

**Aleko – online, issue 67, 24<sup>th</sup> December 2012**

### **CHRISTMAS IN BULGARIA**

In the Bulgarian Orthodox **tradition Christmas Eve** – in Bulgarian "Badni Večer" ("БЪДНИ вечер") – the night when Jesus Christ was born, the entire family comes around a **Christmas** table marking the end of **Lent**. At midnight, carol singers may begin their rounds, calling at neighbors' houses, or the family may attend a midnight mass, bearing candles, ushering in **Christmas Day**.

The carol men - bachelors, engaged and younger or soon married men are called Koledari. Preparation begins at Ignazhden. They learn the Christmas songs, create groups and choose the group leader, who is older and married. They carry long sticks to put **kravai** which are round breads with holes in them.

Christmas time is strictly defined by tradition - from midnight to dawn on Christmas. In folk then appear bogey, vampires, ghouls and more supernatural beings. It is believed that with their Christmas songs, the carolers have the power to drive them away.

The Koledari walk from house to house in groups, always starting in the east. In every home they perform songs of praise of farmers and best wishes. The owner invites the young men around the table and serves them wine and brandy, and then a girl gives them round breads. They also give them money, meat, beans, flour, wine and more. The carolers sing songs for each of the family -from the oldest (as in seniority and in respect) to the youngest. The songs are for health and long life, property fertility (fertility and prosperity), luck, love, happiness and good meeting, for joy, games and laughter. Bulgarian Christmas songs are countless, but the most loved ones are those of beautiful girls who outshine the sun or order a shirt from the Virgin Mary, out singing the nightingale, expecting their first love. Songs of brave young men who ride horse racing with the sun, chasing deer, fighting with Turkish troops, going into the underworld to bring out their loved ones from there. Wishes and blessings occupy prominent place in these songs.

One of the main objectives of Christmas carol tradition is to announce the birth of a new state of the universe, order and organization of the world. All families stay around the fire waiting for the Christmas carolers. Around the fire they sing songs, calling for good luck and happiness. People believe that the fire has enough power to make it all come true. The yule log as the fire is also magical. Splinters from the yule log are buried in the vineyards for fertility and good wine, or are being thrown into the river for health and longevity.

On Christmas the table is not cleared all day. Ash is kept all the days from Ignazhden to Jordan day, and then collected and used to heal various diseases throughout the year. When the host gets from the table, walks bent forward, so that the branches of the trees are bent to the ground covered with fruit during the year. Fruit trees are tied with straw to be fertile.

*Zorka Hristova – Primary school teacher*

### **Christmas around the world**

We all know Bulgarian Christmas traditions, but do we know how people celebrate around the world. I will introduce you to many different traditions of peoples from different parts of the world. Starting with one of my favorite countries:

**SPAIN:** This sunny country has numerous fiestas and traditions. When Christmas comes, the Spanish family gathers around a large table. In this country, children get their gifts until after

the New Year and not by Santa, but by the three wise men, who bring gifts to good children. Just before New Year everyone prepares twelve grapes. They need to eat them quickly, because if they fail to do so till midnight, then they will have bad luck throughout the year. On the table there is necessarily a lot of fish and seafood. There are also a lot of almonds and fruit. For dessert, kids eat Christmas cookies - torones. They are made from honey and almonds, which resemble the Bulgarian halva.

I continue now with another wonderful country.

**FRANCE:** The French are famous for their beautifully decorated trees, and here are some of their customs. Christmas begins with a recreation of the birth of Jesus, called Creche. For this purpose they use small clay figurines - santos. As in Bulgaria, in France they also leave the Yule log to burn. After the Mass the family gathers around the table. Stuffed goose, turkey with chestnuts, oysters and fruit are served. For dessert they all eat and cake, mostly chocolate cake, called *Buche de Noel* (Christmas stump).

I will now tell you about:

**ITALY:** In Italy, on December 6, Saint Nicholas hangs little gifts on doors, but nobody sees him. On December 13 obedient children receive small gifts from St. Lucia. On December 23, children dress up as shepherds and sing carols from door to door. In return they receive sweets or money. On Christmas Eve, families exchange gifts. The day ends with a midnight mass. On January 6<sup>th</sup>, Italian children receive presents from the good witch Befana. She flies and puts the gifts down the chimney. Bad children often receive from her a piece of charcoal, made from chocolate. On the table at Christmas there are fish, turkey, chicken, pasta and Christmas cakes.

Here is information about Christmas in:

**SWEDEN:** Christmas holidays are associated with traditional dress outfits. They start from December 23 - the day of St. Lucia. Early in the morning the oldest girl in the family paints a portrait of St. Lucia, puts on a white robe and wears a crown made of candy. During the day, the girl treats her parents with coffee and wine. Christmas tree is decorated with ginger cookies and flowers. After dinner a family member, dressed as a dwarf, gives gifts while singing funny rhymes. On the table there is ham, pork, many ginger products and biscuits, thick mustard, fish, milk and rice, stew with potatoes and mulled wine.

*Ioan Shterev – 5v class*

### **A LETTER TO SANTA CLAUS**

Joyous celebration approaching,  
With singing, dancing and fun.  
Santa in the snow  
Comes on a wonderful sleigh.  
I decided to ask him for a gift,  
So I sat down and wrote:  
Dear Santa with white beard,  
How I'm waiting for you to come  
To tell you: I have been good  
And I will secretly whisper  
That I did three mischiefs  
But my Mum forgave me!  
Hurry! It's already Christmas,

I know you are coming from afar,  
I'm waiting for a nice toy,  
Otherwise I will cry...!  
*Sonya Ilieva – 5v class*

### **CHRISTMAS MAGIC**

I'm Linda. I'm sixteen years old. I lost my eye sight when I was younger. Although I can't see at all, I can make beautiful tablecloths - my grandmother taught me. It's very hard work. It's Christmas time. I believe that Christmas miracles happen. My dream is to see the whole world one day - to see the birds, the plants, the flowers, the big city.

Today is Christmas Eve! I still expect my miracle. The next day I understood that I'm going into hospital. "Why?"-I asked.-"We haven't got enough money for my operation!" My mother told me that there was a Christmas Charity Bazaar and all my tablecloths have been sold. The sold items have reached the amount I need for my operation to regain my sight. That was my miracle! Do you believe in your Christmas miracle?

*Ivona Nedelcheva – 6 a class*

*клуб "Аз общувам с Европа на английски език"*

### **WONDERS OF CHRISTMAS**

I had a friend. His name was John. He was very rich but disabled. He had everything, the only problem he had was that he didn't have any friends. I was the only friend he had.

On Christmas he gave me a very expensive present. I was poor and gave him just a hug, smile and a good wish. His biggest dream was to play football. On 25th December my wish came true. I learned him how to move his hands and legs. He was getting better and better. After two years he could play football with me. He became better player than me.

That story is an example that on Christmas day the miracles come true.

*Ivailo Rusinov – 6v class*

*клуб "Аз общувам с Европа на английски език"*