

Beyond the shopping mall: Traditions in the city

In a city as diverse as Toronto, Christmas comes in many flavours. And for the observant, Jesus's birthday isn't a

time but a occasion for fastidiously and Anna explains how Toronto

ITALY

THE TRADITION
Whether Santa Claus doles out presents depends on what region of Italy you're from - in some places, La Befana, the kind witch who got lost on

PHILIPPINES

THE TRADITION
Few nations take Christmas as seriously as the Philippines, a predominantly Roman Catholic country. The truly observant attend nine daily

POLAND

THE TRADITION
Christmas Eve dinner - the Wigilia - is a grave occasion, taking days of intense preparation. Devout Polish Catholics don't begin the feast until the first star appears in the sky. Twelve meatless dishes are meant to represent the 12 Apostles (or the 12 days of Christmas). After midnight mass, the super-traditional (and those with hearty appetites) sit down for a second dinner of meat, though this ritual is fading.

RUSSIA

THE TRADITION
Christmas was frowned upon in Soviet Russia - St. Nick was replaced by a more generic "Grandfather Frost" - but is now undergoing a resurgence. Toronto's tightly knit Russian immigrant community, numbering around 100,000, have largely kept Orthodox traditions alive by celebrating on January 6 - Christmas Eve according to the Julian calendar, created by Julius Caesar. Most families spend the day shuttling to relatives' homes, attending evening church services, and fasting to work up an appetite for the meal ahead.



SHOP
Sweet Temptation Bakery (500 Hensall Circle, Mississauga, 905-272-2161) churns out delicious Polish doughnuts, cakes and waffles; Roncesvalles Bakery (173 Roncesvalles Ave., 416-535-7143) serves up hearty comfort foods such as kapusniak soup, potato pancakes and cabbage rolls.

SERV

Want to church, The folk modern

TAKING The new United outdoor live nat 5:30 p.m. Green

BROADWAY STYLE

The gay-friendly Metropolitan Community Church hosts an annual Christmas Eve celebration at Roy Thomson Hall, with a special performance this year by Broadway star Louise Pflue. Monday, 10:30 p.m. \$19.50. 60 Simcoe St. 416-872-4255.

HEARING THE STORY

Apart from their Christmas Eve service, you can also catch the social-justice-oriented Church of the Holy Trinity's Christmas Story nativity play, a 70-year tradition. Shows today and tomorrow, 4:30 and 7:30 p.m.; Christmas service Monday, 9:30 p.m. 10 Trinity Sq. 416-598-4521.

THE ST. JAMES VERSION

St. James Cathedral is an old Anglican stronghold, but open to all. If you're looking for a Christmas Eve with a little gravitas, the 1,000-seat church's Gothic Revival architecture, 100-metre spire (the country's tallest) and booming 5,000-pipe organ are impressive to behold. Monday, 4:30 and 7:30 p.m. 65 Church St. 416-364-7885. ■ Anna-Kaisa Walker

finish, it wouldn't be Christmas without a bottle of chilled prosecco and a cake made in Italy. "No matter where you are in the world, if you're Italian, you have to eat panettone on Christmas," says Nicky Lombardi of the Italian Canadian Cultural Association.



SHOP
Pasquale Bros. (16 Goodrich Rd., Etobicoke, 416-364-7397) imports their panettone (in flavours such as rum and chocolate) from Italy. If it's Italian, Lady York Foods (2939 Dufferin St., 416-782-8585) has it - this family-owned supermarket serves all your Christmas feasting needs.

ance, with dishes like roasted pig, pancit rice noodles, relleno meat loaf and cassava cake on the menu. The gifts often come out after dinner, though some families open presents on Christmas morning.



SHOP
Filipino desserts are big business for FV Foods & Miel's (1225 Dundas St. E., Unit G8, Mississauga, 905-270-9001, plus two other locations). Remedy's Restaurant (4830 Sheppard Ave. E., 416-600-9661) has an extensive party menu and catering.



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night, Our Lady 85 St. 416-924-

two mass- at 10 families. a half-hour

night, St. Paul's 104-7588



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THE SERVICES
1 Monday, English mass at 10 p.m., Polish mass at midnight, St. Casimir's Church, 295 Roncesvalles Ave., 416-532-2122
2 Monday, family mass in English at 9:30 p.m., midnight mass in Polish, St. Stanislaw Koszka Church, 12 Denton Ave., 416-504-4642



AT HOME
Most Poles don't jump the gun by festooning the tree weeks early. "We don't decorate the Christmas tree until Christmas Eve - that's a strict rule," says Anna Herman of the Polish-Canadian Women's Federation. The Wigilia begins with the breaking of the oplatek - a communion-wafer-like bread - and ends with desserts such as dried-fruit compote, racuchy pancakes, and kuzia, a porridge sweetened with honey.



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THE SERVICES
Traditional services are conducted in Old Church Slavonic, the 1,000-year-old liturgical language (if you understand Russian, you'll get the gist). Women cover their heads with a scarf or hat, wear skirts, and forgo lipstick.
1 In Old Church Slavonic: Jan. 6, 7 p.m., Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Church, 29 Henry St., 416-295-5893.
2 In English: Jan. 6, time TBA, St. Joseph of Arimathea Orthodox Church, 255 Wilson Heights Blvd., 416-590-8525.



AT HOME
"The first food after returning from church on Christmas Eve is very simple," says Natalia Cheveleva of the Russian-Canadian Cultural Aid Society - it's kasha, a kind of porridge made from grains such as buckwheat or rye. (Some families toss a spoonful at the ceiling - sticking is considered a good omen, though cleaning it off is a different story.) A belt-busting feast follows, usually involving two buffet tables, according to Ms. Cheveleva: One for meat dishes, such as apple-stuffed goose and tongue en gelée, the other for sweets, such as gingerbread and pryanki cookies.



SHOP
Though you won't find caviar from the endangered Caspian sturgeon here, Caviar Direct at St. Lawrence Market (193 Front St. E., 416-361-3422) caters to discriminating palates with caviar and roe from Canada. ■ Special to The Globe and Mail

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