**Christmas Traditions Around the World**

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Група 11ПММ-11

**Christmas in Africa**

Preparation for Christmas in the Congo begins when some group is designated to prepare the annual Christmas pageant.

Christmas day begins with groups of carolers walking to and fro through the village, along the roadway, by the houses of the missionaries, singing the lovely carols known the world around. Often people may be awakened by a group of carolers beginning to converge on the house of worship. They return home to make final preparation as to the clothes one must wear and also as to his offering for the Christmas service.

The most important part of their Christmas worship service is the love offering, this is the gift in honor of Jesus. Then at about 8 or 9 o'clock everyone makes their way to the celebration of the birthday of Jesus.

Everyone who attends the service goes forward to lay down their gift upon the raised platform near the Communion table. Not one person will attend the service without giving a gift.

Now people have Christmas dinners after the service, preparing tables out in front of their home and inviting many of their intimate friends to share.

Christmas in South Africa is a summer holiday. In December, the southern summer brings glorious days of sunshine that carry an irresistible invitation to the beaches, the rivers, and the shaded mountain slopes. Then the South African holiday season reaches its height. Schools are closed, and camping is the order of the day. In South Africa there is no snow, but it has many flowers, many beautiful varieties of cultivated and wild flowers being in their full pride.

In the cities and towns carolers make their rounds on Christmas Eve. Church services are held on Christmas morning. Christmas Eve celebrations in larger centers include "Carols by Candlelight" and special screen and floor shows.

Homes are decorated with pine branches, and all have the decorated Christmas fir in a corner, with presents for the children around. At bedtime on Christmas Eve, children may also hang up their stockings for presents from Father Christmas.

Many South Africans have a Christmas dinner in the open-air lunch. For many more, it is the traditional dinner of either turkey, roast beef, mince pies, or suckling pig, yellow rice with raisins, vegetables, and plum pudding, crackers, paper hats, and all. In the afternoon, families go out into the country and usually there are games or bathing in the warm sunshine, and then home in the cool of the evening.

Boxing Day is also a proclaimed public holiday usually spent in the open air. It falls on December 26 and is a day of real relaxation.

In Ghana, on Africa's west coast, most churches herald the coming of Christmas by decorating the church and homes beginning with the first week in Advent, four weeks before Christmas. This season happens to coincide with the cocoa harvest, so it is a time of wealth. Everyone returns home from wherever they might be such as farms or mines.

On the eve of Christmas, children march up and down the streets singing Christmas Carols and shouting "Christ is coming, Christ is coming! He is near!" in their language. In the evening, people flock to churches which have been decorated with Christmas evergreens or palm trees massed with candles. Hymns are sung and Nativity plays are presented.

On Christmas Day, children and older people, representing the angels in the fields outside Bethlehem, go from house to house singing. Another church service is held where they dress in their native attire or Western costumes. Later on there is a feast of rice and yam paste called fufu with stew or okra soup, porridge and meats. Families eat together or with close neighbors, and presents are given.

On the west coast of Africa, in Liberia, most homes have an oil palm for a Christmas tree, which is decorated with bells. On Christmas morning, people are woken up by carols. Presents such as cotton cloth, soap, sweets, pencils, and books are exchanged. Also in the morning a church service is held in which the Christmas scene is enacted and hymns and carols are sung. Dinner is eaten outdoors with everyone sitting in a circle to share the meal of rice, beef and biscuits. Games are played in the afternoon, and at night fireworks light up the sky.

**Christmas in Alaska**

Most Alaskan Christians celebrate Christmas on December 25th, just as people do in the continent of the US. Santa Claus may arrive for a pre-Christmas visit, but, food, gift giving, and decorations are like what you might see in Texas or Wisconsin.

The songs sang at each home include Aleut words Gristuusaaq suu'uq, or Christ is born. Everyone joins in the closing words, Mnogaya leta, or god grant you many years. At the end of the carols the host provides carolers with maple-frosted doughnuts, cookies, candy, piruk, or fish pie, and sometimes smoked salmon.

In Alaska children wander from house to house carrying a colored star on a long pole, and singing carols.

**Christmas in United States of America**

Santa Claus was born in US in the 1860's he was named this as he had a white beard and a belly, so he was named Santa Claus as this was the Dutch word for St Nicholas, Sintaklaas. Although the Dutch had bought him with them in the 17th century, he did not become an important person at Christmas until the Novelist Washington Irving put him in a novel that he wrote in 1809. This first Santa Claus was still known as St. Nicholas, he did smoke a pipe, and fly around in a wagon without any reindeer, but he did not have his red suit or live at the North Pole, he did however bring presents to children every year.

