

WHAT IS ADVENT?

What does Advent Mean?

Advent is a term from the Latin word 'adventus' which means 'arrival.'

It is a time of waiting for the arrival of Christmas, the coming of Jesus to earth when he was born as a baby at Bethlehem about two thousand years ago.

What is Advent?

Advent is the new year of the church and the church season that leads to Christmas day.

Advent is the time when we remember that Jesus came into the world in Palestine 2000 years ago and that Jesus also promised one day to return in all His glory.

The Clergy typically wear royal purple vestments during Advent and include an Advent wreath in their Advent services.

When does Advent start?

Advent begins on the Sunday nearest to 30th November and lasts until midnight on Christmas Eve.

There are four Sundays in Advent before 25th December.

What happens during Advent?

During the season of Advent, we prepare for the celebration of the arrival of the Lord into the world through the birth of his Son Jesus Christ. It is also a time to celebrate light in the midst of darkness and a time to look forward to when Jesus will come a second time.

History of Advent

In the 5th Century, Advent began on 11th November and took the form of a six-week fast leading to Christmas. During the 6th century, Advent was reduced to its current length and later fasting was dropped.

What is the Advent Wreath?



The wreath is made of a circle of evergreen branches laid flat to symbolize eternal life. Four candles stand in the circle (3 purple and 1 pink [Sunday 3 – also known as Gaudete Sunday]) and each one represents one of the four Sundays of Advent. In the centre of the circle is a 5th candle (white), the Christ Candle, which is lit on Christmas day.

Why is the Advent Wreath so special?

The circle of the wreath reminds us of God, His eternity and endless mercy, which has no beginning or end.

The green of the wreath speaks of the hope that we have in God, the hope of newness, of renewal, of eternal life.

What do the Advent Candles stand for?

Candles symbolise the light of God coming into the world through the birth of His son, Jesus.

The four traditional advent themes for the four advent Sundays are:

1. **God's people – the candle of Hope**
Hope is like a light shining in a dark place. As we look at the light of this candle, we celebrate the hope we have in Jesus Christ.
2. **The Old Testament Prophets – The candle of Peace**
Peace is like a light shining in a dark place. As we look at this candle, we celebrate the peace we find in Jesus Christ/
3. **John the Baptist – the candle of Love**

Love is like a candle shining in a dark place. As we look at the light of this candle, we celebrate the love we have in Christ.

4. **Mary the mother of Jesus – the candle of Joy**

Joy is like a light shining in a dark place. As we look at this candle, we celebrate the joy we find in Jesus Christ.

The fifth candle represents **the birth of Christ**. The flame of this candle reminds us that He is the light of the world and that, if we follow Him, we will never walk in darkness, but will have the true light of life.

What is Gaudete Sunday?

Certain Sundays throughout the liturgical year have taken their names from the first word in Latin of the Introit, the entrance antiphon at mass. Gaudete Sunday is one of these days.

Gaudete Sunday is a joyous celebration. Although it takes place during the usually penitential period of Advent, Gaudete Sunday serves as a mid-point break from the austere practices to rejoice in the nearness of Jesus' return in three ways.

When Is Gaudete Sunday?

Gaudete Sunday is the third Sunday of Advent. The date usually falls between December 11 to 17 each year.

Where Does the Name Come From?

The Introit for Gaudete Sunday, in both the Traditional Latin Mass and the Novus Ordo, is taken from Philippians 4:4,5: *in Domino semper*, or "rejoice in the Lord always."

Vestments

Like Lent, Advent is a penitential season, so the priest normally wears purple vestments. But on Gaudete Sunday, having passed the midpoint of Advent, the Church lightens the mood a little, and the priest may wear rose vestments. The change in colour provides worshippers with encouragement to continue their spiritual preparation — especially prayer and fasting — for Christmas.

Decor

For the same reason of lightening the mood, the third candle of the Advent wreath, which is first lit on Gaudete Sunday, is traditionally rose-coloured.



