

## Gòdë – Christmas Time

The word „Gòdë” in Slavic languages means time of joy and of merry. In Kashubian „Gòdë” refers to Christmas time.

Kashubian Christmas begins with Christmas Eve on December 24<sup>th</sup> and ends January 6<sup>th</sup>, the Epiphany day. This is time when Christian tradition mingles with the much older pre-Christian Kashubian beliefs, primarily associated with the worship of nature. On Christmas Eve Kashubian family gather to eat dinner together, where only meatless dishes are served. In the past it was a non-festive occasion, and rather just a modest meal.

On Christmas Eve meat is not eaten. Fish take the centre stage. Typically sea fish such as herring, salmon, eel, cod or sweet water fish such as pike, vendace, roach, perch and carp. A traditional dish which is also served is stewed dried fruit compote with plums, pears, apples, all cooked together.

For more than a hundred years Christmas tree is being set in Kashubian homes a few days before Christmas. Most frequently it is spruce or pine. It is decorated with Christmas balls, paper chains and other trinkets that parents and children often make together during long December nights prior to Christmas.

Previously, instead of Christmas tree a sheaf of cereal would be placed in the corner of the room. It was supposed to be the symbol of abundance and hope that the household will never run out of bread.

After Christmas Eve's dinner people get together to sing Christmas carols. Kashubs have so many of them that they could stay by the table singing throughout the whole evening. As little as 30-40 years ago, on that evening you could almost be guaranteed a visit from carollers called in Kashubian „Gwiôzdczi”, „Gwiôdze” or „Panëszczy.” They walked through the village, from house to house. They would always be up to some mischief directed at the children and to dance with adults. They would wear disguises portraying animals, people, personify devil or death, which for example typically is represented as a figure of a woman dressed in white wielding scythe. Among the most common animal disguises are the goat, bear, stork and a horse. Gypsy and a policeman frequently make an appearance as well. Nowadays this custom is practised only in some villages.

In all of the Kashubian homes children are awaiting a man called „Gwiôzdór”, a man bearing gifts. It is a peculiar character, awe-inspiring and sometimes children are even frightened of him. „Gwiôzdór” is wearing long leather boots and sheepskin coat. His attributes are: a mask, bag of gifts for the well-behaved children and a whip for the disobedient. Adults encourage children to approach window and find the star of Bethlehem on the night sky. This is used as a distraction, just for „Gwiôzdór” to suddenly appear.

After the gifts are handed out children go to bed and adults go to church to take part in „Pasterka” - a Midnight mass. Pasterka means literally „Shepherds' Mass” after the shepherds, who first found Jesus in one of Bethlehem stables. Christmas is celebrated over two days: 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of December. Christmas Day is rather a day Kashubs spent at home

with the close family. However, Boxing Day it is common to visit relatives, friends and colleagues. The entire Christmas period up to the day of Epiphany is sacred. Because of this Kashubs avoid any arduous work. Even laundry is being postponed for later.

It is already New Year's Eve and in the past people would walk around orchards and gardens carrying little bell. The bell would have been rung by every vegetable patch and every tree, accompanied by wish or spell for fruit, vegetables and cereals to be plentiful in the new year. Fishermen would ring the bell at the sea shore to wake up the fish. This was supposed to guarantee abundant fishing trips.

Between New Year and Epiphany day it is possible to meet children and teenagers dressed up as the Three Wise Men. They sing Christmas carols carrying the nativity scene representing birth of Jesus Christ surrounded by shepherds and animals. People repay them by giving small amount of money. And this way we have reached the last part of Kashubian Christmas!