

## Well-Known Polish Christmas Customs



Wesolych Swiat! Bozego Narodzenia! That is the way to say "Merry Christmas" in Polish. Among Poles, living all over the world, the most beloved and beautiful of all traditional festivities is that of Christmas Eve as they gather for the Christmas Eve Dinner, known as Wigilia.

The Wigilia table is covered with a white cloth on which a thin layer of hay is placed to remind all gathered of the humble manger setting where the Christ Child was born. 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. The Oplatek is a thin, unleavened wafer similar to the altar bread in church. It is stamped with the figures of the Christ Child and family. The Oplatek wafer is known as the bread of love and unity and is often sent by mail to family members and friends in Poland or those living at a distance who are unable to be present for the Christmas Eve Dinner.

A lighted candle in the window, or on the table, symbolizes the hope that the Christ Child will be with you in spirit. The Polish people also set an extra place at the table for an 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. Items that are included in a traditional Wigilia menu are mushroom soup, boiled potatoes, pickled herring, fried fish, pierogi, beans and sauerkraut, a dried fruit compote, babka, potato pancakes, assorted pastries, nuts and candies.

After dinner the members of the family sing Polish Christmas Carols called Koledy, while the children wait impatiently around the Christmas tree or choinka for the gifts to be exchanged.

Aside from the beautiful Wigilia, the Polish people enjoy Polish Christmas Carols, "Koledy", sung in Polish churches at the Christmas Eve Mass, known as Pasterka, or Shepherd's Watch, and throughout the Christmas season, to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.

Christmas Day itself is spent enjoying visits to family members and friends where you will always hear the words "We Wish You a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year", in Polish, "**Wesolych Swiat, Bozego Narodzenia i Szczesliwego Nowego Roku!**"


## Working Together, We Accomplished Many Good Things! Dziekujemy Bardzo - Thank You!

2011 has been a year of many challenges, but because so many organizations, churches, schools, and individual members worked closely together, we were able to "**Keep the Polish American Heart Beating Proudly**". In each edition of the Polish American News you will find reports on recent activities highlighting our efforts, information about upcoming events, and ways to access community services and be part of the efforts of Polonia in Southeastern Pennsylvania and TriState Polonia which includes: Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. After you read this newspaper, spread the word to others. The newspaper can be viewed on the Internet at: **PolishAmericanNews.com**. You're asked to email the newspaper's link to your family members and friends.

The Board and Directors of the Polish American Cultural Center Museum and the Polish American Congress, Eastern Pennsylvania District ask for your continued support throughout 2012. Best wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. Visit us on the Internet at: **PolishAmericanCenter.com**.

Michael Blichasz, President





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## Polish Christmas Open House at Museum



On **Saturday, December 10th**, 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 10th, 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.

Visit us on the Internet at:

**PolishAmericanCenter.com**

## To all our Members and Friends Best Wishes for a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Healthy New Year

**Adam Mickiewicz Polish Language School**

**Copernicus Society of America**

**Council of United Polish Societies  
Chester, Pennsylvania**

**Jagiellonian Law Society**

**Janosik Polish Dancers**

**Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission**

**Polish American Congress  
Eastern Pennsylvania District**

**Polish American Cultural Center Museum  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

**Polish American Heritage Association  
of Delaware County**

**St. Hedwig Society, Chester, PA**

**Polish American Radio Program**

**Polish Beneficial Association**

**Polish Eagles Sports Club**

**Polish Falcons of America**

**Polish Falcons of America Nest #171**

**Polish Intercollegiate Club  
PKM Polish Folk Dance Group**

**Polish Museum of America  
Chicago, Illinois**

**Polish National Alliance of U.S. of N.A.**

**Polish National Alliance District #6**

**Polish National Alliance Lodge #650**

**Polish National Alliance Lodge #714**

**Polish Police Association of Philadelphia**

**Polish Roman Catholic Union of America**

**Polish Roman Catholic Union of America  
District 3 - Philadelphia**

**Polish Women's Alliance of America**

**Polish Women's Alliance of America  
St. Rita's Society #417**

**St. Adalbert Polish Language School**

**Second Street Polish Society**

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