



UKRAINIAN CANADIAN CONGRESS
ALBERTA PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

КОНГРЕС УКРАЇНЦІВ КАНАДИ
ПРОВІНЦІЙНА РАДА АЛЬБЕРТИ

Tuesday, January 5, 2010

For Immediate Release
(Edmonton, Alberta)

Ukrainians in Alberta Begin Christmas Celebrations

As the first star appears in the sky tomorrow evening, Ukrainian Canadian families will gather to celebrate Christmas Eve. Sviata Vecherya (the Christmas Eve Supper) is steeped in tradition and features a humble and reverent 12-course meatless meal in honour of the twelve apostles spreading food for the soul throughout the world. It is the climax of a six week Nativity Fast period called Pylypivka.

“Christmas on January 7 is a centuries old tradition based on the old Julian Calendar that is celebrated by both Ukrainian Orthodox and Catholic Churches,” states Daria Luciw, UCC-APC President. “On behalf of the Board of Ukrainian Canadian Congress - Alberta Provincial Council, I am pleased to extend our heartfelt greetings on the occasion of one of the most significant of Christian holy days – the birth of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.”

Christmas has a special place in the lives of Ukrainians. It is time to appreciate the many blessings we enjoy and cherish, including our loving families, our sense of Ukrainian community and our Christian faith. We ready ourselves for Christmas with much ritual, planning the traditional meal and decorating our home. We rejoice in the Birth of Jesus Christ and thank God for all the blessings bestowed upon us, our families, our brothers and sisters in Ukraine, and on Canada, which has provided us a safe haven in which we can preserve our culture and heritage.

Khrystos Rodyvsia! (Christ is born!) "Slavite Yoho!" (Let Us Glorify Him!).

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UCC APC has arranged access to meet with a 4 generation Ukrainian Canadian family preparing and maintaining Ukrainian Christmas traditions on Wednesday, January 6.

For media inquiries to profile this Ukrainian Canadian family, dinner preparations and other inquiries please contact:

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Backgrounder: Ukrainian Christmas Traditions

The Ukrainian Christmas festive days according to the Julian calendar start on 6 January, Christmas Eve, and end on 19 January, "Jordan" or Epiphany.

The twelve-dish Christmas Eve *Sviata Vecherya* or "Holy Supper" is the central tradition of the Christmas Eve celebrations in Ukrainian homes. The dinner table sometimes has a few wisps of hay on the embroidered table cloth as a reminder of the manger in Bethlehem. When the children see the first Star in the eastern evening sky, which symbolizes the trek of the Three Wise Men, the *Sviata Vechera* may begin.

A decorated sheaf of wheat or "didukh", symbolizing the harvest, is placed in a corner of the room under an icon, with each kernel of the didukh (which literally means "grandfather spirit") denoting the spiritual presence of family and forebears. All are called to the table when the first star appears in the eastern evening sky.

Sviata Vecherya begins with the oldest member of the family offering guests a piece of bread dipped in honey as a sign of plenty and family unity. The supper continues with courses introduced one by one starting with *kutya*, which is cooked wheat sweetened with honey and dressed with poppy seeds symbolizing prosperity, peace and good health, and concluding with dessert featuring "uzvar" - a compote of stewed fruit.

Caroling begins after the *Sviata Vecherya* as groups of carolers go from house to house and "for a song" the hosts provide a donation to the charity the carolers have chosen. Ukrainian Christmas carols ("koliadky") are a part of the rich Ukrainian oral tradition and through them one can trace the Ukrainian historical experience to antiquity.

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