Intr. 1. **G** Audé- te * in Dómino sem-per : í-terum dīco,
gau- dé- te : modésti- a véstra nóta sit ómnibus homí-
ni- bus : Dómi-nus pro- pe est. Ni- hil sollí- ci- ti





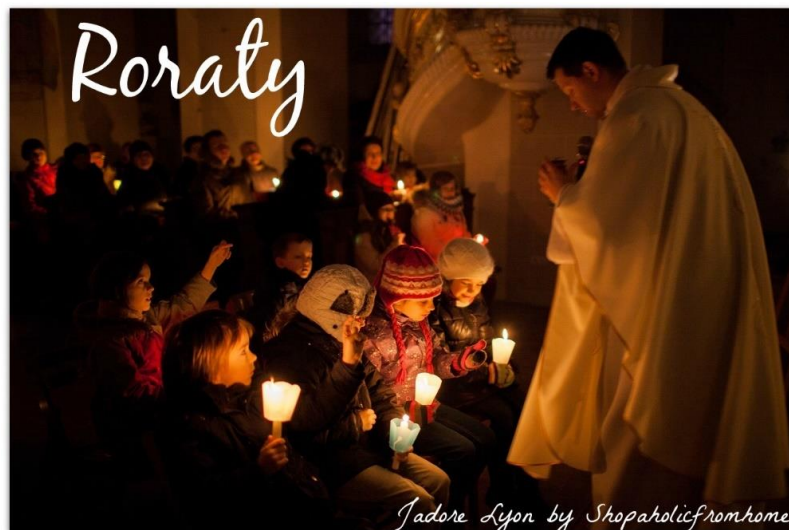
RORATY (LANTERN) MASSES

Roraty

One of the most beautiful traditions of preparing for Christmas in Poland is a mass called "roraty," that is only celebrated during Advent. The mass usually begins before sunrise, in complete darkness. The word "roraty" comes from the first words of the introit, the prayer that begins the mass, which are "Rorate coeli" in Latin, meaning "Heaven, drop the morning dew," and which asks for blessings on the new day that is about to begin.

In no other country is this mass celebrated as solemnly and as beautifully as in Poland. The service symbolizes readiness and vigilance in anticipation of Christ's coming. People who participate in the service bring torches or candles with them, which are lit at certain times during the mass, gradually dispelling the darkness.

This service has a very special atmosphere since it starts in total darkness, before sunrise, and as daybreak slowly comes, candles are lit at the altar and in the hands of the people participating in the service. As the mass comes to an end, the sun has risen and the world is bathed in light, symbolizing the nativity of Christ which brought light and redemption to the world. Roraty have been celebrated in Poland since the 12th century and continue to be celebrated in cities and villages throughout the country to this day.



NEW CHRISTMAS TRADITION

NEW CHRISTMAS TRADITION

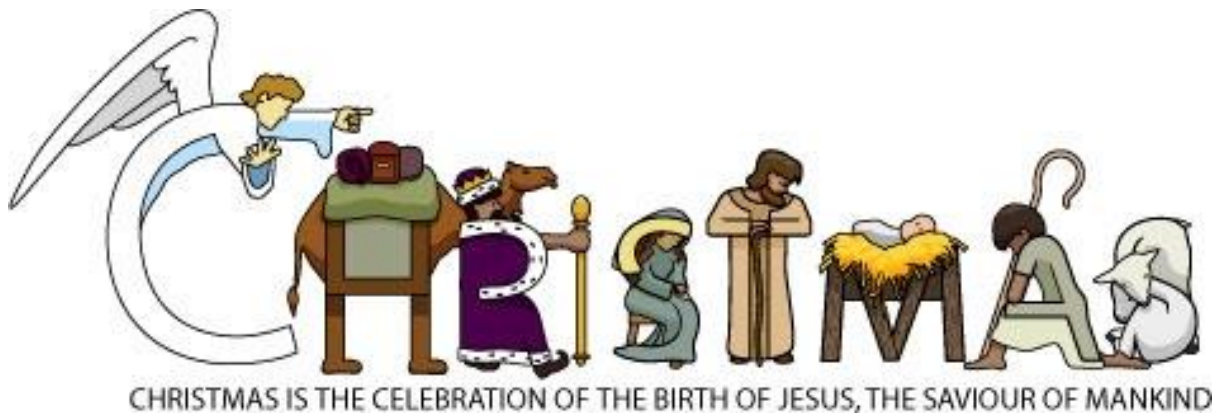
*BEGINNING DECEMBER 1ST,
READ ONE CHAPTER OF THE
GOSPEL OF LUKE IN THE BIBLE
EACH EVENING.*

