

Kleszczów, December 2016

ACROSS CULTURES

E-TWINNING

CHRISTMAS

IN POLAND



# ADVENT

In Poland, Advent is the beginning of Christmas Time. It's a time when people try to be peaceful and remember the real reason for Christmas. People try not to have excess of anything. Some people give up their favourite food or drinks and parties and discos are not widely held. Some people also go to Church quite frequently. There is the tradition of the 'roraty', special masses (or communion services) held at dawn and dedicated to Mary for receiving the good news from the angel Gabriel.



During Advent, people also prepare their houses for Christmas. There's lots of cleaning and people wash their windows and clean their carpets very thoroughly. Everything must be clean for Christmas day!

# NATIVITY PLAYS

Before Christmas, children in schools and preschools take part in "Jasełka". They are very popular and often more secular than religious. The Christmas story is also sometime put into modern times.



Poland is a largely catholic country and Christmas Eve is a very important and busy day. It's now often the most important day over Christmas - even though it's not a holiday but Christmas and the 26th December are holidays! Traditionally it was day of fasting and abstinence (not eating anything) and meat is not normally allowed to be eaten in any form.



## CHRISTMAS EVE



Christmas Eve is known as Wigilia.

The house is also cleaned and everyone gets washed and puts on their festive clothes.

The main Christmas meal is eaten in the evening and is called "Kolacja wigilijna" (Christmas Eve supper). It's traditional that no food is eaten until the first star is seen in the sky! So children look at the night sky to spot the first star!

## DISHES

On the table there are 12 dishes - they are meant to give you good luck for the next 12 months. The meal is traditionally meat free, this is to remember the animals who took care of the baby Jesus in the manger. Everyone has to eat or at least try some of each dish. For catholics the 12 dishes symbolize Jesus's 12 disciples.



Like in many Catholic countries, Christmas Eve is often a 'fasting day' meaning that some people don't eat anything until after sunset (when the Church day officially ends). So that's where the custom of the first star come from. Some people in central Poland say that at midnight the animals can talk.



## WISHES

At the beginning of the meal, a large wafer biscuit called an 'Oplatek', which has a picture of Mary, Joseph and Jesus on it, is passed around the table and everyone breaks a piece off and eats it.

Sometimes a small piece may be given to any farm animals or pets that the family may have. A place is often left empty at the meal table, for an unexpected guest. Polish people say that no one should be alone or hungry, therefore if someone unexpectedly knocks on the door they are welcomed. In some houses, the empty place is to commemorate a dead relative or for a family member who couldn't come to the meal.

## STRAW

Sometimes straw is put on the floor of the room, or under the table cloth, to remind people that Jesus was born in a stable or cow shed.



## PRESENTS

The worst part about the Christmas Eve supper is that you can't open the presents before it has finished! Older members of the family (who traditionally begin and end this meal) always make it last a long time. In most of the houses, before the presents are opened, the family sings carols together. Children really want to open the present and sometimes more carols are sung just to tease the children!





## SANTA CLAUS

Presents are brought by "Święty Mikołaj" (St Nicholas/Santa Claus), but in some parts of Poland there are different present bringers (because during the 19th century the borders of Poland were different, so people had different traditions). In the east (Podlasie) there is "Dziadek Mróz" (Ded Moroz), in western and northern Poland "Gwiazdor", the Starman. The starman is not always all-good - if someone was bad, he can give him "różga", a birch-rod that should be used on bad person!

## CHRISTMAS TREE

The Christmas tree is also often bought in and decorated on Christmas Eve. It is decorated with a star on the top (to represent the Star of Bethlehem), gingerbreads, lights (previously candles) and "bombki" which are baubles and glass ornaments in different shapes (though most often they are spheres). They are usually hand-made, painted or decorated in other way. In the east of Poland the decorations are traditionally made of straw and are very beautiful. In some houses there is also custom of breaking one of the Christmas Tree decorations to scare the evil out of the house for the whole next year!



# E-TWINNING

During this magic time we also remembered about our friends from Europe. Again we took part in the eTwinning project connected with Christmas. Thanks to eTwinning programme we could send them some postcards and Christmas wishes. We also remembered about students and friends from the school in Ukraine. We send them our postcards, too.



In my opinion eTwinning is very amazing project for us. We made Christmas Cards on the lesson. Together we had fun. Now, we're waiting for cards from other countries!!!





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