

Christmas is a beautiful time of the year, which is celebrated in all European countries. However, it is celebrated differently in those countries – each one of them has various traditions. In this essay, I will describe how Christmas is celebrated in Poland – a country in the central Europe, where 37 million people live. Also, my mum and my grandpa are from Polandish.

Because most of the people in Poland are Catholics, they start to celebrate Christmas three weeks before the day when little Jesus was born. This time is called Advent. During Advent, people already start preparing for Christmas time. They usually bake small spiced cookies, which are a type of gingerbread and which are called *pierniczki*. Pierniczki should be colourful and decorated. They also start to decorate the house with Christmas tree and other ornaments. My grandpa says that Polish Christmas ornaments are one of the most famous in Europe and can be found in many other countries, especially the glass balls, which are called *bombki*. But most importantly, kids in Poland get their presents twice! Before Christmas, on 6<sup>th</sup> December, they are visited by Santa Claus. Santa Claus usually leaves them small gifts, such as sweets, fruits, and little toys. They are usually packed in big socks, which the kids leave hanging next to the fireplace or next to the door on the night before.



Polish people celebrate Christmas on the Christmas Eve, so on 24<sup>th</sup> December. This day is called *Wigilia* and it is one of the most important days in Polish tradition. The whole day is spent on preparations for the evening – people clean, cook, and decorate their houses. They also try not to eat too much because they know that they are going to eat a lot in the evening. In the evening, the families all meet together on celebratory supper. The supper starts after the first star shows on the sky – it is to celebrate the Star of Bethlehem. There is usually one plate left empty at the table – it waits for someone who has no place to go that night. It begins with exchanging wishes and breaking of *oplatek*, which is a very thin wafer baked from wheat and water and sold at the churches. Traditionally, there are



twelve different meals during the Christmas supper, which symbolize twelve Apostles. People do not eat meat on that day, they usually eat fish instead. The most popular Christmas fish is carp. After the meal, people exchange gifts that they bought for each other, sing traditional Christmas songs, which are called *kolędy*, and enjoy time with their families. In some parts of Poland, the rest of the food from *Wigilia* is given to the animals because it is believed that at midnight, animals will speak using a human voice. Sometimes people go to the mass at midnight, which is called *Pasterka*. It is a mass full of joy and singing, because little Jesus has just been born and everyone is happy.

The next day, 25<sup>th</sup> December, is usually spent with family and friends. People visit each other on that day and cook celebratory Christmas dinners. Early in the morning, people usually go to church – especially if they didn't go on *Pasterka*. 26<sup>th</sup> December is also a day free from work. After Christmas, people often go and visit nativity scenes (in Polish, *szopki*), which represent the place where baby Jesus was born. They also sing a lot of Christmas carols. A priest from church walks from house to house to visit the people that belong to his parish. People throw away their Christmas trees after the visit of the priest, after 6<sup>th</sup> January, which is Epiphany, or even in February.

I think that Christmas celebrations in Poland are really different from those in other countries and they are really interesting. I like the most that children get their presents twice and that there are so many free days that you can spend with your family and your friends!