

spice wine and a variety of home-made cookies finish off the dinner. Everyone attends church after dinner. Then the beautiful tree-lighting ritual begins. The youngest child recites a prayer and the family sings *Silent Night* in German. Anyone who plays a musical instrument is invited to accompany the singers. The tree dazzles as it is lit for the first time, a reminder of the days when real candles were used.

In German-Canadian homes, December 25 is a joyous family celebration, highlighted if possible with a visit to the Grandmother's house. She has a special tree, decorated with hand-

made ornaments, marzipan and chocolate treats.

The Christmas feast includes goose or duck, a roast pig, sauerkraut and potato dumplings. Desserts would satisfy any sweet tooth – Black Forest cake, raisin loaf and special cookies baked a month in advance. The children are given a plate of goodies to nibble during the day.

#### Italian traditions

Families from southern Italy in Canada share a special supper on Christmas eve, while those from northern Italy celebrate the following day. Since December 24 is a day of abstinence,

the meal is meatless and seafood dishes are eaten, with eel being the most popular. Codfish, smelts and anchovies are fried in oil. Fancy pastries and desserts of seasonal fruits complete the meal.

*Panettone*, a bread-like cake with raisins, is served by immigrants from northern Italy.

One custom common to both northern and southern Italo-Canadians is the visit of the *Befana* on January 6. *Befana* is a Latin abbreviation of Epiphany, the day of the Wise Men's visit to Bethlehem. Legend has it that good children receive gifts from an old woman who carries a sack. Those who misbehave get nothing but a chunk of coal.

#### Dutch customs

Canada's immigrants from the Netherlands spend the season quietly, gifts being exchanged on St. Nicholas Day, December 6. This is a children's holiday and they still hang their stockings "by the chimney with care." St. Nick, a bishop in the third century, was known for his generosity. British colonists in New York adapted his name to Santa Claus.

Christmas Day is usually spent with the family. In accordance with Canadian custom, turkey is the main dish for dinner.

#### Polish celebrations

Polish festivities begin Christmas eve when the first star appears. A blessed host of unleavened bread, the *oplatek*, is shared among family members. A white tablecloth covers a layer of hay, a reminder of Jesus's birth in the manger.

An extra place is set at table, since legend says that any weary traveller could stop by and feel welcome and in the hope that the God Child will pay a visit.

*Borscht*, a beet soup, is served at the meatless meal, which is known as the *Wilia* supper. Traditional Polish dishes are eaten and it is interesting to note that an odd number of dishes must be served but there must never be an odd number round the table – if there is, says tradition, one of the celebrants will not live to enjoy next year's Christmas meal.

Polish Christmas season lasts until February 2, which is Cancellmas Day,

#### Thoughts for the New Year – message withstands the test of time

*On a street in Montreal, someone found a crumpled paper at his feet. He picked it up and read the printed message. This document is relayed to you as a message of joy and peace for the coming year. (Extract from the newspaper Bonne Nouvelle, December 1976.)*

Go peacefully on your way through the noise and bustle, and remember that silence is peace. As far as possible and without bending your head be friends with your fellow men; express your truth calmly and clearly; listen to what others have to say, even the boring and the ignorant – they also have something to relay.

Avoid the man with a loud and authoritative voice, he sins against the mind. Do not compare yourself to others or you may become vain and bitter. You will always find some who are better than you and some who are worse.

Rejoice in your successes but also in your plans. Enjoy your work, no matter how simple, for it is a real thing in an uncertain world.

Be cautious in business, for people are cheats. But do not forget either that virtue exists, and that a great number of people follow an ideal and that heroism is not a rare thing.

Be yourself and especially do not make a pretense of your friendship. Do not, at the same time, look at love cynically because, despite the vicissitudes and disenchantments, it is as lively as the grass you hoe.

Accept the inevitable passage of time and have no regrets of youth and its pleasures. Know that in order to be strong you have to prepare yourself but do not succumb to imaginary fears that are often the cause of fatigue and loneliness.

Besides following a wise discipline, be good to yourself. You are a son of the universe, as are the trees and the stars. You have your place among them.

Whatever you think, it is clear that the world unfolds as it should. Be therefore at peace with God, whatever it represents for you; and whatever your duties and aspirations in a world of noise and confusion, keep your soul in peace.

Despite evil, work and shattered dreams, life can still be beautiful. Be prudent. Try to be happy.

FOUND IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH IN BALTIMORE, U.S.A., DATED 1693.