*THERE ARE 24 CHAPTERS.
ON CHRISTMAS EVE, YOU WILL
HAVE READ AN ENTIRE ACCOUNT
OF JESUS' LIFE AND WAKE UP
CHRISTMAS MORNING KNOWING
'WHO' AND 'WHY' WE CELEBRATE!*

Be Inspired



WHAT IS CHRISTMAS?



Why do we celebrate Christmas?

Every year in December we celebrate the birthday of Jesus Christ. That is why we call this time of the year **Christmas** - we celebrate the **Mass**, or church service, for **Christ**.

Where does the word Christmas come from?

The word Christmas (or Christ's Mass) comes from the Old English Name '**Cristes Maesse**' – **Christ's Mass** – and is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. The first recorded observance occurred in Rome in AD360, but it wasn't until AD440 that the Church fixed a celebration date of 25th December.

Christmas also brings family and friends together to share the much-loved customs and traditions which have been around for centuries

Jesus is Born



And so it was that a few hours later, Mary gave birth to her son in that stable. She wrapped Jesus in strips of cloth and laid Him in a manger full of hay.



POLISH ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS

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.

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!

The smell of tangerines in schools or workplaces is widely thought to mean that Christmas time is about to start.

Roraty Masses

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Jazelka (Nativity Plays)

Before Christmas, children in schools and preschools take part in Jaselka or nativity plays.

Wigilia - 24th December

Christmas Eve is now often the most important day over Christmas. Traditionally it was a day of fasting and abstinence.

Christmas Eve is known as Wigilia (pronounced vee-GHEE-lee-uk) Traditionally the house is cleaned, and everyone wears their best festive clothes.

Christmas Eve is the most holy and meaningful day of the year in Poland. It is a day of waiting for and celebration of the birth of the Christ Child. Wigilia comes from the Latin word "vigilare" which means to wait. Early in the day, the women of the family start preparing the meal.

While the meal is being cooked, the men and children decorate the Christmas tree and set the table.

Kolacja Wigilina (Christmas Eve Supper)

The main Christmas meal is eaten in the evening and is called Kolacja Wigilina or Christmas Eve Supper. It's traditional that no food is eaten until the first star is seen in the sky! So, children look to the night sky to spot the first star!

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. Some people in central Poland say that at midnight the animals can talk. The 12 dishes also symbolize the 12 apostles. Everyone has to eat or at least try some of each dish.

One of the most important dishes is "barszcz" (beetroot soup) and it's obligatory to have it. If you really hate it, you can eat mushroom soup instead! The barszcz may be eaten with "uszka" – little dumplings with mushrooms, or "krokiety" – pancakes with mushrooms and/or cabbage in breadcrumbs which are fried.

Carp is often the main dish of the meal. The fish itself is traditionally bought a few days earlier alive and it swims in the bath until it's killed by the lady of the house. Now most people just buy fillets of carp instead. The carp's scales are said to bring luck and fortune, and some keep scales for a whole year.

"Bigos" is a dish which can be eaten hot or cold. It's made of cabbage, bacon and meats and so is saved for Christmas Day or 26th December. It is made about a week before Christmas Eve and improves each day.

Herrings are very popular and usually served in several ways.

In most houses there is also “kompot z suzu” that is a drink made by boiling dried fruits and fresh apples.

The most popular desserts are “makowiec”, a poppy seed roll made of sweet yeast bread, “kutia” – mixed dried fruits and nuts with wheat seeds, and “Pernik” a moist cake made with honey that is like gingerbread and gingerbreads themselves.

