



Fact of Faith

Advent and Christmas Celebrations and Customs Around the World

by Norma Montenegro Flynn

Christmas is one of the biggest celebration around the world, as Christians from different cultures come together to celebrate the birth of Jesus. God and King, yet so humble, he was destined to be born in a manger.

With shopping, gifts lists, sales and specials that lure people to spend more money, it is difficult to remain focused on the true meaning of Advent and Christmas and the opportunity it brings us to prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus, to show kindness to others, to give to those in need, and to share time and memories with family and friends. A fun way to enjoy the Advent season is to learn about how countries around the world have unique customs and celebrations for the Advent season. Here are some:

The Feast of Saint Nicholas is celebrated on December 6. Children leave their shoes outside their bedroom door the night before and awaken that day to find a surprise treat in their shoes. Saint Nicholas was a fourth century bishop in Lycia, a province in Turkey. He became well known for his generosity. He is also considered the patron saint of brides and children and the precursor to Santa Claus.

Saint Lucy: The feast of Saint Lucy (Lucia) is celebrated on December 13, in Italy, Sweden, Scandinavia and Croatia. Her name means light. In Italy, children leave bowls of milk and carrots to attract the hungry donkey she travels on and make sure she stops by their house and leaves presents for them. In Sweden, the feast day is called *Luciadagen*. The oldest girl in the family wears a white dress, a red sash as a sign of martyrdom, and a wreath crown with lighted white candles. Other girls also dressed as Lucy walk in procession singing traditional songs and carrying

rolls and cookies that later on are shared with all those present.

Fiesta de la Guadalupana: December 12 is the Feast Day of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This Mexican tradition has also been adopted by many people from Central and South America living in the United States. This is one of the most popular religious feasts among Hispanics in the United States. Many parishes throughout the country celebrate this feast day by doing reenactments of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, praying a morning rosary dedicated to her, and bringing her the traditional “Mañanitas” with mariachi bands singing songs to praise her. Our Lady of Guadalupe is also considered the patroness of the unborn.

Posadas are celebrated in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and other Latin American countries. Usually neighborhoods get together to reenact the pilgrimage of Joseph and Mary before the birth



Bishops Jose Leopoldo Gonzalez Gonzalez of Nogales, Mexico, and Gerald F. Kicanas of Tucson, Ariz., make their way with people along the international border fence during a “posada,” the commemoration of Mary and Joseph’s search for shelter, Dec. 20 in Nogales, Sonora.

of Jesus as a way to prepare their hearts for the nativity of our Lord. They go from house to house singing traditional Advent and Christmas carols or



villancicos, knocking on every door, but everyone turns them down until they find one house that gives them shelter. Some parishes in the United States also celebrate this tradition as a way to pass on this tradition to young children. They are celebrated starting December 16.

Simbang Gabi or Misa de Gallo: It is a novena of Masses celebrated in the Philippines at dawn starting on December 16 until Christmas Eve. Filipino communities throughout the United States also celebrate this tradition, from December 15 to December 23. It is considered a way to prepare for the coming of Jesus with fervor, joy and thanksgiving which are expressed in their faithfulness to attend the full novena Masses. After each Mass, families share traditional holiday sweets and desserts.

The Feast of the Epiphany is celebrated on January 5, in many countries around the world,

like Mexico, Spain, Peru and in the island of Puerto Rico, where it's called the Feast of the Three Kings. In Puerto Rico for example, the town's mayor will visit impoverished neighborhoods and bring toys to kids. The kids receive the gifts from people dressed as the Reyes Magos. The night before the Feast of the Epiphany, children fill out a box or leave treats for the Wise Men (and their camels,) and the next day they find gifts or candy delivered to them while they were sleeping.

These feasts may be diverse in their celebrations and customs, but the center remains the same: they remind us of the beautiful miracle that Jesus was born unto us.

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