

Christmas Eve traditions in Poland

On the Christmas table should find twelve dishes. Everyone should try, which is to ensure happiness throughout the year. The most traditional ones known throughout Poland are: borscht with dumplings, fried carp and jelly, cabbage with peas, cabbage with mushrooms, dumplings with cabbage, dumplings with poppy seeds, sugar and honey, chives and compote of dried fruit.



Decorating Christmas tree

It is hard to imagine Christmas without a Christmas tree. Few remember, however, that when in 1982, on the initiative of John Paul II, for the first time in history, a Christmas tree was set up on St. Peter's Square in the Vatican, many church hierarchs were even appalled at this idea and criticized it harshly. "It is not right that a holy Christmas tree with baubles should stand in the capital of Christianity" - it was said.



Wafer magic

Its name comes from the Latin *oblatum*, which means sacrificed. In the form known today, wafers were introduced in the tenth century, in place of dedicated bread.

Wafers have also been attributed to many magical and healing properties. A piece of wafer thrown into the well was supposed to purify water, ensure health for people and animals. It was believed that everyone who shares Wafer on Christmas Eve will not be hungry all year long and will be able to share bread and other food with the poor.

In some regions, the host broke the wafer in as many parts as people sat on Christmas Eve, dipped every particle in honey and, pronouncing the names of the household members, stuck to the window glass. A particle of wafer that has slipped or fallen out spells death for the person.

Today, sharing the Christmas wafer, the participants of the Christmas Eve supper wish first of all for health and all prosperity, as well as make their dreams come true. And this is what we wish everyone for the upcoming Christmas.



The door ajar for the ghost

The fact that it was on Christmas Eve that the souls of the dead return to earth, was believed in Old Slavonic times. On Christmas Eve, gates and entrance doors or windows were left ajar for them - says Katarzyna Jaskólska, an ethnologist. - Leftover food left on them, crumbs of wafer. And before the supper began, animals were often cited because they were believed to be able to enter the souls of the dead. Also because of the presence of the ghosts of the dead, on that day it was forbidden to spit, pour dirty water and wash or spin on a spinning wheel - adds Katarzyna Jaskólska. - Sharp objects such as knives, scissors and needles could only be used in an emergency. Why? Not to hurt the ghosts.



Free space at the table

I remember that at my house there was always care to leave one free place at the table. For a stray wanderer. My husband's house also had this tradition, but it was said that it was a place for loved ones who had already passed away. For their spirits - says Monika, who is preparing Christmas Eve dinner for the first time this year. - Of course, I will also have such an extra place - he adds.

It is difficult to determine the origin of this tradition. According to ethnologists, this is not an old custom, because none of the Polish chroniclers and historians mentions it.



Hiding hay under the tablecloth

We hide the hay under the Christmas Eve tablecloth for several reasons. According to pagan beliefs, it is to be a good omen for the coming year. In addition to the symbol of prosperity and fertility, hay also reminds us of Jesus Christ. That he was born in a stable and laid in a manger because there was no room for him in the inn. That wealth is not the most important thing in life. The hay under the tablecloth is to symbolize the modesty that every Christian should wear in his heart.



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