In 1863 He was given the name Santa Claus and bore the red suit, pipe, and his reindeer and sleigh.

Now Christmas celebrations vary greatly between regions of the United States, because of the variety of nationalities which have settled in it.

In Pennsylvania, the Moravians build a landscape, called a putz - under the Christmas tree, while in the same state the Germans are given gifts by Belsnickle, who taps them with his switch if they have misbehaved.

Early European settlers brought many traditions to the United States. Many settled in the early days in the South, these settlers would send Christmas greetings to their distant neighbors by shooting firearms and letting off fireworks. In Hawaii this practice is still in use as under the sunny skies, Santa Claus arrives by boat and Christmas dinner is eaten outdoors.

In Alaska, a star on a pole is taken from door to door, followed by Herod's Men, who try to capture the star. Colonial doorways are often decorated with pineapple, a symbol of hospitality.

In Alaska, boys and girls with lanterns on poles carry a large figure of a star from door to door. They sing carols and are invited in for supper.

In Washington D.C., a huge, spectacular tree is lit ceremoniously when the President presses a button and turns on the tree's lights.

In Boston, carol singing festivities are famous. The singers are accompanied by hand bells.

In New Orleans, a huge ox is paraded around the streets decorated with holly and with ribbons tied to its horns.

In Arizona, the Mexican ritual called Las Posadas is kept up. This is a ritual procession and play representing the search of Mary and Joseph for a room at the inn. Families play the parts and visit each other's houses enacting and re-enacting the drama and, at the same time, having a look at each family's crib.

In Hawaii, Christmas starts with the coming of the Christmas Tree Ship, which is a ship bringing a great load of Christmas fare. Santa Claus also arrives by boat.

*In California, Santa Claus sweeps in on a surf board.*

In America the traditional Christmas dinner is roast turkey with vegetables and sauces. For dessert it is rich, fruity Christmas pudding with brandy sauce. Mince pies, pastry cases filled with a mixture of chopped dried fruit.

The majority of Americans celebrate Christmas with the exchange of gifts and greetings and with family visits. For many, the day begins on Christmas Eve with the Midnight Mass. At Christmas it snows in many states, so dinner is usually eaten indoors. Dinner usually is roast turkey, goose, duck or ham served with cranberry sauce, then plum pudding or pumpkin pie followed by nuts and fruit.

American homes are decorated with holly, mistletoe and branches of trees, most have a Christmas tree hung with electric lights, tinsel, baubles, and strings of popcorn and candy canes.

In Colorado, an enormous star is placed on the mountain, it can be seen for many kilometers around, while in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, a star is lit in early December.

Polish Americans on Christmas Eve spread hay on their kitchen floor and under the tablecloth to remind them of a stable and a manger. When they make up the table for dinner two extra places are set up for Mary and the Christ Child in case they should knock at the door to ask for shelter.

In Philadelphia, a procession called a mummers parade runs for a whole day with bands, dancers and people in fancy dress.

There are two homes for Santa Claus in the United States one is in Torrington, Connecticut, where Santa and his helpers give out presents. The other home is in Wilmington, New York, where a village for Santa and his reindeer is located.

In Arizona they follow the Mexican traditions called Las Posadas. Families play out the parts of Mary and Joseph searching for somewhere to stay. They form a procession and visit their friends' and neighbors' homes where they admire each family's Nativity crib. In parts of New Mexico, people place lighted candles in paper bags filled with sand on streets and rooftops to light the way for the Christ Child.

**Christmas in Argentina**

People go to the church with family, then come back to a family gathering. At midnight after eating they toast, then the adults' dance while younger people go out to see the fireworks. After this they go to sleep, but not before they open the presents under the Christmas tree. That day is very special for because they are Christian and celebrate Jesus' birth on the 24th of December.

The dinner food is pork, turkey, and a great variety of meals. Then the table is covered with sweet things, cider, beer, and juice for consuming while waiting for the time of the toast. After the toast all the family chat, others play.

Houses are decorated with red and white garlands; on the door Father Christmas's Boots are placed. The Christmas tree is decorated with colored lights, ornaments and Father Christmas placed on top of it. Mothers make different kinds of meals such as roasted turkey, roasted pork, stuffed tomatoes, mince pies, Christmas's bread and puddings. The toast: drink prepared with different kinds of fruit which is cut into pieces, then it is mixed with juice and cider.

