**Christmas - A holiday cherished by the Romanians**

In our country, the winter holidays traditionally begin with Christmas fasting and last until St. John holiday. It is a period rich in customs, different from one area to another, from one community to another.

 The most important moments of the winter holidays are: Christmas fasting (November 15-December 24), Saint Nicholas (December 6), Ignatius feast (December 20), Christmas Eve(December 24), Christmas Day (December 25), New Year (January 1), Epiphany (January 6) and St. John celebration (January 7).

Rehearsals for caroling are being prepared from the beginning of Fasting period until St. Nicholas or even a few days before Christmas. Children use bells, sticks, whips, and the noise made by this whole arsenal is meant to drive away evil forces. Mask games have the same role: Goat, Bear or Horses. The children go with the star (caroling) until December 24, custom found among all Christians, reminding to the people of the star that announced the birth of Jesus and that guided the three wise men to Bethlehem. Sometimes children carol with Vicleim, a popular theater that depicts scenes from the birth of Jesus. Today, the carol has the function of wishing and announcing the birth of Jesus.

The custom of decorating the Christmas tree is one of the most beautiful traditions. At the end of the 19th century, the Christmas tree was especially decorated in the city. Only after the First World War did this custom become widespread. Nowadays, the decoration of the Christmas tree has become one of the most beloved customs in both rural and urban areas. Moreover, this custom has been adopted on all continents, regardless of the religious affiliation of those communities. Traditionally, the Christmas tree is decorated on Christmas Eve and kept in the house until Epiphany.

On Christmas Day all worries should be dispelled so that each of us can enjoy this Holy celebration properly.

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