

# ukrainian christmas for children



# contents

- 3 Celebrating Christmas
- 4 Roots of traditions, Meanings
- 5 *Vertep* and caroling
- 6 *Sviat-vechir* - Christmas Eve
- 7 *Kutia*
- 8 12 dishes - Decipher the words
- 10 *Didukh, Kutia* at Buckingham Palace
- 11 Word game
- 12 How to make a star
- 13 How one family celebrates
- 16 How the community celebrates
- 17 Family tree
- 18 A pioneer Christmas story
- 27 Answers
- 28 Carol: *Boh predvichnyi*

## the julian and gregorian calendars

In 45 BC (Before Christ) the Roman emperor, Julius Caesar, together with the astronomer Sosigenes of Alexandria introduced a new calendar, called the Julian calendar. The year was to be on average 365.25 days long. It was used by all countries until the 16th century.

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII introduced a new corrected calendar, which changed the length of the calendar year from 365.25 days to 365.2425 days. Thus the years in the Gregorian calendar pass more quickly. That meant that December 25th according to the Julian calendar was already January the 7th according to the Gregorian (Canadian) calendar. Today the difference between the two calendars is 13 days.

The Gregorian calendar was adopted by most churches, and by most countries. But the Orthodox Church and most of the Ukrainian Catholic Church has kept the Julian calendar. That is why Ukrainians and many of Ukrainian heritage world-wide celebrate Christmas on January 7th.

From the library of *Hotuys*,  
a magazine for Plast youth,  
published by "Plast Publishing USA-  
Canada", 2199 Bloor Street West,  
Toronto ON, M6S 1N2, Canada.  
Co-publisher: "Koota Ooma", 842 The  
Queensway, Toronto ON, M8Z 1N7

All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or  
in part without written permission is prohibited.

*Editor and author of text:*

Tanya Dzulynsky

*Layout:* Luda Pawliw

*Illustrations:*

Oles Slywynsky, Luda Pawliw,  
Leonid Denysenko and

Melania Pawliw:

*A pioneer Christmas story*

*Photographs:*

Roman Dubczak, Ostap Mojsiak,  
Orest Dzulynsky, Oksana Zakydalsky,  
Valentina Kuryliw, Irene Makaryk,  
Roman Hrycyshyn, Khrystia Kolos

*Thank you to those who helped:*

Oksana Kuryliw, Tania Onyschuk,  
Daria Darewych, Khrystia Zeltway,  
Lev Piasecky, Raya Juchymenko,  
Daria Baran Publishing, Halyna Junyk,  
children of the Mojsiak, Dubczak and  
Dzulynsky families.

*Bibliography*

*Hotuys 1.2002*. Plast Magazine;  
Dzulynsky, T. *Trypillia, Ancient Ukraine*.  
Toronto: Plast Publishing, 2008;  
*Pisni dlia novatstva*, Toronto: Plast  
Publishing, 2002;  
Wikipedia: Julian Calendar,  
Gregorian Calendar;  
Internet: [www.brama.com](http://www.brama.com);  
*National Post* 10.04.2002

Prepared on

PC 1.2 GHz/QuarkXpress 6.1,  
Adobe Photoshop 6.0, Adobe Illustrator 9.0,  
Adobe Streamline 4.0

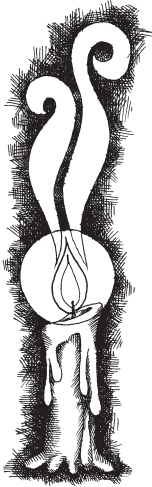
Printed by:

The Basilian Press, Toronto ON, Canada

ISBN 978-0-9684902-3-5

# celebrating christmas

Most Ukrainians are Christians, usually either Ukrainian Orthodox or Ukrainian Catholic. Like all Christians, they celebrate Christmas, the birth of Christ, but most of them celebrate according to the Julian calendar on January 7th.

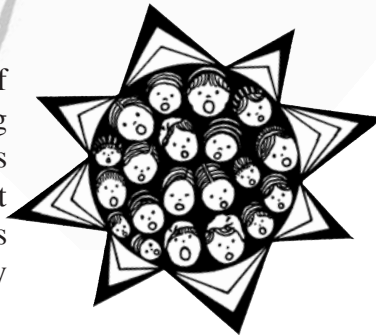


A lit candle symbolizes the light that Christ brought into the world upon his birth. Traditionally a candle is lit at the *Sviat-vechir* supper and a **light** was kept in the window to welcome travelers and carolers.