Oplatek – The Christmas Wafer

Sharing of the oplatek (pronounced opwatek) is the most ancient and beloved of all Polish Christmas traditions. Oplatek is a thin wafer made of flour and water, similar in taste to the hosts that are used for communion during Mass. The Christmas wafer is shared before Wigilia, the Christmas Eve supper. The head of the household usually starts by breaking the wafer with his wife and then continues to share it with everyone at the Wigilia table. Wishes for peace and prosperity are exchanged and even the pets and farm animals are given a piece of oplatek on Christmas Eve. Legend has it that if animals eat oplatek on Christmas Eve, they will be able to speak in human voices at midnight, but only those who are pure of spirit will be able to hear them.

This tradition dates back many centuries when a thin, flat bread called podplomyk was baked over an open flame and then shared with the family gathered around the fire on Christmas Eve. Patterns would be cut onto the bread to make breaking easier. This is why oplatki today still have patterns on them, usually of Nativity scenes.



“Niespodziewany Gosc” (The unexpected guest)

A place is often left empty at the 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 a family member who couldn't come to the meal.

Straw

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

Presents

The worst part about the Christmas Eve supper is that you can't open presents before it is finished! Older members of the family always make it last a long time. In most houses, before the presents are opened, the family sings carols together.

Koleda - Carols

The Polish word for Christmas carol is koleda (pronounced kolenda) and it comes from the Latin word "calendae," meaning the first day of the month. Koledy are mostly anonymous, having been created by the Polish people over the centuries. Koledy date back to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and while they did start out as hymns to be sung during Mass, they quickly found their way out of churches to the populace, where they took on a colourful life of their own.

You can hear strains of Polish folk melodies and popular tunes in many koledy. They are tender and humorous as often as they are joyful or exalted. The miraculous story of the birth of Baby Jesus, the Son of God, in a humble stable, surrounded by animals and shepherds, appealed to the popular imagination and resonated with the people, resulting in the creations of hundreds of carols over the years, both religious and humorous, that retell this story in many different ways. Many koledy are regional and not as well-known as the more traditional ones that we sing in our homes today. Poland has a larger cannon of Christmas carols than any other Christian nation.

Carolers are called kolednicy and they walk from house to house between Christmas and the Feast of the Epiphany, carrying a star on a pole and a Nativity scene. They usually wear folk costumes or dress up as angels, shepherds, kings, sometimes also as devils or the Grim Reaper. They

enact Nativity plays, often with a touch of comedy added, along with the singing of carols. They are treated to food and drink and sometimes other gifts in return.

The most beloved Polish koledy include "Gdy sie Chrystus rodzi "(When Christ is Born), "Lulajze Jezuniu," which is a lullaby to Baby Jesus, and "Przybiezeli do Betlejem" (The Shepherds Arrive in Bethlehem).

St. Nicholas Day – 6th December

December 6th, St. Nicholas day - Dzień Swietego Mikolaja - brings a slight reprieve to the grey winter days, especially to children, who feel that Christmas is still so far away. Someone in the family was selected to represent St. Nicholas and he was often driven in a sleigh to the homes in a Polish village. He was dressed in a long white or red robe, wearing a tall headpiece much like a bishop's mitre, a long white flowing beard, and in his hand, he held a shepherd's staff. He rebuked the naughty children and praised the nice ones, listening to them as they recited their catechism and prayers. Then he passed around heart-shaped pierniki (gingerbread cookies), holy pictures, and big red apples, which he produced magically from under his cloak. When St. Nicholas could not make the visit personally, his gifts were placed under the children's pillows during the night. The tradition continues today, and Polish children receive gifts on December 6th as well as on December 24th.



[Polish Straw Christmas tree decorations, via Wikimedia Commons](#)

Choinka - The Christmas Tree

The Christmas tree is brought in and decorated on Christmas Eve. It is decorated with a star on the top to represent the Star of Bethlehem, gingerbreads, lights, and “bombki” which are baubles and glass ornaments. They are usually hand-made and painted or decorated in some way. In the east of Poland, the decorations are traditionally made of straw. In some parts of Poland trees will also have an artificial spider’s web because of the story of the Christmas spider. In some houses there is also the tradition of breaking one of the tree decorations to scare the evil out of the house for the next year.

