



RUSSIAN WINTER FESTIVALS GUIDE

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Russian Christmas Religious Traditions



- **Russian Orthodox Christmas takes place on January 7th (following the Old Calendar this is the 25th of December) and the celebration lasts for six days.**
- **In the Orthodox tradition nothing is eaten or drunk on Christmas Eve until the first star appears in the sky. The star is symbolic of the great star that led the Magi to the newly born Christ. Once the first star has appeared in the sky, the festivities begin with a Lenten meal - meaning meat or dairy products (including chocolates) are excluded. This Christmas Eve meal is "The Holy Supper" .**
- **The family gathers around the table to honor the coming Christ Child. A white tablecloth is used to symbolize Christ's swaddling clothes and hay is displayed as a reminder of the poverty of the place where Jesus was born. A tall white candle is placed in the center of the Table, to symbolize Christ - the "Light of the World." A large round loaf of "pagach", a special Lenten bread, is placed beside the candle to symbolize Christ - the "Bread of Life".**
- **The father begins the Christmas meal by leading the family in the Lord's Prayer, a prayer of thanksgiving for the blessings of the past year and for the good things to come in the new year. The head of the family greets those present with "Christ is Born!" - the traditional Russian Christmas greeting - and the family responds with "Glorify Him!" The Mother then draws a cross with honey on each person's forehead, saying a blessing - "In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, may you have sweetness and many good things in life and in the new year." The Lenten bread (Pagach) is then broken and shared. The bread is dipped first in honey to symbolize the sweetness of life and then in chopped garlic to symbolize life's bitterness. The "Holy Supper" is then eaten. After dinner, no dishes are washed and the Christmas presents are opened. The family goes to church for the Christmas Mass which lasts until after midnight.**

Holy Supper



- **Traditionally, the "Holy Supper" consists of 12 different foods, symbolic of the 12 Apostles. Although there was also some variation in the foods from place to place and village to village, the following is a good summary of what is typically served.**
- **1) Mushroom soup**
- **2) Lenten bread**
- **3) Chopped garlic**
- **4) Honey**
- **5) Baked fish**
- **6) Fresh Oranges, Figs**
- **7) Nuts**
- **8) Kidney beans, seasoned with shredded potatoes, lots of garlic, salt and pepper**
- **9) Peas**
- **10) Parsley Potatoes**
- **11) Small biscuits combined with sauerkraut or poppy seed with honey**
- **12) Red Wine**



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