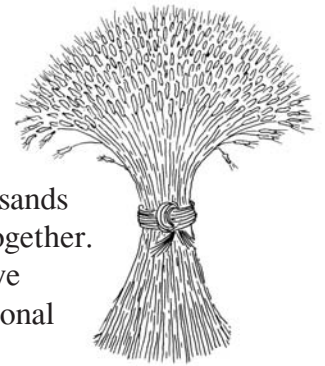


Christmas is foremost a religious holiday, so on Christmas day almost everyone goes to **church**.

**Caroling** is an important part of Christmas traditions. Families sing *koliadky* (carols) in their homes and members of different organizations visit homes in the community



But it is also a **family** holiday. Some members may travel thousands of miles to be together. On Christmas eve there is a traditional 12 course Holy Supper.



There are 5 images on this page.  
They are symbols.  
Find the 5 words which describe the symbol.



# vertep and caroling

**origins of the vertep** - the Ukrainian Christmas puppet theater had its beginnings in the XVII century. Students of the Kyivan Academy wrote and performed puppet plays. The original puppet theater consisted of a small two-storied stage. The actors were puppets made of wood. During the Christmas holidays the students went from town to town, village to village with their plays.



There were two acts or mini-plays. The first play took place on the upper floor and told about the birth of Christ. The characters would be: Mary with the baby Jesus, Joseph, angels, the shepherds, the Three Kings, King Herod, who killed thousands of new-born children because he wanted to kill Jesus, Roman soldiers, Death and the Devil, who would carry Herod's soul to hell.



The second act took place on the lower floor of the theatre. It consisted of short humorous scenes about a character called "Kozak Zaporozhets". He was a legendary folk hero, a great warrior, defender of freedom and honour. He wore the traditional dress of the *Kozaky* and had a *bandura*. The *Kozak* puppet spoke of the glorious past of Ukraine. But the scenes in the second act also included humorous skits of greedy or cowardly people who cheated, lied, fought or generally misbehaved.



*tsymbaly*

All the scenes included singing and playing instruments, such as violins, *tsymbaly*, a flute, a drum, or the *bandura*. *Vertep* plays were very popular. With time wandering minstrels (poets, singers) and various theater groups performed these plays all over the country.



*bandura*

## caroling

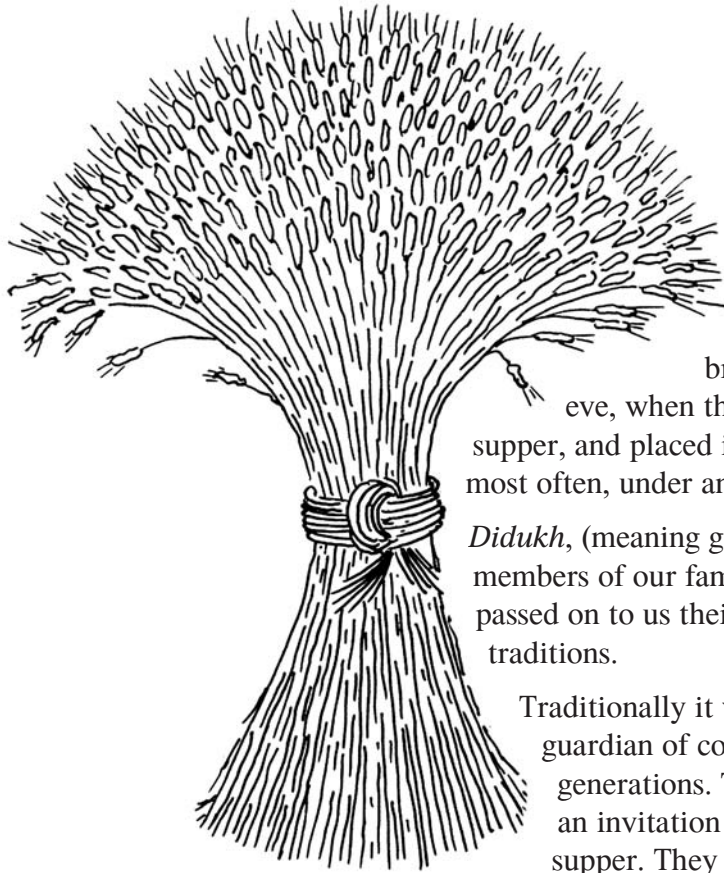
Eventually the puppet theatre traditions and caroling became intertwined. Instead of using puppets, people dressed up in costumes to play the traditional roles. For many groups, caroling was not simply a singing of Christmas songs, it was more like a folk opera. It required extensive preparation: giving out roles, practicing the skits, making costumes and choosing instruments. In each region of Ukraine, people chose their favourite one. For example the *hutsuls* in the Carpathian Mountains played on a long tube called the *trembita*. Everywhere each group carried a star attached to a long stick, symbolizing the Star of Bethlehem.