The tree will stay up at least through the Twelve Days of Christmas, which end on the Feast of the Three Kings on January 6th, and sometimes it stays up even until February 2nd, which is Candlemas Day and the official end of the Christmas season in the liturgical calendar.

Midnight Mass

Christmas Eve is finished by going to Midnight Mass.

In Polish Merry Christmas is “Wesolych Swiat”

Tinsel and the Legend of the Christmas spider

Tinsel was created in Germany, where it was originally made from thin strips of beaten silver.

The tales of how tinsel was created started in Poland, Eastern Germany and the Ukraine and are also told in Finland and parts of Scandinavia.

All versions of the story involve a poor family who can’t afford to decorate a Tree for Christmas (in some versions the tree grew from a pinecone in their house, in others the family have brought a tree into the house). When the children go to sleep on Christmas Eve a spider covers the tree in cobwebs. Then on Christmas morning the cobwebs are magically turned into silver and gold strands which decorate the tree.

Some versions of the story say that it’s the light of the sun which changed the cobwebs into silver and gold, but other versions say it’s St. Nicholas/Santa Claus who made the magic happen.

In part of Poland, it is good luck to find a spider or a spider's web on your Christmas tree. Spider's web decorations are also popular in the Ukraine. They're called "pavuchky" (which means "little spider") and the decorations are made of paper and silver wire.



Szopki Krakowskie

Krakow, the historic royal city of Poland and former capital, celebrates Advent in a very special way. On the first Sunday of Advent, the beautiful city square "Rynek" gets decorated with fir boughs, garlands, Christmas trees, and twinkling lights. Booths are set up for the Christmas Market and on the first Thursday in December, the square turns into an art competition, keeping alive a tradition that dates back hundreds of years. The competition for the most beautiful Krakow Nativity Crib or "Szopka Krakowska" is sponsored every year by the Historical Museum of Krakow.

Nativity scenes, popular at Christmas in all Christian countries, originated with St. Francis of Assisi in the 13th century and spread to Poland quickly afterwards. During the Middle Ages, a live nativity scene, enacted by young men, called jaselka, developed in Poland. Some actors told the Christmas story with the help of wooden and cloth puppets -- and they often employed lots of humour and exaggeration in their renditions. The tradition continues through today, as young men and women go from house to house in the days after Christmas, carrying a nativity scene called a szopka, and re-enacting the Christmas story and singing Christmas carols.

In homes and churches, the movable puppets were replaced over time by smaller wooden figurines that were hand-carved and beautifully decorated. In olden times, the figures included not only the Holy Family,

stable animals, shepherds, and angels, but also heroes of Polish history such as winged hussars, knights, queens, and kings, as well as legendary figures such as Pan Twardowski, the Warsaw Mermaid, and the Wawel Dragon. Today, the szopki are mostly religious but the hand-carved figures are still beautifully and lovingly created by artists all over the country who pass their skill down to others, generation after generation.

The city of Krakow has its own very colourful szopka tradition that dates back to the 19th century, when Krakow's craftsmen, including masons and woodworkers, began to make them as seasonal decorations in order to earn extra income during the holidays. The custom grew in popularity, with people willing to pay to look at szopka collections, which were often carried door-to-door by carollers, or to buy them for their own homes.

Over the years, the city government decided to support this tradition by announcing the first official Krakow Szopka Competition in December 1937. Since then, with the exception of the World War II years, the competition takes place on the first Thursday of December in the Main Market Square in Krakow, next to the Adam Mickiewicz Monument. The winning szopki are later displayed in the Historical Museum of Krakow.

The elaborate structures can be up to six feet high and three feet wide and they often show the many churches and palaces of Krakow that are their inspiration. The building most often replicated is St. Mary's Basilica with its easily recognizable spires. Other popular buildings that appear in the szopki include Wawel Castle, Sukiennice Hall, and the Barbakan. The humble stable of Bethlehem can often be found on the second floor of the szopka, while the lower floor is filled with historical figures.



