

## Polish and Latvian Christmas Rituals

In addition to Radek's wonderful homework, which he handed in at the end of the session, I jotted down these offerings.

The '**oplatek**', or holy wafer is large and blessed by the local priest with holy water and handed out by the church to each family.

There is a tradition of **fasting** before the Wigilia, which is held on the evening of December 24<sup>th</sup>, Christmas Eve. No meat is eaten at this meal.

Varieties of the beetroot soup '**bortsch**' are common across the Russian, Latvian and Polish cultures. In some families, tiny mushroom ravioli are added to the soup.

**Carp** is a traditional fish for this feast, and is eaten fried, with fried vegetables.

A special large pancake is made, called '**croquette**' (not sure of correct spelling). It is filled with a mixture of cooked cabbage, onions and mushrooms, rolled up, dipped in egg and breadcrumbs and fried.

**Compote** is another traditional part of the feast. It is made with dried fruit, including strawberries, soaked in fruit juice and is very sweet. There is no special cake made at Christmas, but the table will be covered with many beautiful different kinds of cakes.

**Presents** will be under the Christmas Tree, and there is a tradition of singing and listening to carols around the tree on December 24<sup>th</sup>.

On December 25<sup>th</sup>, there will be plenty of food left to eat, with the addition of meat, maybe a turkey or something special like that.

## Latvian, Russian Christmas

In the Orthodox Church the New Year, January 7<sup>th</sup>, is celebrated more than Christmas. The church holds a six hour service from 11.p.m. until 5.00a.m. and people stay throughout, standing and, at midnight, moving round the church with lighted candles, listening to the service which is sung and full of wonderful music. Children go to this service with their families.

There would often be a Christmas Tree in the middle of the room, so that families or community groups could hold hands and circle the tree, singing carols. At school, there would be a Santa, and the children would have to step up to him and sing a song or recite a poem in order to be given a present.

**Kutya**, a special sweet dish of rice, honey and grapes would be eaten at this time, and was recognised by all the cultures.