*trembita*



All carolers first had to ask for permission to sing. Only then did they enter the house, sang carols for each member of the family and performed a skit. At the end there was always a short poem wishing everyone well. There were also groups of carolers who simply went from house to house singing carols and bringing Christmas greetings.



# didukh

*Didukh* — is a sheaf of wheat stalks or of mixed grains: rye, oats or barley.

Traditionally it was the last sheaf gathered off the field at harvest time. Father

brought the sheaf into the house on Christmas-eve, when the family was gathered for their traditional supper, and placed it in a visible spot or, most often, under an icon in the corner.

*Didukh*, (meaning grandfather) represents the spirits of ancestors, members of our families and clans long deceased. Our ancestors passed on to us their love and wisdom, and our customs and traditions.

Traditionally it was believed that the “*didukh* spirit” was the guardian of community and was a bridge between generations. The bringing in of the *didukh* was regarded as an invitation to the ancestor spirits to share in the family supper. They could bring good fortune to the family.



## kutia at buckingham palace

Edward Schreyer was governor general of Canada from 1979 to 1984. He was of Ukrainian descent. As the Queen’s representative he visited the Queen at Buckingham Palace in London, Great Britain. In his memoirs he writes:

“ ... Among other matters, I told her [the Queen Mother] that our visit coincided that evening with the Ukrainian Christmas Eve

and that as a symbolic gesture we had brought one of the traditional meatless dishes - *kutia*. I explained further that the boiled wheat, honey and poppy seed ingredients had been prepared and kept separate simply because *kutia*, once cooked, does not travel well.” The ingredients were mixed and *kutia* was served. But the Queen Mum enjoyed it best with apple pie.

Canada is truly a multicultural country.



# a pioneer christmas story

“Oh my God! Where are the children!?!?” Two horses with an empty sled had just come up to the home-stead. Hanna, with her baby in her arms, had heard a sound and looked out of the window, as the moon appeared between the clouds. Now she began shouting to her husband, “Ivan! Where are the children?”



Ivan was already outside frantically looking around. He had heard the sound of horses neighing. With the wind howling and the baby crying off and on, he had not slept well all night. Now it was quiet; the moon appeared from between the clouds and he could see the white, smoothly swept fields around him. The horses were standing at the entrance to the barn, obviously exhausted. And the sled was empty... It began to sink in that the children were missing. “Why did he let them go?” “Why did they not stay at Yuri’s home?”



This year was the first time Ivan's family had spent Christmas-eve in their new home.

"We will not be going to uncle Yuri's homestead for *Sviat-vechir*\* supper this year," Ivan had told his older children when Nastia was born just one week before Christmas. Up to this time, ever since they had come to Canada from Ukraine, they had always gone to his brother's place on the adjoining homestead. There the families of all the brothers and sisters, and his mother, were always joined by some of the single men from the area. Quite often men would come to Canada by themselves, start farming, and only then bring their families.

Taras, Hryhori and Olia were disappointed. They loved *Sviat-vechir*\* supper at uncle Yuri's. "Don't worry," their father had gone on, "Mother has prepared some of the dishes ahead of time, and Aunt Sonia has offered to send some food. We will all help out and we will have our twelve traditional dishes." Food was only one concern, but Taras did not want to say anything at the time.