UK and Scottish Advent and Christmas Traditions

There are a lot less traditions in Scotland than there are in Poland. Many of our traditions are adopted from England.

Tudor Times – UK wide

During Advent it was traditional to eat no meat, eggs or cheese for religious reasons but also to save up more food for the 12 days of Christmas, which were a time of big celebrations, particularly for the upper classes.

21st December is St. Thomas' day and poor people often went 'Thomasing' around their richer neighbours and employers asking for help over Christmas. They were normally given items like flour and oats rather than money.

During the 12 days of Christmas everyone was meant to stop work. However, many people still did have to work. Farmers were not allowed to work in the fields but still had to look after their animals and firewood was still needed to keep houses and families warm.

The celebrations by royalty and the upper classes were very extravagant. It was traditional to invite all those who worked on the farms belonging to rich landowners to the main Christmas meal – although they ate with the servants.

The big formal halls of large houses and palaces were decorated with boughs of holly and ivy. The main decoration was a Christmas crown made by weaving branches of ash or hazel together which was then filled with holly, ivy and other greenery and hung from a high ceiling on Christmas Eve.

There were huge feasts. They normally consisted of pottage/frumenty (a kind of watery porridge) or soup to line the stomach, lots of meat, lots of different puddings (suet or pastry puddings filled with meat and expensive dried fruit) and finished with cheese. All dishes were on the table at the same time.

Frumenty is cracked wheat boiled in milk and was eaten all year round. For Christmas, dried fruit and spices were added which were all very expensive. Over time, frumenty turned into the Christmas pudding we know today.

The traditional centre of the table was a Boar's head which was ceremonially brought into the feast – the Boar's Head Carol is still sung today.

An early form of a mince pie was a “shrewd pie.” They were large, raised pies containing meat, dried fruit, and spices.

Monks and nuns ate poultry rather than red meat.

At this time, church choirs started to appear, and many candles were used in church, so they looked incredible to glorify God at Christmas.

Christmas in Scotland

Prior to the Reformation of 1560, Christmas in Scotland was called Yule and also Yhoill or Yuil. It was celebrated with games, gifts, and feasts.

Yule Log

The custom of burning the Yule Log goes back to medieval times. It was originally a Nordic tradition and was brought to the UK with the Vikings.

The Yule log was originally an entire tree, carefully chosen and brought into the house with great ceremony. It was lit from the remains of the previous year's log.

In Scotland, Birch is usually used for the Yule log.

The ashes of the Yule Log were very good for plants.

A chocolate Yule Log is now a very popular Christmas dessert in the UK for those who don't like fruit cake.



Christmas is cancelled!

From the mid-1640s until 1660 Christmas was banned in England, Wales, and Scotland by the Puritans. They thought Christmas was wasteful and that it led to lots of people eating and drinking too much. In 1647 the Feasts of Christmas, Easter and Whitsun (Pentecost) were all banned.

In the 1650s laws were passed ordering shops to stay open on 25th December and penalising anyone who went to a Church Service on that day.

Although Christmas was officially banned, many people still celebrated it in quiet.

In 1660 King Charles restored Christmas and the 12 days of Christmas but only in England.

The Georgian Period - England

The 12 days of Christmas continued to be important.

Food such as multi-bird pies and brawn was popular over the 12-day celebrations. Roast beef, Christmas puddings and mince pies (without meat in) – started to become popular. Sweet jellies with alcohol and custards in spectacular shapes also became more prevalent. These have developed into the sherry trifle that is popular at Christmas as a pudding in the UK.

The 12th night cake, eaten on the Feast of the Epiphany was also invented.



The Victorian Period

This period shaped how we celebrate Christmas more than any other.

Charles Dickens "A Christmas Carol" was also influential in shaping our modern traditions.

Christmas trees, Christmas cards, Carolling, Turkey, mince pies and Christmas crackers all developed in Victorian times in the UK.

Scotland

In Scotland, even into the 20th century, excessive feasting and celebrating at Christmas time was kept to a minimum as there was never much emphasis placed on the festival.

The Christmas Tree

The Christmas Tree became popular in the UK when a drawing of the British Royal family with a Christmas tree was published in 1848.