**Christmas in Austria**

The feast of St Nicholas marks the beginning of Christmas in Austria. The saint accompanied by the devil asks children for a list of their good and bad deeds. Good children are given sweets, toys and nuts. Gifts that are placed under the tree are opened after dinner on Christmas Eve.

Brass instruments play chorale music room church steeples, and carol singers, carrying blazing torches and a manger from house to house, gather on the church steps.

Silent Night was first sung in 1818, in the village church of Oberndorf. There is a story told of how Christmas was almost spoiled for the villagers that year.

On Christmas Eve, the priest went into the church and found that the organ was not working. The leather bellows that are used to pump the air through the pipes were full of holes. Christmas without music would not do so the priest showed the organist Franz Bauer a new Christmas hymn he had written. Franz quickly composed a tune for it that could be played on a guitar. So Oberndorf had music after all.

In Austria baked carp is served for the traditional Christmas dinner.

December 6 in Austria is when Heiliger Nikolaus or St. Nicholas, rewards good children with sweets, nuts and apples.

On December 24, the Christ Child brings presents and the Christmas tree for the children. The children wait until they hear a bell tinkling. Then they enter a special room where the Christmas tree is waiting all decorated with candles, ornaments and candies. The whole family sings Christmas carols and wishes each other:

**Christmas in Brazil**

Brazilians are a mix of different ethnic people, and as a former Portuguese colony, they have many Christmas customs which originate from this heritage.

One tradition is to create a nativity scene or Presйpio. The word originates from the Hebrew word "presepium" which means the bed of straw upon which Jesus first slept in Bethlehem. The Presйpio is common in northeastern Brazil. Nowadays presйpios are set up in December and displayed in churches, homes, and stores.

Papai Noel or Father Noel is the gift-bringer in Brazil. According to legend, he lives in Greenland. When he arrives in Brazil, he usually wears silk clothing due to the summer heat.

A huge Christmas dinner includes turkey, ham, colored rice, and wonderful vegetables and fruit dishes.

Devout Catholics often attend Midnight Mass or Missa do Galo. The mass has this name because the rooster announces the coming day and the Missa do Galo finishes at 1 AM on Christmas morning! On December 25th, Catholics go to church, but the masses are mostly late afternoon, because people enjoy sleeping late after the dinner called Ceia de Natal or going to the beach.

Decorations include fresh flowers picked from the garden. Fireworks go off in the skies over the cites and huge Christmas "trees" of electric lights can be seen against the night skies in major cities such as Brasilia, San Paolo, and Rio de Janeiro.

In Brazil there is folk dancing and singing and the festivities go on until January 6th, which the Brazilians refer to as Three Kings Day. January 6th is supposed to be the day when three wise men visited Jesus to bring him gifts.

**Christmas in Canada**

Christmas celebrations are quite similar in the variety to America.

In some provinces, a big winter festival, called Sinck tuck, is celebrated by the Eskimos, with dancing and a present-giving party.

In Labrador, turnips are saved from the summer harvest and are given to children, with a lighted candle pushed into a hollowed out hole.

In Nova Scotia, a country settled by Scottish highlanders, songs and carols brought from Britain two centuries ago are sung each Christmas morning.

Also in Nova Scotia, during the twelve days of Christmas small groups of belsnicklers, or masked mummers, appear in neighborhoods, ringing bells, making noise, seeking candy or other treats. The hosts may try to guess who the mummers are and if they guess right the mummer removes his or her disguise and stops making rude noises and actions. Children may be quizzed by the mummers on their behavior if they say they have been good they are rewarded with candy.

In Quebec they display Crиches or nativity scenes in their homes as the Christmas decorations. After attending midnight mass, families may be served tourtiere or pork pie. Another favorite food is Boulettes or small meatballs. A Christmas banquet is called a reveillon.

In British Columbia Christmas turkey may be accompanied by either fresh or smoked salmon.

In Canada the traditional Christmas dinner is roast turkey with vegetables and sauces. For dessert it is rich, fruity Christmas pudding with brandy sauce. Mince pies, pastry cases filled with a mixture of chopped dried fruit.

**Christmas in China**

The Christian children of China decorate trees with colorful ornaments. These ornaments are made from paper in the shapes of flowers, chains and lanterns. They also hang muslin stockings hoping that Christmas Old Man will fill them with gifts and treats. The Chinese Christmas trees are called "Trees of Light." Santa Claus is called Dun Che Lao Ren which means "Christmas Old Man.".

