

THE CHILDREN FROM BETLEHEM (BETLEMAŠI)

Christmas Eve



It is the 24th of December, the day before Christmas, special day in every family. Everything is so solemn. People get up about 2 a.m. Men lit the fire and bake pigs on the broach and women make dough and bake bread because it has to be baked before dawn. Just as

bread has to be over before the day breaks, so it has to be with the Christmas tree. It has to be decorated before the morning comes.

Male children go to their neighbours' and relatives' houses to congratulate the Christmas Eve. They sit in the corner of the kitchen and shout:



''Pipice, titice, zugice, telici, prascici...''

(The words are mainly diminutives of the words – chicken, calf, pig et. Expressing the wish to have all these in abundance next year)

After that they are given an apple, dried plums or pears.

During the day the housewives prepare dinner for Christmas, they cook ``sarma``, a dish made of spiced minced meat enrolled in leaves of sauerkraut. The other traditional dish is pork-jelly. People don't eat meat on that day so, at noon they eat special sort of pumpkins. When everything is ready, they prepare special Christmas Eve dinner. There have to be nine dishes on the table;

- bread
- honey
- garlic
- nuts
- apples
- dried fruit (plums, pears, apples)
- pasta with cheese
- grilled fish
- bean soup without flour burned on fat





Before dinner the landlord brings straw into the house. He enters the house bringing a bundle of straw and wishes merry Christmas (The birth of Jesus). The children spread the straw under the table, and women lay the table. Some of the straw is put in the basket. There they put some wheat, corn, oats and barley together with horse bridles. The straw is

taken out of the house after three days, on 27th of December, the day of St. John. It is taken to the orchard and put on every plum tree that next year it has more fruit.

One small bread decorated with garlic and carrot is put on the table, it stays in it's corner during the all Christmas holidays.

Before dinner people pray usual prayers and then have supper. After dinner they sing Christmas songs and get ready for the Midnight Service in the church. During the day and in the evening grown up people drink plum brandy, Slavonian national drink.

