from their mountain houses to the city squares to earn some extra money by playing the bagpipes to anyone who wanted to listen. This was based on the story of shepherds who visited Jesus on the night of his birth and played the bagpipes for him. 

9. **GREECE – Kallikantzari** are nasty, Greek Christmas goblins. They live under the ground. They try to cut down the “Tree of life” which holds up the Earth and everyone living above. However, just before the final part of the tree is cut, Christmas Day comes. On this day, they climb up to Earth and cause trouble for the people. They do this until January 6<sup>th</sup>. On this day, the priests bless the waters and sprinkle Holy Water in people’s houses. The Kallikantzari hate Holy Water and run quickly back under ground. There, they see the “Tree of life” has healed and they start cutting it again.



10. **LITHUANIA - Kūčiukai (sausage, sližikai)** is a traditional Lithuanian Christmas dinner dish. These are small, crunchy, slightly sweet flour pastries with poppy seeds.



11. **SLOVAKIA -On December 6<sup>th</sup> St. Nicolas comes** and brings children sweets and fruit when they are good. However, when they are naughty, they get coal and onion or a wooden spoon instead. All children **clean their little boots** and put them to the windows or doors and wait impatiently for HIM to come. In the morning, they find their little treats and savor the joy from their gifts.



12. **ROMANIA –** For the Christmas dinner, the Romanian women make special dishes: cabbage rolls, sausages, „piftie”, „tobă”, „lebar”, many sweets and especially cake „cozonac”, filled with walnuts, raisins. Before sitting at the table, the Romanians take care to **share with the neighbors or the poor people from the food cooked for Christmas**, for the souls of their loved ones, who have died.

13. **POLAND –** It is a Christmas tradition **to leave space at the table** once a vacant place was left for the souls of the dead, today we often identify it with an unexpected visitor or a lost wanderer who may knock on our door.



14. **Spain – “Campana Sobre Campana”** is a Xmas carol of Spain

15. **ITALY –** The Italians love the tradition of the Nativity scene it is called **“Presepe”**. The cribs depicting the birth of Jesus are present in all the churches, in the squares and in the homes of the Italians.



16. **GREECE – Melomakarona** are traditional Greek Christmas sweets and can be found in almost all Greek homes at Christmas time. They are **honey cookies** that are made with olive oil, flour, citrus, cinnamon, clove and of course, honey.



17. **LITHUANIA –** There are many Advent and Xmas songs and games in the Lithuanian calendar folklore. There are more than 3,602 variants of calendar songs and 2,139 advent Xmas songs and games.

18. **SLOVAKIA** – It is a tradition to put **fish scales under the tablecloth** to ensure prosperity for all family members. After Christmas the fish scale is usually put into wallets and purses. Lentils or beans are put also under the tablecloth to “bring” enough food for all present people. On the table there must always be honey, garlic, apple, and nuts to bring health and positive vibes for the soul.



19. **ROMANIA** – **Sorcova** is a popular Romanian custom, practiced on January 1<sup>st</sup>. It is a New Year's Day custom, walking with Sorcova is especially the joy of children. They wear a budding tree twig or a sorcove made of a stick around which flowers of colored paper were intertwined. Sorcova plays somewhat the role of a magic wand, endowed with the ability to transmit vigor and youth to the one concerned.



20. **POLAND** – **12 dishes on the Christmas table** are traditional, just like the hay under the tablecloth or the extra set of the table. This number is meant to symbolize the 12 apostles. In connection with the Christmas dinner there are also some superstitions. Twelve dishes should be tasted so that every month in the coming year is full of health and prosperity. The most popular dishes are:

1. mushroom soup
2. kutia
3. vegetable salad
4. dried fruit compote
- 5 Pierogi with cabbage and mushrooms
6. cabbage with peas
- 7 Herring in various ways
8. carp in various ways
9. red borscht with ravioli
10. fish in **Greek style**
11. cabbage with mushrooms
12. poppy seed cake

21. **SPAIN** (Catalonia) – In Catalonia, a region in Spain, there is the tradition of **Caga Tio**. It means “**Poo log**”. Children look after their “tio” - a log propped up on sticks, with a painted face, wearing a Barretina hat, and covered with a blanket. Children keep the log warm and "feed" it to fatten it up so that on Christmas Day or Eve, the 'tio' will defecate (poop), while they beat it with sticks and sing a traditional song. Relatives hide gifts or candies under the blanket for the children to find after they sing and beat the log to poop.



22. **ITALY** – Italian Xmas sweets are **Panettone and Pandoro** are famous all over the world. Both are types of sweet bread with the main difference being that Panettone contains candied fruit and raisins. In southern Italy, delicious, spiced nut pastries known as mostaccioli are also made.



23. **GREECE** – **Kalanda** are the traditional Greek Christmas carols sung on Christmas Eve, New Year's Eve and on the Eve of Theofania (Epiphany). On these days, children in groups go from house to house to sing the carols. They sing the carols accompanied by a metal triangle and the people give them pocket money or sweets. The lyrics of Greek Christmas carols wish good luck and prosperity to the family. It is considered a blessing to have children sing the Kalanda at your house on these days.



24. **Lithuania** – In ancient times, Christmas day was considered the birthday of the **god of the sun and vegetation**. Santa Claus is not very old in Lithuanian customs. His functions in the past were different from the current grandfather who distributes gifts. Nowadays children find presents under the Xmas tree on Christmas Day.

# Merry Christmas!