The non-Christian Chinese call this season the Spring Festival and celebrate with many festivities that include delicious meals and pay respects to their ancestors. The children are the main focus of these celebrations, they receive new clothes and toys, eat delectable food and watch firecrackers displays.

**Christmas in England**

The English enjoy beautiful Christmas music. They love to decorate Christmas Trees and hang up evergreen branches.

One England's customs is mummering. In the Middle Ages, people called mummers put on masks and acted out Christmas plays. These plays are still performed in towns and villages.

The English gift giver is called Father Christmas. He wears a long red or green robe, and leaves presents in stockings on Christmas Eve. However, the gifts are not usually opened until the following afternoon.

Christmas in England began in AD 596, when St Augustine landed on her shores with monks who wanted to bring Christianity to the Anglo Saxons.

Father Christmas delivers them during the night before Christmas. The Children leave an empty stocking or pillowcase hanging at the end of the bed. In the morning they hope it will be full of presents.

In England the day after Christmas is called Boxing Day because boys used to go round collecting money in clay boxes. When the boxes were full, they broke them open.

In England Christmas dinner was usually eaten at Midday on December 25, during daylight.

In England, the only thing that people ate on the day before the feast was Frumenty, which is, was a kind of porridge made from corn. Over the years the recipe changed. Eggs, fruit, spice, lumps of meat and dried plums were added. The whole mixture was wrapped in a cloth and boiled. This is how plum pudding began.

In England the traditional Christmas dinner is roast turkey with vegetables and sauces. For dessert it is rich, fruity Christmas pudding with brandy sauce. Mince pies, pastry cases filled with a mixture of chopped dried fruit.

In England also they elect Boy Bishops in commemoration of St. Nicholas compassion for children. These mock bishops were allowed to do the duties of the ecclesiastic except deliver the Mass.

*\*\*\*\*Information from Suzanna Austin\*\*\*\*\**

One point I would like to raise is on how Christmas is celebrated in England. As an English family living in rural England we have the pleasure of a traditional English Christmas with all the trimmings each year. You mention the Christmas trees and evergreen branches the christmas trees are a tradition we adopted from Germany during Victoria's reign and the branches are mistletoe and holly for symbolic reasons. As Christmas is a religious festival many people here still attend midnight mass on Christmas eve and this is usually seen as the start of festivities. Again the reason presents are not opened until afternoon is that we wait until after morning service / morning mass. Your description of the gluttonous amounts consumed by the average person at Christmas dinner is very sparse, typically there are 2 roasted meats 1 being either goose (traditional) or turkey (american) covered in bacon and stuffed with sausagemeat, the other meat being a gammon. A variety of seasonal vegetables but essential are roast potatoes and brussel sprouts and always kilted sausages (also called sausages in blankets). For dessert Christmas pudding with brandy butter or brandy custard / cream, the pudding is so rich in alcohol that it is usually ignited before serving. Mince pies not only contain dried fruit but also suet and brandy. Christmas cake is also eaten and is traditionally made a couple of months (end of September) before Christmas and matured by regularly feeding it brandy. Incidentally boxing day derives its name from the practice of opening the alms boxes in church and distributing the money collected amongst the poor in the parish.

**Christmas in Finland**

Everybody's house is given a very good clean in readiness for Christmas. Hours are spent in the kitchen cooking and baking special treats for the festive season.

Fir trees are felled, tied onto sleds, and taken home to be decorated.

A sheaf of grain is often tied to a pole, together with nuts and seeds and placed in the garden for the birds. Many of the peasants will not eat their Christmas dinner until the birds have had their dinner.

The meal was begun as soon as the first star appeared in the sky.

In Finland the Christmas tree is set up on Christmas Eve. Apples and other fruits, candies, paper flags, cotton and tinsel are used as decorations, and candles are used for lighting it.

The Christmas festivities are preceded by a visit to the famous steam baths, after which everyone dressed in clean clothes in preparation for the Christmas dinner, which is served at 5-7 in the evening.

Christmas gifts may be given out before or after the dinner. The children do not hang up stockings, but Santa Claus comes in person, often accompanied by as many as half a dozen Christmas elves to distribute the presents.

The main dish of the dinner is boiled codfish served snowy white and fluffy, with allspice, boiled potatoes, and cream sauce. The dried cod has been soaked for a week in a lye solution, then in clear water to soften it to the right texture. Also on the menu is roast suckling pig or a roasted fresh ham, mashed potatoes, and vegetables.

After dinner the children go to bed while the older people stay up to chat with visitors and drink coffee until about midnight.

