

Polish Christmas Open House at Museum



On **Saturday, December 9th**, the Polish American Cultural Center Museum at 308 Walnut Street in historic Philadelphia will sponsor its annual **Christmas Open House**. **Everyone is invited. Admission is FREE.**

The schedule for the Christmas Open House is as follows:

- 11 A.M. to 11:45 A.M.** Snacks and refreshments will be served in the 4th floor meeting rooms of the Polish American Cultural Center.
- 12 Noon to 12:30 P.M.** Children's Magic Show in the Exhibit Hall on the first floor.
- 12:30 P.M. to 1 P.M.** Sw. Mikolaj will visit the Museum and have a treat for every child.
- 1 P.M. to 1:30 P.M.** The children will sing Koledy.

Admission is FREE to everyone and Sw. Mikolaj will be available to take pictures with the children, so bring your camera.

Refreshments will be served from 11 A.M. to 2 P.M.

For more information about the Christmas Open House on Saturday, December 9th, call the Museum - Monday through Friday between 9 A.M. and 4 P.M. - Call 215-922-1700.

During the Polish Christmas Open House the Museum Gift Shop will be open from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M. The Gift Shop is open Monday through Saturday between 10 A.M. and 4 P.M.



Best Wishes for a Blessed Christmas and a Happy New Year To All Our Parishioners and Friends in Polonia!

St. Adalbert Parish, Philadelphia, PA
Rev. Msgr. Francis S. Feret, Pastor

St. Adalbert Parish, Schenectady, NY
Rev. Carl A. Urban, Pastor

St. Casimir Parish, Mahanoy City, PA
Rev. Lawrence Bukaty, Pastor

St. Hedwig Parish, Trenton, NJ
Rev. Jacek Libinski, Pastor

St. Hedwig Parish, Wilmington, DE
Rev. Andrew Molewski, Pastor

St. Hubert Parish, Point Marion, PA
Rev. Joseph Sredzinski, Pastor

St. John Cantius Parish, Philadelphia, PA
Rev. Joseph Zingaro, Pastor

St. Josaphat Parish, Philadelphia, PA
Rev. Leonard Lewandowski, Pastor

St. Joseph Parish, Camden, N.J.
Rev. Edward Lipinski, Pastor

St. Laurentius Parish, Philadelphia, PA
Rev. Francis Gwiazda, Pastor

St. Mary Parish, Conshohocken, PA
Rev. Msgr. Robert Grudowski, Pastor

St. Mary Parish, Reading, PA
Rev. Leon Stajkowski, Pastor

National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa
Pauline Fathers and Brothers

Sacred Heart Parish, Clifton Heights, PA
St. Hedwig, Chester, PA

Rev. Msgr. Francis A. Barszczewski, Pastor
Rev. Jan Palkowski, Parochial Administrator

Sacred Heart Parish, Swedesburg, PA
Rev. Andrew McCormick, Pastor

St. Philip Neri Parish/St. Stanislaus, Philadelphia, PA
Rev. Vincent Welsh, Pastor

St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish, Coatesville, PA
Rev. John V. Oulds, Pastor

St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish, Minersville, PA
Rev. Leo J. Maletz, Pastor

St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish, Wilmington, DE
Rev. Edward Kaczorowski, Pastor

St. Valentine Parish, Philadelphia, PA
Rev. Christopher Mendelewski, Pastor

Holy Cross Parish, Trenton, NJ

St. Stanislaus Parish, Trenton, NJ
Rev. Msgr. Edward Arnister, Pastor

Treasured Polish Christmas Traditions

Wesolych Swiat Bozego Narodzenia! That is the way to say "Merry Christmas" in Polish. Among Poles, wherever they are, the most beloved and beautiful of all traditional festivities is that of Christmas Eve. It is then that the Wigilia, or Christmas Eve Dinner is served. It is a solemnly celebrated occasion and arouses deep feelings of kinship among family members.



For days in advance, Poles prepare the traditional foods and everyone anxiously awaits the moment when the first star, known as the Gwiazdka, appears in the eastern sky, for that is when the feast to commemorate the birth of the Christ Child begins.

There is always a thin layer of hay under the white tablecloth in memory of the Godchild in the manger. Before sitting down at the table, everyone breaks the traditional wafer, or Oplatek, and exchanges good wishes for health, wealth and happiness in the New Year. This is such a deeply moving moment that often tears of love and joy are evoked from the family members who are breaking this symbolic bread. The Oplatek is a thin, unleavened wafer similar to the altar bread in the Roman Catholic Church. It is stamped with the figures of the Godchild, the blessed Mary, and the holy angels. The wafer is known as the bread of love and is often sent by mail to the absent members of the family.



Wesolych Świat Bożego Narodzenia Pomysłności w Nowym Roku

The dinner itself differs from other evening meals in that the number of courses is fixed at seven, nine or eleven. According to myth, in no case must there be an odd number of

people at the table, otherwise it is said that some of the feasters would not live to see another Christmas. A lighted candle in the windows symbolizes the hope that the Godchild, in the form of a stranger, may come to share the Wigilia and an extra place is set at the table for the unexpected guest. This belief stems from the ancient Polish adage, "A guest in the home is God in the home."

The Wigilia is a meatless meal, no doubt the result of a long-time Church mandate that a strict fast and abstinence be observed on this day before Christmas. Although the Church laws have been revised and permit meat to be eaten on this day, the traditional meal remains meatless. Items that would normally be included in a traditional Wigilia menu include mushroom soup, boiled potatoes (kartofle), pickled herring (sledzie), fried fish, pierogi, beans and sauerkraut (groch i kapusta), a dried fruit compote, babka, platek, assorted pastries, nuts and candies.

After the meal the members of the family sing Polish Christmas Carols called the koledy while the children wait impatiently around the Christmas tree or choinka for the gifts to be exchanged. Polish Christmas Carols are numerous and beautiful, especially when sung in Polish parishes at the Christmas Eve Mass. This Mass is called the Pasterka, which means the Shepherds Watch, and there is a popular belief in Poland that while the congregation is praying, peace descends on the snow-clad, sleeping earth and that during that holy night, the humble companions of men - the domestic animals - assume voices. But only the innocent of heart may hear them.

Aside from the beautiful Wigilia, the Polish people have a number of other traditions that they practice throughout the Christmas season. Christmas Day itself is spent in rest, prayer, and visits to various members of the family. In Poland, from Christmas Day until the twelfth night, boys trudge from village to village with an illuminated star and a ranting King Herod among them to sing carols. Sometimes, they travel through the towns in expectation of more generous gifts. In some districts, the boys carry on puppet shows called szopki. These are built like a little house with two towers, open in the front where a small crib is set.

During the Christmas season, the theaters give special performances. On the feast of the Epiphany, the priest and the organist visit the homes, bless them and write over their doors the initials of the three wise men - KMB (Kasper, Melchior and Balthazar) - in the belief that this will spare the homes from misfortune.

The Christmas season closes on February 2, known as Candlemas Day. On that day, people carry candles to church and have them blessed for use in their homes during storms, sickness and death.

Wesolych Swiat, Bozego Narodzenia i Szczesliwego Nowego Roku!

Polishamericancenter.org/Polish_Christmas_Customs.htm



Polish American String Band Trip to Italy

The Polish American String Band invites you to join them on a trip to Italy, March 21-29, 2007. For more information, call Atkinson & Mullen Travel at 1-800-727-4380.