

## **Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ (Christmas) (January 7<sup>th</sup> (December 25<sup>th</sup>))**

Since the early days of Christianity, the followers of Christ celebrated Christ's birthday known as Christmas. In the second century it spread throughout the whole Church. By the middle of the fourth century, it became an official feast binding on the Eastern as well as Western Church.

On January 6, (Dec. 24), that is, on Christmas Eve the Ukrainians have "a Holy Supper" when the first evening star appears in the sky. The supper consists of non-meat foods, for the day of Christmas eve is devoted to prayer, fasting and strict abstinence.

The floor is covered with straw and the table with hay. This is in remembrance that Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger. A white tablecloth is spread over the table. In the center of the table a large lighted candle is placed, which reminds the inhabitants of the star of Bethlehem.

The traditional supper, consisting of twelve plates, begins with a common prayer led by the head of the family. After the prayer he distributes the "prospora" (little pieces of bread with honey) to each member, extending his wishes and greetings.

The supper consists of such items as kutia (boiled wheat with honey and poppy seeds), borsch (special beet soup), holubtsi (cabbage rolls), pyrohy (boiled rolls filled with mashed potatoes or sour cabbage or cheese), fish or herring, etc. Each of the twelve items is in remembrance of the twelve apostles.

A sheaf of rye is placed at the corner of the room as a symbol of the fertility of the Ukrainian soil).

At the time of the supper the members of the family sing Christmas carols. Besides, groups of carolers visit the homes and carol "koliada" during the course of the evening. The carolers carry a little grotto in which are the manger, the shepherds and the newly-born Infant Jesus. There are also carolers who carry a six- or eight-pointed star, with two surfaces. The star is mounted upon a rod. Within the star a lighted candle is placed. The star reminds the people of the star that shone over the grotto when Christ was born. The carolers represent the angels and the shepherds at the crib.

Caroling during Christmas is very popular. It is our traditional custom confirmed by long centuries. The carols koliada glorify the Divine Infant Jesus and His Mother Mary, and instill religious truths, especially that of the divinity of our Lord, into the minds and hearts of the people.

Carols had their origin in the seventeenth century. The oldest carol and the most popular s "Boh predvichny," that is, Eternal God is born."

Carols are divided into two groups: "koliady" and "schedrivky." The first ones have a religious character. The others are peculiar songs which express greetings to the farmer or in general to the head of the family.

The church services of Christians are inspiring and beautiful. During the Christmas season, the people greet one another with a joyous salutation, "Khrystos razhdayetsja" (Christ is born), in response to which the greeted person answers, "Slavyte Yeho," (Praise Him!).

+++

Source: *My Divine Friend: Sunday And Holy Day Missal In Accordance With The Latest Text.*

Published By The Sacred Oriental Congregation, By Rev. Michael Schudio, CSSR. The Redeemer's Voice, Yorkton, Saskatchewan, Canada, 1959. Made in Belgium.