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| **FESTIVALS AROUND EUROPE:**  **“The December newspaper” from Italy** | |
| **IMMACULATE CONCEPTION**  On 8th December we celebrate the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary, declared by pope Pius IX. This feast is celebrated by Catholics with a Mass and it explains the fact that the Virgin Mary was conceived without sin, as the mother of God.  From this day on, all families start to prepare the Nativity scene with all the figures and creating the scenery they choose as background for the Nativity.  Besides, we prepare the Christmas at home and in all schools.  \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*  **CHRISTMAS PERFORMANCE AND GOSPELS**  From mid November onwards we prepare in school our Christmas drama performance. This year we chose a performance about Jesus’ nativity with some humorous notations. All the children take part to the performance and have their own parts to dramatise and they wore special costumes, so to become little actors and actresses.  On 22nd December there was the performance whose title was “Natale…lavori in corso” (Christmas…works in progress).  All families were invited with a special invitation prepared by the children.  After the performance all the children got ready for the Gospels. We painted their faces, they wore special wigs and red capes, already prepared by the teachers and sang “O happy day” and “I will follow him”. Free entrance.    On December all the children make Christmas crafts to sell in the school market on 21st and 22nd to gain some money and help our school for all the necessities and projects.  \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*  **SAINT STEVEN**  On 26th December, we celebrate the first martyr of Christianity, Saint Steven, and we gather will all our relatives and friends, going out for trips or staying at home playing games.  This is Terni a big town near Montefranco. On the top there is a comet star that is set up every year in the small village of Miranda on the hills around. It’s with this big and luminous star that we wish you a Happy Christmas and a wonderful and prosperous New Year 2016!!!  In all towns and cities there are Christmas markets that sell all sorts of crafts and sweets and cakes. | **CHRISTMAS DAY**  On 24th December all families gather around a special Christmas meal, having starters with cheeses, salami and ham, usually we have pasta or rice with fish, roasted potatoes and a selection of vegetables. Then we have special cakes, such as panettone, from Milan, a cake with sultanas and candied fruits,    Pandoro (which means “golden bread”), traditional of Verona,  and torrone (long bar with chocolate and nuts or almond and pistachios with nuts).  At midnight, we put baby Jesus in a manger and we have a special Mass in our parish. When we are back we open the presents brought by Father Christmas during the night. This is particularly felt by the children. Little children usually open the presents on the next morning. On 25th December we enjoy the company of family and we eat tortellini (filled pasta) soup, chicken or roast beef, roast potatoes and vegetables, and all the traditional cakes. Then we play together with games such as tombola.  \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*  **X-MAS HOLIDAYS**  This year the X-mas holiday starts from December 23tf until January 6rh .  Usually during these holidays, people go out admiring the decorations in towns and visiting churches and Nativity or living Nativity scenes.  \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*  **NEW YEARS EVE**  On 31st December there is a special thanksgiving Mass and families gather together around a “cenone” (big meal) with traditional lasagne, cotechino (traditional pork dish) or chicken and lentils. Usually lentils are believed to bring wealth.  Then at midnight we have fantastic fireworks.  **EPIPHANY**  On 6th January we celebrate Epiphany, when the three Kings visited Jesus and brought him gold, incense and myrrh. It’s when Jesus reveals himself to the world.  This feast is celebrated particularly by the Catholics, besides we also believe that during the night between 5th and 6th an old lady, called Befana with a broom comes and brings presents to good children and sometimes, if they have been naughty, some “sweet coal!!” |

