

Christmas in Many Foreign Countries Time of Feasting, Religion, Customs

GIVER MAKES GIFTS IN NORWAY, FINLAND, GREECE, AUSTRIA, FRANCE

By Don Wenzl
Emerald Reporter

Christmas in European countries is a feast of religion and custom and not so much a commercialized thing as in America, foreign students said in recent interviews.

All said that in their country, gifts given were made by the hand of the giver.

Arne M. Borgnes, of Oslo, Norway, said cooking for Christmas is begun three weeks ahead of time. "It is a housemother's pride to have as many different kinds of cookies as possible. One special one we call the 'Fattigmann' the poor man's cookie, which is a dark morsel made with syrup, and shaped like little men."

Lutefisk and Steak

The big dinner with lutefisk and rib steak is served Christmas eve. Then the children are taken into the room where they are surprised by the decorated Christmas tree, and Santa comes then.

In the countryside, some believe that Santa Claus lives in a barn, and on Christmas eve a bowl of pudding is left outside for the old man.

Oslo's Philharmonic gives the Messiah shortly before Christmas, and on the eve, children dressed as Santa Claus visit the homes, sing carols and are given candies.

In Finland

For Finns' little Christmas, big Christmas and the sauna hold sway. Viola Erikson of Helsinki, Finland said the little Christmas is celebrated three weeks before the big feast.

"A little tree is used, little gifts are given and young ladies dressed in white dresses and wearing green crowns of leaves represent St. Lucia on her feast. The Scandinavian countries each elect a national Queen Lucia, and she carries the countries good wishes to each of the other countries."

Through the Window

Finnish children are told Santa's helpers look through the windows and return to Santa's mountain in northern Finland to report on the children. Miss Erikson said, "We almost lost that mountain to the Russians."

On Christmas eve the special meal is eaten. Everyone is anxious to eat the rice pudding, which contains one white almond. Whoever gets the almond will be married before the year is out.

"The people all go to church at six on Christmas morning. After service they race in their horse drawn sleighs to see who will get

home first," Miss Erikson stated.

Athanasios Mourdjinis, of Athens thinks Greeks have the right idea. All Greek civil servants draw double pay for the month of December as a Christmas gift. "If they don't get it, they strike," he said.

"Greeks are not permitted by law to cut down Christmas trees, since the invaders ravaged our forests, and the trees must be given time to return," Mourdjinis stated.

Religious Minded

"Many go to midnight services, and the liturgy lasts several hours," Mourdjinis asserted. "Our people are more religious minded during the Christmas season. At the church all the lights are turned out, and the priest sings a psalm saying 'Christ is born.' All the lights come on slowly and the choir repeats the psalm."

For Austrians and Elfriede Kralik, of Vienna, Christmas season begins the first Sunday of Advent, the fourth Sunday before Christmas. The Advent wreath, a woolen wheel, with four spokes, each containing a candle and the rim of the wheel wrapped with firs to form the wreath, is a national custom. One candle is lit on each Sunday of Advent.

December 6 is big feast for the children. "The rumpus comes to the door, and rattles bones and chains against it to scare the children. He gives the mother a bundle of switches to be used for spankings during the coming year."

All's Forgiven

Then St. Nicholas comes, all is forgiven, he tells the children to be good and then gives them candy and nuts.

Austrians, predominantly Catholic, consider the Midnight Mass a part of national custom. The day before Christmas, its vigil, is a fish day. When the people return home from Mass at two in the morning, they have a Christmas breakfast of sausages and kretzbrot, a fruit cake.

Manger Scene

Each family has a "Krippe," a hand made manger scene, with Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds and the animals under the tree.

Children in Austria are brought gifts by the Krist Kink, the Christ Child, rather than by Santa Claus. Each gift is handmade and has the person's name on it.

In France too, Christmas is mostly a religious celebration.

Janine Etchepare said most Frenchmen attend Midnight Mass

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Panama, Peru, Palestine's Like U.S.

By Dottie Luebke
Emerald Reporter

Christmas everywhere is a time of celebration and feasting. Foreign students from Panama, Peru and Palestine revealed in an interview that their native customs are not so different from the annual observance in the United States. Three girls from these respective countries told about Christmas in their homes.

Papa Noel is the Santa Claus of Peru, Inez Pozzi-Escot, Lima, Peru, said, and he brings the gifts. Everybody receives their presents in their shoes which are left beside the bed.

Became a Godfather

The traditional Christmas carols are sung only by the higher social class and are unknown to the poor of Lima. The center of each Christmas celebration is the manger scene. Miss Pozzi-Escot described these scenes as varying from house to house. On Jan. 6 the scene is put away by inviting guests to the house to become a godparent of one of the figures.

The spirit of giving is not confined to close friends and relatives in Peru. The grocer, the baker and mailman all get presents and they in turn give gifts to every family.

The custom of trees and cards is used quite widely in both Peru and Panama although all homes do not have trees.

In Panama

Consuelo Silvera, Panama, said that Panamanians recognize Santa Claus as a symbol of the American influence. He is found in every department store. Children are told the Holy Child brings their gifts and leaves them in their beds.

"Christmas in Palestine is highlighted by the procession to Bethlehem which begins early on the 24th," Ghaida Meo said. Services start in the Church of the Nativity at midnight and are almost continuous until Christmas afternoon. The services are broadcast for those who cannot get inside the church.

The manger scene plays an important part in the Christmas decorations here too. The figures are placed under the tree which has been constructed of pine branches.

Presents are given to children while friends send each other flowers or candy. The children usually receive their gifts at the breakfast table and know that they come from their parents for being good.

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