Christmas Day services in the churches begin at six in the morning. It is a day for family visits and reunions. In some parts of the country the Star Boys tour the countryside singing Christmas songs. During all these days the people keep wishing each other a "Merry Yule."

**Christmas in Great Britain**

In Great Britain the hustle and bustle of the season begins well before Christmas and there is barely anytime for a break until the Twelfth night. There is preparation going on of foods, the sending of Christmas cards, the decorating of houses and churches, and the readying of gifts keep everyone busy even the youngest family members.

On Christmas Eve youngsters hang up their stockings on the ends of the beds or by the chimney so that when Father Christmas comes he can leave them something.

On Christmas morning the family traditionally opens their presents and prepares for a big feast which typically is served just after midday. The table gleams with the best china and glassware, and at every place on the table there is a cracker. The meal begins with a toast, followed by the popping of the crackers. After the meal they sit down in front of the Television for the traditional Christmas speech of the British Monarch.

In the afternoon they exchange visits with neighbors other family members.

Some churches in Great Britain have a Christingle service on the fourth Sunday of Advent. This is a carol service of Scandinavian origin at which every child received an orange and candle wrapped in a red ribbon. The candle represents Jesus and the ribbon stands for the blood of Christ and the love of God embracing the world.

In Britain, children write their letters to Father Christmas and then throw them into the fireplace so they will float up the chimney and fly to the North Pole. If the lists catch fire first, they have to rewrite them.

At Christmas dinner, a plum pudding is served with little treasures hidden inside that bring their finders good luck. Britain was the first country to hang up mistletoe.

**Christmas in India**

Christians in India decorate banana or mango trees. They also light small oil-burning lamps as Christmas decorations and fill their churches with red flowers.

They give presents to family members and baksheesh, or charity, to the poor people.

In India, the poinsettia is in flower and so the churches are decorated with this brilliant bloom for the Christmas Midnight Mass.

In South India, Christians put small clay lamps on the rooftops and walls of their houses at Christmas, just as the Hindus do during their festival called Diwali.

**Christmas in Italy**

The Christmas season in Italy goes for three weeks, starting 8 days before Christmas known as the Novena. During this period, children go from house to house reciting Christmas poems and singing.

In some parts shepherds bring musical instruments into the villages, play and sing Christmas songs.

In the week before Christmas children go from house to house dressed as shepherds, playing pipes, singing and reciting Christmas poems. They are given money to buy presents.

A strict feast is observed for 24 hours before Christmas Eve, and is followed by a celebration meal, in which a light Milanese cake called panettone features as well as chocolate.

Presents and empty boxes, are drawn from the Urn of Fate - lucky dip, which always contains one gift per person. By twilight, candles are lighted around the family crib known as the Presepio, prayers are said, and children recite poems.

At noon on Christmas Day the pope gives his blessing to crowds gathered in the huge Vatican square.

In Italy the children wait until Epiphany, January 6, for their presents. According to tradition, the presents are delivered by a kind ugly witch called Befana on a broomstick. It was said that she was told by the three kings that the baby Jesus was born, she was busy and delayed visiting the baby.

She missed the Star lost her way and has been flying around ever since, leaving presents at every house with children in case he is there. She slides down chimneys, and fills stockings and shoes with good things for good children and it is said leaves coal for children who are not so good.

*Submitted by Michela Sacchi*

On christmas Eve the dinner is called cenone which is a traditional dish of eel.

Christmas lunch is Tortellini in Brodo which is filled pasta parcels in broth, also served is cappone which is boiled capon, or roasts are served in central Italy.

Another famous cake is pandoro which originated from Verona.

**Christmas in New Zealand**

In New Zealand Christmas is combined with summer holidays, so as well as present-buying and parties, families are preparing for trips to the beach. Shops are decorated with Father Christmas in his red cloak and white beard, as well as snow scenes.

The New Zealand traditions of Christmas have mostly come through the English settlers who began arriving their in the late 18th Century. In the last 20 or 30 years the persona of Father Christmas had changed and he is referred to as Santa Claus and has become much more like the Santa of the United States and Ireland. As well people have been forced to change as a result of the Maori culture. The spirits and creatures of the Maori culture resemble the elves and gnomes of European Christmas traditions.

They celebrate the story of the birth of Jesus Christ with a special service, which is appropriate to New Zealanders way of life as they had no motels, and they have many shepherds who take care of their flocks, in doing so they can see the true meaning of Christmas.

