

Andriana Aladyshkina, Vladyslava Ivankiv, Kateryna Shvorob, Tetiana Zdrenyk

Ivan Franko National University of Lviv

CHRISTMAS IN UKRAINE

Christmas is one of the most favorite holidays for Ukrainians because it is an opportunity to relax, spend time with family, and enjoy delicious dishes. This year, every holiday has a special touch. Since the beginning of the war, our values have changed, and all Ukrainians have one common dream – victory as soon as possible. However, the traditions that Ukrainians have followed from generation to generation should not be abandoned. Christmas is just one word, but it holds so much meaning, so many emotions, so much power. The power of Christmas is in its presence, in its effect on people. And the impact is nothing short of miraculous by any stretch of the imagination. For Ukrainian people right now, it primarily signifies the sheer fact of survival: we’ve made it to next year, and we managed to not only hold but fight back the devil. It’s also a sign of remaining human – that even in the hardest of times, the darkest days we, the Ukrainian people, don’t forget to honor our traditions, our heritage, the building blocks of our identity. Some people are surely going to say: why celebrate, why have time off? “There’s a war outside, go and fight, or do something for the war effort.” That’s quite a foolish argument. The power of such a holiday can’t be underestimated. That’s a recharge that all of us need. It gives us hope and the future to look forward to. Ukraine has a long history of immigration, its success is evident in how many Ukrainian diasporas there are in the world, and one of the things that made them so strong are traditions and culture. That’s the thing that allowed the Ukrainian people to remain Ukrainian people – to celebrate, to have a little moment of peace and happiness in the foreign environment, to live a little.

The main house decoration that you’ll see is the *didukh* (a sheaf of wheat stalks) that symbolizes our ancestors’ spirits. It is believed that during these holy days our ancestors return to spend time with their families. That is also why some Kutia and other dishes should be left on the table – as a treat for deceased relatives.

Since the evening of January 6, it is customary to sing carols with a big star in their hands: carolers sing Christmas carols. Boys and girls prepare special songs and poems that they take from house to house, entertaining their neighbors in exchange for sweet gifts and coins. It is believed that the more carolers come to the house, the more prosperity and wealth there will be in the family over the next year. Christmas songs are an integral part of the whole holiday season, too. In Ukraine, we have different types of Christmas songs – *koliadky* (comes from the word ‘calendar’ which starts with the birth of Christ) for Christmas and *shchedrivky* (comes from the Ukrainian word for generosity) for so-called Generous Evening, a.k.a. Ukrainians have a tradition of presenting the Christmas pageant in the form of a travelling group of people who interpret the meaning of Christmas that is called “*vertep*.”

TRADITIONS AND CHANGES

Christmas Lviv is a special place. Old traditions of Ukrainians are still preserved here, but at the same time they are constantly inventing something new, unusual and modern. The city of Lviv was named as the most attractive place to celebrate New Year's and Christmas holidays in Ukraine! Citizens of the city of Lviv treat Christmas and the Holy Evening very seriously and with great respect.

Traditional Ukrainian apparel, the roots of which trace back to the times of Kievan Rus, has many stylistic varieties. Its look depends on the ethnographic region, even though a homemade shirt, made of homespun cloth, has always constituted the basis for both male and female wardrobes. The main feature of this shirt (*vyshyvanka*) is the embroidery on the neck, cuffs and hem. Western Ukrainian apparel reflected its Polish and Hungarian historical past and was distinguished by complex geometrical patterns.

There are small buns made of yeast dough based on wheat flour. For the festive Christmas table, they are prepared in a special way: Ukrainians add the sweet filling, fry buns in oil and sprinkle them with powdered sugar. Such *pampushky* are very similar in taste to donuts.

This year, Ukrainians celebrated Christmas and the New Year against the backdrop of a full-scale Russian invasion, constant shelling, and blackouts. Many Ukrainians celebrated 2023 on the frontlines and could not be with their relatives during these holidays. Millions of Ukrainians celebrated Christmas with refugee status. In those hard times, many people were not sure how to celebrate the winter holidays and whether it was all right to make some preparations. Because how can you celebrate Christmas and have parties while there's a war going on in your country? However, then they say to themselves: "I have the right to live." And the war is now on the front lines so that I can live now. When we live life to the fullest, we can be useful, and we can give other people the opportunity to live better whatever it takes. This war is not the responsibility of one, but helping one or more people is within our power, it is our responsibility, and we can do it. Therefore, thanks to our brave soldiers, we had the opportunity to celebrate Christmas peacefully and we are quite sure that peace will come to our land soon.