

Russia

The Russian Christmas greeting is “**S Rozhdestvom.**” Most Christian Russians belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church, and it is customary to fast until after the first church service on **Sochelnik** (Christmas Eve). Christmas Eve dinner is meatless but festive. They eat fish, beet soup or **borsch**, cabbage stuffed with millet, cooked and

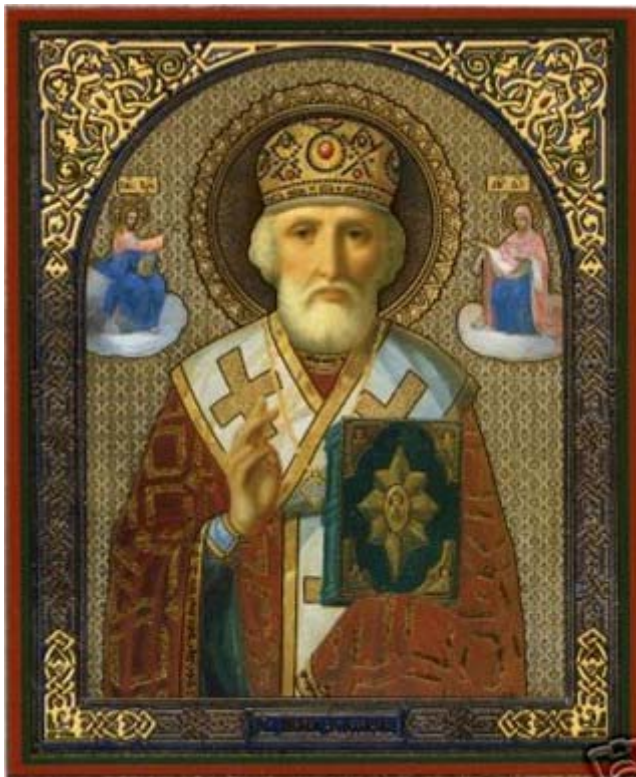


dried fruit and **sochivo** (a wheat or rice dish with honey and fruit). A favorite dish is a special porridge called **kutya**. It is made of wheat berries or other grains which symbolize hope and immortality, and honey and poppy seeds which ensure



happiness, success, and untroubled rest. Other special Christmas foods include cakes, pies and meat dumplings.

A ceremony involving the blessing of the home is frequently observed. A priest visits the home accompanied by boys carrying vessels of holy water, and a little water is sprinkled in each room.



St. Nicholas is especially popular in Russia. The legend is that the 11th-century Prince Vladimir traveled to Constantinople to be baptized, and returned with stories of miracles performed by St. Nicholas of Myra. Since then many Eastern Orthodox Churches have been named for the saint, and to this day, Nicholas is one of the most common names for Russian boys. The feast of St. Nicholas (December 6th) was observed for many centuries, but after the communist revolution, the celebration of the feast was suppressed.

According to another tradition, **Babouschka**, a kind grandmother, brings gifts for the children. Like Italy's La Befana, the story is that Babouschka failed to give food and

shelter to the three wise men during their journey to visit the Christ Child. According to tradition, she still roams the countryside searching for the Christ Child and visiting the homes of children during the Christmas season leaving a small gift behind.



On Sochelnik, at midnight service, **Ded Moroz** (Grandfather Frost) brings presents to children. He is always accompanied by his granddaughter, **Snegurochka**. On Sochelnik children hold hands, make a circle around the Christmas tree and call for Snegurochka or Ded Moroz. When they appear the star and other lights on the Christmas tree light up! The traditional greeting for Happy New Year is 'S Novym Godom'.

On Christmas Day, hymns and carols are sung. People gather in churches which have been decorated with Christmas trees or **Yelka**, flowers and colored lights.

Resources:

Australian Media Pty. [Santa's Net](http://www.santas.net/russianchristmas.htm). "Christmas in Russia". <http://www.santas.net/russianchristmas.htm>

Krimmel, Celine. [Why Christmas?](http://whychristmas.com/cultures/russia.shtml) "Christmas in Russia". <http://whychristmas.com/cultures/russia.shtml>

The-North-Pole. [Christmas Around the World](http://www.the-north-pole.com/around/russia.html). "Christmas in Russia". <http://www.the-north-pole.com/around/russia.html>