



# News of Polonia

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## Wiadomości Polonijne

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### Did you know that?

By: **Robert Strybel**,

Polish/Polonian Affairs Writer

-- The opłatek-sharing ritual on Christmas Eve and the Holy Saturday food-blessing custom are practiced by more than 95% of all Polish families and continue to be the country's most widespread holiday traditions

-- The crèche-making contest, held in Kraków in early December, is a fairly recent tradition dating from the pre-World War II period. Participating Christmas cribs, ranging from matchbox size to 10 feet tall, are displayed round the Adam Mickiewicz Monument in the Main Old Town Square.

-- Some families insist on serving 12 dishes for the traditional "wieczerza wigilijna" (Christmas Eve supper). In other families it must be an odd number: 5, 7, 9 or 11, depending on the household's affluence.

-- Sad to say, more and more families in Poland are setting up artificial Christmas trees in their homes and decorating them with today's plastic Santa Claus, reindeer, snowmen and other tacky "Made in China" trinkets and blinking lights.

-- It was once regarded as a lucky sign if a male visitor was the first to cross a family's threshold on Christmas Eve. A female as the first outside visitor was thought to bring misfortune.

-- Poland's two most popular Wigilia fish are herring (usually pickled in vinegar, in oil or sour cream) and carp, usually fried or in aspic (jelly).

-- Polish youngsters do not have to wait until the morning of December 25th to get their gifts. These are passed out on Christmas Eve some time between the festive Wigilia supper and the family's departure for Midnight Mass.

-- Once very popular were Christmas Eve fortune-telling games meant to predict the

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### Wigilia for Beginners

By: **Robert Strybel**,

Our Warsaw Correspondent

If, for whatever reason, you have never prepared the traditional Polish Wigilia (Christmas Eve supper), but would like to try your hand at it, here are a few things to bear in mind. First of all, Wigilia is not just another meal, not even just another festive family gathering. It is a certain spirit, a frame of mind, and to Polish-minded people everywhere – the single most important occasion of the year. That is probably because it intertwines the things Poles hold so dear: God, country and family. It is a magic moment full of symbols, ritual foods and special activities, many reserved for this one night a year. And Wigilia is more home-made than store-bought, steeped in time honored tradition, not commercialism. Here are some pointers on how to go about it.

#### Setting the Mood

To create the proper atmosphere surrounding Wigilia, it must be spoken of frequently with great anticipation to pique the interest of family members. For instance: "Aunt Helen and Uncle Stan will be coming to our Wigilia." "Grandpa has gone to the parish for opłatek." "Today I got a beautiful northern pike for our Christmas Eve supper." "Dad found a cassette with Polish carols which we can sing along with on Christmas Eve," "If it's not too cold we can walk to Midnight Mass," even "I wonder if Blackie (the family pet) will talk to us on Christmas Eve?" This could be the perfect antidote to the "gift-mania" that has turned American-style Christmas into one gigantic shopping spree, unwittingly reinforced by grown-ups making a big fuss about buying, wrapping and hiding presents, followed by that mad rush to rip them open on Christmas morning. Above all, do not keep asking your youngsters: "What do you WANT for Christmas?" Polish-style Christmas is not about wanting but about reenacting beautiful, old customs, breaking bread and sharing oneself with loved ones in celebration of Christ's birth.

#### Necessary Artifacts

The only absolutely necessary ritual artifacts are opłatek (Christmas Eve wafer) and a little hay. Opłatek is usually available at Polish parishes. Little bunches of hay may be obtained at some parishes, Polish specialty shops or Polish Christmas bazaars. If that fails, you can surely get a handful of hay at a nearby riding stable or feed store. Or even dry a handful of 4 to 5-inch-long grass in a warm oven or near a radiator or heat register.

#### Family Participation

This should not be an occasion where one person does all the work and everybody else comes as an invited guest. All members of the household should pitch in and make their contribution. It is especially important to involve the kids in the shopping, house cleaning, food preparation, setting the table, trimming the tree, etc. Traditionally a young child is kept from getting in the way by being asked to stand in a window and watch for the evening's first star, the sign for the festivities to begin.

#### Family Craft Projects

Rather than having the TV set blaring

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### Church Schedules of the Holiday Season

#### Our Lady of the Bright Mount Catholic Church (Masses in Polish)

3400 W. Adams Blvd. - Los Angeles (323) 734-5249

**Dec. 24 Fri,** **WIGILIA**—Christmas Mass at 10:00 pm (With children's participation) and Midnight Mass (Pasterka). Half an hour before each Mass we will sing Christmas Carols.

**Dec. 25 Sat,** **Christmas Day** Masses at 9:00 a.m. and noon

**Dec. 26 Sun,** **Holy Family** - Masses at 9:00 a.m. and noon. After the noon Mass there will be a meeting of "Friends of Radio Mayja."

**Dec. 31 Fri,** Mass of Thanksgiving for 2010 - the old year. 5:00 p.m.

**Jan. 1 Sat,** **Happy New Year. - Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**

Masses at 9 am, noon, 5:00 pm

**Jan. 2 Sun** **Three Kings** - Masses at 9:00 am and noon

**Jan. 9 Sun** **Baptism of the Lord** - Masses at 9:00 and noon.

**After noon's Mass there will be the traditional "Opłatek and "Jaselka". Please make reservations early, space is limited.**

#### Pope John Paul II Polish Center

3999 Rose Drive - Yorba Linda (Orange County) (714) 996-8161

**Dec. 24 Fri,** **Christmas Eve**  
Vigil Mass in English 4:00 pm  
Vigil Mass in English 10:00 pm  
Live Nativity 11:00 - 12:00 Midnight  
Shepherd's Mass in Polish, 12:00 Midnight

**Dec. 25 Sat** **Christmas Day**  
Latin Tridentine Mass 7:00 am  
Mass in English, 9:00 am  
Mass in Polish 10:30 am

**Jan. 1 Sat** **Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God**  
Vigil Mass in English, Dec. 31, 6:00 pm.  
Latin Tridentine Mass 10:00 noon  
Mass in English, 4:00 pm  
Mass in Polish, 7:30 p.m.

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