Christmas In Spain Essay, Research Paper

Christmas in Spain is a very joyous and religious time of year. You will see that a Spanish Christmas has a lot of American influence but also has much of their own heritage in it. In small towns and villages it is more traditional and distinctly Spanish. It is in the bigger cities that you will find more American and European customs. For an example, will only see a Santa Claus walking around in Madrid and other big cities. The idea of Santa has spread through out Spain more today.

The climate and the language differ and so does Christmas in Spain. The Spanish customs and traditions in small towns also will differ than in the big cities. In Spain there are two regions, the north and the south. They are very different from another. The northern regions decorate their homes with holly and mistletoe when the nativity comes. The southern region decorates their homes with geraniums and heliotrope. You can see so much of the difference because of the climate and the culture. In the northern region it snows and it really never snows in the south. The cultures in the north are more of Roman and European because they refused the Muslim rule. In the south is influenced by Asiatic and Saracen culture.

There are many celebrations that the Spanish celebrate during the Christmas holiday. Christmas starts in Spain on December 1 to some people because that is when they start their advent calendars. Advent calendars are calendars that have a piece of candy or a treat for each day. Every day you get a treat but before you get it you have to say what you are thankful for. The calendar counts up to Christmas Eve. The other holidays are Immaculada, which is on December 8th, Christmas Eve, which is on December 24, Christmas day, which is on December 25, the Day of the Holy Innocents, which is on December 28th, The Day of the Three Kings Eve, which is on January 5th , and the Day of the Three Kings which is also known as epiphany is on January 6th. Within all of these celebrations there are certain parts throughout Spain that have different customs.

Immaculada that is on December 8th is a feast that officially starts the Christmas season. They celebrate it each year in front of the great Gothic cathedral in Serville. It is also called Los Seises or the dance of six. Ten boys that are dressed up in customs perform this dance. It is a sequence of movements and gestures, which are moving and beautiful.

To get ready for Christmas Eve, known as Noche buenas the ?good night?, the Spanish are big on decorating. Early in December is when the Christmas markets open up and there you can get decorations like wreaths, holly, greenery, candles, ornaments toys lights, trees, and supplies for the nacimentos also known as Bethlehem?s. The markets have a lot of American influence in them too. Some families put up Christmas trees. A lot of big city people live in apartments and it is very common for the complex to put a big tree in the center and decorate it with lights. The nacimentos is Spanish for nativity set. You will find one in every home. The nacimentos consists of a stable, sheep, camels, and miniatures of the holly family. A club that is devoted to organizing the nativity scenes is people called Belenista.

When Noche Buena starts to come it is time for the cooks to start to cook. Food also varies from region to region. No Spanish cook can agree on the authentic way to prepare paella, which is flavored rice. Some other recipes are a flan, garlic soup, sweets and turkey. In Serville the turkey are driven down the roads while people stick their heads outs of the window to pick which turkey they prefer. They stuff the turkey with ham, pork sausage, onions, mushrooms, and if they can afford it, chestnuts, truffles, and dried fruit. Another common sweet, dulce, is a turron. It is a sweet made of sugar honey, almond, and eggs for the rich or the poor to in joy. The Noche Buenos meal is a huge dinner. The first course is fine cheeses with anchovies. In wealthier homes there will be glass of muscatel or Spanish sherry. Chestnut soup or creamy almond soup is a great second course. In most houses they will have a besqugo witch is a metteranium sea bream or a flounder. The main meal for Christmas Eve is called Pavo Trufado de Navidad, which is Christmas turkey with truffles; truffles are mushroom like delicacy found underground. For a noche Buena dessert they will have a turron with a fine wine. The Christmas dinner in never eaten until after the midnight mass called La Misa Del Gallo, the mass of the Rooster. Then the family comes over and eats.

After dinner many go out and sing Christmas carols. Every one will bring out their guitars and other instruments. The songs they sing are known as villancicos. They also gather around their Christmas tree and sing villancicos. Most of the Christmas songs sang are hymns of Christendom. An Old Spanish verse goes like this: Esta noche es Noche-Buena, Y no es noche de domir; meaning that, this is the good night, therefore it is not meant for sleep. A common song sang is El cant dels ocells, which mean carol of the birds.

On Christmas Eve it is custom to have out cards the have angles, baby Jesus, or the nacimentos set. The greeting cards most of the time will say, ?Felices Pascuas? which means happy holiday, or Felices pascuas de navidad which means happy holiday of the nativity. If you walk down the streets you can see signs on the stores saying ? Paz en la tierra a Los hombre de Buena voluntad? which means peace on earth to people of good will.

On Christmas Eve also time to set up the nacimentos. The nacimentos will have a baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the 3 king?s shepherds, and the angle announcing the birth of Jesus. They put the shepherd in the hillside or in the town of Bethlehem. Also they put soldiers of roman and the castle of the king Herod. Sometimes you will have the nacimentos in live size forms, like at churches or schools. Many schools have a tableaux vivants. That is when students are assigned a role as one of the figures in the nacimetos and they perform a play On Christmas Eve a gift my be passed out or waited until Christmas morning. Many people divide their gifts between Christmas and the Day of the three kings. Still in some places throughout Spain people stick to customs and only hand out gifts on the day of the three kings.