In New Zealand the traditional Christmas dinner is roast turkey with vegetables and sauces. For dessert it is rich, fruity Christmas pudding with brandy sauce. Mince pies, pastry cases filled with a mixture of chopped dried fruit.

**Christmas in Poland**

Traditionally, Advent is an important season in the Polish year, with special church services, known as Roraty, being held every morning at 6am. The four Sundays of Advent are said to represent the 4,000 years of waiting for Christ.

During Advent and, in some homes, on Christmas Eve, bees wax or plain wax is poured on water, and fortunes are told from the shapes which emerge.

Special tasks carried out during Advent are the baking of the Christmas piernik or honey cake, and the making of Christmas decorations. Pierniki are made in a great variety of shapes, including hearts, animals and St Nicholas figures. Traditional decorations include the pajaki, which are handmade mobiles, stars and decorated egg shells. Pajaki are traditional decorations, rather lots of bomb lets, colorful paper chains and lots of electric lights.

Beautifully lit Christmas trees are placed in all public arenas, outside churches and in homes. Traditionally the trees are decorated with shiny apples, gift walnuts, beautifully wrapped chocolate shapes and many homemade decorations and candles. On the top of the tree is a star or a glittering top piece. In many homes, sparklers are hung on the branches of the trees giving it a magical air. Sometimes the trees are left standing until February 2nd, the feast day of St Mary of the Candle of Lightning.

During Advent, the Gwiadorze or star carriers or carol singers, used to begin wandering through the towns and villages and this would continue until Epiphany. Some of the Gwiadorze sang carols, others recited verses or put on Szopke or puppet show, or herody or nativity scenes. The last two customs are developments from traditional manger scenes or Jaselka or crib.

Christmas Eve, Wigilia, is an important part of the Polish Christmas, in fact, the most important rituals are celebrated on this day.

A traditional food found in Poland is Oplatek which is a piece of bread pressed with a holy picture on the surface. Oplatek is more symbolic than real food. We celebrate with at least 12 different vegetarian dishes like: mushroom soup, carp, cabbage with pea, stuffed dumplings, and shells macaroni with poppy "makielki". In some homes - some hay is put under the tablecloth (it is connected with Christ's manger).

People once carried these oplatek from house to house and wish their neighbors a Merry Christmas. Nowadays, the bread is mostly shared with members of the family and immediate neighbors. As each person shares the bread, they would have to do two things: forgive any hurts that have occurred over the past year and to wish the person all the happiness in the coming year.

**Christmas in Russia**

In Russia the religious festival of Christmas is being replaced by the Festival of Winter but there are some traditions that are still kept up in some parts of the country.

In the traditional Russian Christmas, special prayers are said and people fast, sometimes for 39 days, until January 6th Christmas Eve, when the first evening star in appears in the sky. Then begins a twelve course supper in honor of each of the twelve apostles - fish, beet soup or Borsch, cabbage stuffed with millet, cooked dried fruit and much more.

Hay is spread on the floors and tables to encourage horse feed to grow in the coming year and people make clucking noises to encourage their hens to lay eggs.

On Christmas Day, hymns and carols are sung. People gather in churches which have been decorated with the usual Christmas trees or Yelka, flowers and colored lights.

Christmas dinner includes a variety of different meats - goose and suckling pig are favorites.

Babushka is a traditional Christmas figure who distributes presents to children. Her name means grandmother and the legend is told that she declined to go with the wise men to see Jesus because of the cold weather. However, she regretted not going and set off to try and catch up, filling her basket with presents. She never found Jesus, and that is why she visits each house, leaving toys for good children.

The role of Father Christmas was played by Dedushka Moroz or Grandfather Christmas.

Babushka is a traditional Christmas figure who distributes presents to children. The word ''Babushka'' is translated to English as a grand-mother!

A traditional Christmas figure is Snegurochka. She is a grand-daughter of Ded Moroz Photo of the two.

**Christmas in Vietnam**

Traditional Vietnamese religions are Buddhism and the Chinese philosophies of Taoism and Confucianism. However, during French rule, many people became Christians.

Christmas is one of the four most important festivals of the Vietnamese year, they being the birthday of Buddha, the New Year and the mid-autumn festival. Although the Christians observed the religious rituals of Christmas.

On Christmas Eve the Christians would attend a midnight Mass. After Church people would return to their homes for the most important meal the Christmas supper. The dinner usually consisted of chicken soup, and wealthier people ate turkey and Christmas Pudding.

The European customs of Santa Claus and the Christmas tree were popular and children would leave their shoes out on Christmas Eve