Christmas Carols

It was at this time that the singing of Christmas carols became popular again with people collecting old folk tunes and setting new words to them. Popular magazines published the words and music for these carols so people could make their own entertainment at home around the piano. Many new carols were also written around this time such as the English translation of Silent Night, Good King Wenceslas and In the Bleak Midwinter.

Carols such as the Holly and the Ivy, Good King Wenceslas, Gaudete, The Boar's Head Carol all have derived from Christmas tradition in the UK and are still sung today.

Christmas Cake

The traditional Christmas fruit cake, and, what we know as Christmas pudding, were established during the Victorian period. As the prices of ingredients fell, they became available to more people across the country.

Turkey also replaced the traditional goose as the main meal of Christmas

The 12 days of Christmas became less important as towns and cities required people to work more over the Christmas period.



Christmas cards

The custom of sending Christmas cards was started in the UK in 1843 by Sir Henry Cole. He was a senior civil servant (government worker) who had helped set up the new 'Public Record Office', now known as the Post Office, where he was an Assistant Keeper and wondered how it could be used more by ordinary people.

Sir Henry had the idea of Christmas Cards with his friend John Horsley, who was an artist. They designed the first card. The card had 3 panels. The outer two panels showed people caring for the poor and in the centre panel was a family having a large Christmas dinner.

The first postal service that ordinary people could use was started in 1840 when the first 'Penny Post' public postal deliveries began. It was cheaper to post cards than letters which increased their popularity.

The first cards usually had pictures of the Nativity scene on them. In late Victorian times, robins (a British bird) and snow scenes became popular. In those times the postmen were nicknamed 'Robin Postmen' because of the red uniforms they wore. Snow scenes were popular because they reminded people of the very bad winter that happened in the UK in 1836.

Nativity Plays

As in Poland, it is traditional for primary schools in Scotland to perform Nativity Plays for parents and local people. The Nativity Play recreates the scene of Jesus' birth and tells of how Mary and Joseph were visited by the Shepherds and Wise Men. The parts of all the characters are played by children.

In the past it was common for live animals, including an ox and donkey and other farm animals (except pigs) to be used in the plays. Sometimes they still are, but it is now more common for children to dress up as the animals.

Christingle Services

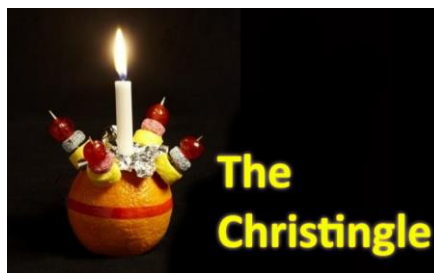
The idea of Christingle was originally developed in Germany. The Christingle Service was brought to the UK in the 1700s and is usually held on the Sunday before Christmas or on Christmas Eve. The Service became popular in the UK from 1968 onwards.

Here is what the different parts of the Christingle represent:

- The orange is round like the world
- The candle stands tall and straight and gives light in the dark like the love of God
- The red ribbon goes all around the world and is the symbol of the blood Jesus shed when he died for us
- The four sticks point in all directions to symbolise, North, South, East and West and also the four seasons
- The fruit and nuts or cloves represent the fruits of the earth



“Ingle” in old Scots means fire so Christ-Ingle in Scotland means Christ Light.



Boxing Day – 26th December

Boxing Day started in the UK about 800 years ago, during the Middle Ages. It was the day when the alms box, collection boxes for the poor, often kept in churches, were traditionally opened so that the content could be distributed to poor people. Some churches still open these boxes on Boxing Day today.

It was also traditional that servants got this day off to celebrate Christmas with their families. Before World War II it was common for working people (such as milkmen and butchers) to travel round their delivery places and collect their Christmas box or tip.



Christmas Crackers

Christmas crackers were first made around 1845-1850 by a London sweet maker called Tom Smith. He had seen French bon-bon sweets on a visit to Paris – almonds wrapped in paper. He tried to do the same and included a motto or riddle with the sweet, but they didn't sell very well.