On Christmas morning the nacimentos is the center of attention. El Natal is the word for Christmas. The baby Jesus is placed in his crib and candles are light. The children are gathered around dressed in pleasant customs and playing an instrument. Then every one performs in singing beloved carols. Many families may attend three masses through out Christmas day. The main meal is eaten in the afternoon and it is shared with many family members. The main course is roast turkey, goose, or capon. Puchero Olla is a dish made of chicken beef pig?s feet and garlic is very common on the Christmas day dinner table. The dessert to finish off the wonderful meal is turron.

The Urn of Fate performs a rite where the names of friends and neighbors are written down and put in a bowl. Then two names are picked at a time and the people of those names are to be destined to be come good friends for the year to come.

In Cadiz the young children perform a rite called ?swinging the sun.? Swings are set up in public squares and the children see who can go the highest. The purpose is to lead the sun further north so that winter will change to spring,

The Catalonian villagers have a way of celebrating where the young boys drag a Yule log around the streets beating in as a sign for good luck for the year to come. At the houses where they stop they are given nuts or gifts.

These are some of the rituals that different religions practice on Christmas day and by the end of the day the Christ child has been formally welcomed throughout Spain. Now the children anxiously wait for the day of the three kings.

After Christmas the time between Christmas and the day of the three kings most families spend browsing looking for gifts. This is a time when children tell their parents what they want from the kings. The children write letters to the kings just like we write letters to Santa Claus. People dress as the three kings just like we dress for as Santa Claus and visit hospitals, orphanages, and do other charity projects just like Santa Claus does.

On December 28 is the Day of the Holy Innocents or Dia de Los Santos Inocentes. It is equivalent to April Fools Day because they both play jokes on people. They got this day by when the kings reach Bethlehem, Herod decides to kill all the new born Jewish babies to avoid trouble, so on December 28th it is the day that the Spanish have for all the victims of Herod?s kill. In some parts of Spain young boys light bonfires and one of them act like the mayor who orders townspeople around to perform civic chores such as sweeping the streets. Refusal to do these chores results in fines which are used to pay for the celebration.

The next exciting day is New Years Eve or Nocheviejo, which means old night. This is another family celebration when family gathers. People dress up in costumes and dance in the streets. The wealthier families celebrate it very elegantly. The men wear white ties with tails and the women wear their most elegant gowns with their finest jewels. There are also many parties thrown and specials going on with businesses. The new years meal is basically pig with a lot of champagne and turron for dessert. It is said that people who turkey, goose, or other fowl are asking for bad luck for the New Year to come. As the clock gets ready to strike 12 everyone watches a place called Plaza de Sol that is at Madrid and you can see it from all over Spain. It is similar to when we watch the ball drop from New York. When the clock strikes 12 it is a custom to have 12 grapes and for each chime you pop one in your mouth. Prospero ano nuevo is the saying they say meaning Happy New Years. A person who can eat them all at the end of the last chime is to have good luck for the new year to come. Everyone parties until about five or six and then head to a caf?. Later that morning people head to morning mass.

After church, most people spend recovering from the night before.

The Pyreneans believe that the last night of the year, fairies or hades are suppose to come and bring good luck in the right hand and bad luck in the left hand. Families leave the door open that night and they provide open, spotless room that is supplied with bread and wine. The next morning which is New Years Day, the man of the house checks the room. The bread that is left over is split upon the other family members.

The Romans believe that their dead ancestors come back to visit so the Roman families set a table of a food for them.

The day of January 5 is the Three Kings Eve. The three kings are also known as Magi in Spain. There are many parades that go on this day. People will dress up as Magi and sit on their floats throwing sweets out to the children. The custom used to be and in some places still is where people would go out in a big group and walk all over. They would carry cakes, straw, carrots, oats, and other foods. The children would carry rattles and bells. They would also blow horns and bang-together pots and pans. They would have one person looking at around to see if they see Los Reyes Magos. They would just walk until they got tired.

That night every family member leaves out their shoes hoping that the kings will come and fill them with treats and gifts. If a child or an adult has been rotten then they would get coal in their shoe. Before they go to bed that night they take they three kings from the nacimentos and they move them to by the baby Jesus? crib instead of being on a hill or in the town of Bethlehem. They move them because the kings have reached their destination in their journey. They children that night are very anxious for the kings to come.

The 6th of January is the day of the three kings. The Spanish celebrate this day because it is when the three kings brought the three gifts to the newborn Jesus. That is why many Spanish believe you are to have out the gifts on January 6th. It is also the last day of the twelve days of Christmas also known as Epiphany. Epiphany comes from the Greek word manifestation or revolution. The oldest Spanish drama that tells about the three kings is Auto de Los Reyes Magos. It tells about their search for the Christ child. In the movie they discuss the star in the east and what it might mean. The gifts they bring are gold, frankincense, or myrrh. At first the kings do not want to follow the star but they do.

In the morning of January 6th, the children go to see if they got treats from the kings. In some places the wealthier families will go to the poor and fill their shoes with treats. On this day they have very many parades. This is also the closing of their Christmas holidays.