

# France



In France, "**Joyeux Noel**" means "Merry Christmas."

Nearly every French home at Christmastime displays a Nativity scene or **crèche**, which serves as the focus for the Christmas celebration. The crèche is often peopled with little clay figures called **santons** or "little saints." The Three Wise Men are placed away from the manger and are moved closer each day. They

will "arrive" for the **Epiphany** on January 6.

In Southern France, a log is burned in people's homes from Christmas Eve until New Years Day. A long time ago, part of the log was used to make the wedge for the plough as good luck for the coming harvest. Although the use of the **Yule log** has faded, the French make a traditional



Yule log-shaped cake called the **buche de Nol**, which means "**Christmas Log**." In recent years, Christmas trees have begun to show up in homes. The trees are decorated with colorful decorations, the Christmas Star, wreaths and garlands, and electric lights.



On Christmas Eve, young children are very excited. They leave a fire burning and food and drink on the table in case the Virgin Mary visits. Children leave their shoes, or wooden clogs called **sabots**, by the fireplace for a gift from "**Père Noël**" who travels with his stern disciplinarian companion **Pre Fouettard**. Pre Fouettard reminds Père Noël of just how each child has behaved during the past year.

In the north of France, children are given gifts on December 6, which is **St. Nicholas' Day**. Père Noël brings a small gift on St. Nicholas Day and visits again on Christmas. In other places it is **le petit Jesus** who brings the gifts. French children set out their shoes in hopes that they will be filled during the night with small gifts. Generally adults wait until New Year's Day to exchange gifts.

Older children and adults go to church at midnight and then return home for a late supper called "**le réveillon**". Families get together for the réveillon. It is a hearty meal. Turkey with chestnuts, refined goose liver, various meats, smoked salmon, oysters, and many cheeses are served and for dessert, a beautiful chocolate-iced Yule-log.

Another tradition is to eat the thirteen desserts from Provence, including nougats, and varied dried fruits (walnuts, hazelnuts, raisins & dried figs.) At midnight, family members kiss each other with much warmth, then around two o'clock in the morning; leave for their own homes.

**Resources:**

Australian Media. Santa's Net. "Christmas in France". <http://www.santas.net/frenchchristmas.htm>

Echelon Internet. The North Pole. "France". <http://www.northpole.net/world.htm#FRANCE>

Mailon, Oliver. ZuZu. Here and Now. "Christmas in France". <http://www.zuzu.org/fran.html>

The North Pole. Christmas Around the World. "Christmas in France". <http://www.the-north-pole.com/around/france.html>