Legend says he was sitting in front of his fire one night, fascinated by the sparks and cracks coming from the fire. Suddenly he thought what a fun idea it would be if his sweets and toys could be opened with a crack when their fancy wrappers were pulled in half.

In 1861 Tom Smith launched his new range of what he called “Bangs of Expectation”. When Tom died, his three sons took over the business and added hats into the crackers. They also developed themed crackers.

The Christmas crackers we use today are normally placed next to each plate on the Christmas Dinner table. The party hats are designed to symbolise the crowns that might have been worn by the Wise Men. They are also famous for their very bad jokes!

Hogmanay

Believe it or not, Christmas day only became a public holiday in 1958 and Boxing Day in 1974 in Scotland. People were accustomed to working on Christmas Day and, until as recently as 2001 there were threats of strikes when Scottish banks tried to offer their workers English bank holidays – giving workers more time off over Christmas but less time off at New Year. So, if you want to have a truly traditional Scottish Christmas – go to work!

Gift-giving, public holidays and feasting associated with mid-winter were therefore traditionally left for Hogmanay and the New Year. It explains why Hogmanay is still by far the biggest celebration in the Scottish Calendar.

In some part of Scotland, gifts were given on Hogmanay instead of Christmas day.

Whisky is important to the Celebration as are foods such as shortbread, Black Bun and Cloutie Dumpling.

Shortbread is a rich butter biscuit made from flour, sugar and butter.

Blackbun is a rich fruit cake covered in pastry. This was originally eaten on 12th night but is now enjoyed at Hogmanay

Cloutie Dumpling is similar to a Christmas pudding. It is a rich mixture of fruit, nuts, spices and other ingredients and is cooked by boiling in a pan of water in a “clout” which is a cloth and then dried off in the oven. It can be eaten as a pudding but is also often seen sliced and fried as part of a Scottish cooked breakfast.



Hogmanay is also the time for the tradition of “first footing”.

First Footing

The First Foot is the first person to enter the home of a household on New Year’s Day and is seen as a bringer of good fortune for the coming year.

Although it is acceptable in many places for the first foot to be a resident of the house, they must not be in the house at the stroke of midnight in order to be the first foot.

It is said to be desirable for the first foot to be a tall, dark-haired male.

The first foot usually brings several gifts including coal, shortbread, salt, blackbun and a wee dram of whisky with them.

Auld Lang Syne is sung and usually there will be some form of party or entertainment in the household.

A photograph of a stone house with a white door. A basket of flowers sits on the steps in front of the door. The text is overlaid on the image.

New Year's Tradition First Footing!

In days gone by a British custom was to open the front door on the stroke of midnight on New Year's eve allowing the old year out and the new year in. A custom called 'first footing' to ensure good luck. As soon as midnight passed people would stand behind the door waiting for a dark haired person to arrive. The person carried bread, coal, coin, and greenery. The bread ensured people would always have enough to eat, the coal to keep the house warm, the coin to always have enough money and the greenery for a long life. The visitor would then take a pan of dust or ashes out of the house signifying the departure of the old year!

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*Should old acquaintance be forgot,
and never brought to mind?
Should old acquaintance be forgot,
and old lang syne?*

*For auld lang syne, my dear,
for auld lang syne,
we'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
for auld lang syne.*

*And surely you'll buy your pint cup!
and surely I'll buy mine!
And we'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
for auld lang syne.*



Should old acquaintance be forgot,
and never brought to mind?
Should old acquaintance be forgot,
for auld lang syne? *Chorus*

*For auld lang syne, my dear,
for auld lang syne,
we'll take a cup of kindness yet,
for auld lang syne.*

And surely you'll buy your pint stowe!
and surely I'll buy mine!
And we'll take a cup o' kindness yet,
for auld lang syne. *Chorus*

We two have run about the braes,
and pu'd the gowans fine;
And we've wandered many a weary step,
since auld lang syne. *Chorus*

We two have paddled in the burn,
from morning sun till dine;
But the seas between us broad have roared
since auld lang syne. *Chorus*

...we'll take a cup of kindness yet,
for auld lang syne.

