

Designated Speaker: (reads the Holy Nativity from St. Luke 2:1-14). In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time had come for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

In that region there were shepherds living in fields keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see- I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"

Leader: "We share the holy wafers. Through this sharing we are God bound to forgive each other all wrongs, real and imagined, which have been committed through the year...and promise never to return to them. Only then do we have a valid sharing of the holy wafers. As Christ forgives us, so we forgive each other. Then Bethlehem, the House of Bread, where True Bread from heaven was born, is born from above, among us, in us. For this reason the Christmas wafer is called the "Bread of Unifying Love." Glory to God in the Highest!

All: "Peace to all God's people on earth".

The holy wafers are now shared with all present, each breaking a piece from the other.

Exchange may include the traditional: "I wish you much health, happiness, and good fortune, and after this life an eternal crown in heaven."

Resources

Oplatki are distributed at St. Michaels Church beginning the 3rd week of Advent.

References



The Oplatki Tradition of Eastern Europe." The Catholic Store for First Communion Gifts, Confirmation Gifts, Catholic Books, Catholic Bibles and Rosaries. Web. 25 Oct. 2010. aquinasandmore.com



Krysa, Czesław Michał. A Polish Christmas Eve: Traditions and Recipes, Decorations and Song. Lewiston, NY: CWB, 1998. Print.

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OPLATKI

The Christmas Wafer

A Family Guide to this Festive Christmas Eve Tradition

Christmas

Christmas celebrates the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The feast is preceded by a 40-day period of prayer, fasting and penitence known as Advent. Oplatki, the Christmas Wafer, provides an excellent transition from one season to the next.

Heritage

Catholic families of Polish, Slovak, Czech and Lithuanian heritage begin their Christmas Eve celebration with Oplatki, Oplatky or Plotkele a thin communion like wafer made of unleavened flour and stamped with intricate Christmas designs. This spiritual custom began around 966 A.D. when the Kingdom of Poland became Christian.

Symbolism

Historically bread has been a symbol of life and hope. God sent manna to His people as they wandered in the dessert (Exodus 16:8, 9, 31, 32). Bethlehem meaning "House of Bread" was the village of Jesus' birth. And finally, Jesus declared at the Last Supper, "I am the Bread of Life" (John 6:47-51) and he left believers his body and blood under the appearance of bread and wine in the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

Communion

The word oplatki derives from the Latin word "oblata" meaning "offering". During the Mass the bread and wine are offered to God the Father as oblata. At Christmas Eve dinner the oplatki is something we offer to each other along with blessings, good wishes or forgiveness. Oplatki can be seen as an aid to worthy reception of the Eucharist as well as a means to unite the family in spiritual communion.

Preparation

The ceremony begins with the family and guests gathered around the Christmas Eve dinner table. The oplatki is displayed on a napkin-lined plate. Straw symbolizing the manger can be scattered on the table or placed under the oplatki.

Sharing

One oplatki for the whole family to share: The eldest member breaks off a piece of the oplatki and gives it to their spouse while offering their specific blessings and good wishes and asking forgiveness for the past year. The Spouse then breaks off a piece of the oplatki and reciprocates the gesture. They now turn to their right and offer blessings, wishes and forgiveness to the person sitting next to them. The process repeats itself around the table until everyone present has participated. Or...

One oplatki per person: Each family member receives their own oplatki wafer and breaks off a piece and offers it along with their blessings and good wishes and asks forgiveness of each person present at the meal.

Conclusion

The meal begins after everyone has participated. Oplatki is a tradition rich in history and symbolism. A Eucharistic atmosphere of love and thanksgiving is created around the family holiday table. It is a way to personally bridge the darkness of life without Christ to a new life committed to His will. Oplatki is a gift we can give each other that is pleasing to God the Father during this holy Christmas season.

The Oplatki Ceremony

The family gathered begins by making the Sign of the Cross.

Designated Speaker: "The Star of the Wise Men appears in the East; summons us to celebrate this Royal feast. The Star of Bethlehem with its gleaming light signifies that our Lord was born this holy night. The Word is made flesh-Him we humbly adore. Revealed in a manger-God's true Grace restores. In solemn tribute we bow, revere, proclaim: Blessed be our Lord! Worship His Holy Name!"

Mother: (of the home or someone designated- lights the festival candles on the table. She says for each candle): "The Light of Christ:"

All: "Thanks be to God!"

Leader: "We gather together on this holy evening for the sacred and joyful Christmas Eve Vigil. On this night, closest to the year's shortest of days and longest of nights, a Star appears in the heavens, dispelling the darkness. We celebrate the fact that the Word became flesh!"

All: "And full of grace and truth lived among us!"

Leader: "The Birth of our Lord Jesus Christ".