



Kolędowanie (caroling): Poles love the dramatic expression in their carolers who go from home to home singing kolędy. The star carriers hold a long pole with an illuminated star on top. The star could spin and often had a nativity scene. The person carrying the animal head is called the Turoń. The church approved time for caroling lasted from the end of the Midnight Mass till January 6 (The Three Kings Day). But Polish tradition stretches this time through February 2.

The most beautiful description of traditional Wigilia in Polish literature can be found in the national epic, *Chłopi* (The Peasants) by Władysław Reymont. For this novel Reymont won the Nobel Prize in 1924. Recently, the novel is back in the headlines because the oil-painted animated adaptation of this literary classic (directed DK Welchman and Hugh Welchman under the same title) will be a contender in the 2024 Oscars' best animation category.



2023 PHC Wigilia Volunteer Crew:
Julita and Weronika Zolnik, Irene Swiggum,
Szymon Woźniczka, Ania Falkowska-Felcyn,
Brian Pillsbury, Irena Frączek



2023 WIGILIA

43th Annual PHC Christmas Gathering

December 10, 2023
Breakwater Banquet Hall, Monona WI



POLISH HERITAGE CLUB
Madison-Wisconsin

Lore of Wigilia, the Vigil Supper on Christmas Eve:

1. Wigilia is the most significant part of Polish Christmas. In fact, it is more important to Poles than Christmas Day. Its name derives from the Latin word *vigilare* (to watch, be awake), in reference to waiting for Christ's birth. Wigilia has been celebrated in Poland since the 16th-17th century.
3. In memory of the star that led the Three Kings to Bethlehem, the feast begins after the first star appears in the sky. The task of spotting the star is usually delegated to children, adding to the excitement and anticipation in the air.
4. Supper begins with sharing of a wafer called *opłatek* (plural *opłatki*) and exchanging good wishes. The wafer is a symbol of reconciliation and forgiveness, hence Wigilia is the time to forgo old grudges and mend broken bridges. In older times, *opłatki* were shared also with household animals.
5. The bits of hay are often spread under the tablecloth as a reminder of Christ's birth in a manger. In some households, straws of hay are pulled out during the dinner to check what the future holds - the longest straight blade promises the greatest success in the upcoming year.
6. The table usually has an extra setting for an unexpected guest. This Christmas Eve tradition is meant to remember lonely people and invite to the table anyone who knocks on the door. An empty setting also signifies memory of loved ones who are too far to attend or have passed away.
7. The supper usually consists of 12 courses (for 12 apostles). But in some regions of Poland, the odd number of dishes was served (7, 9 or 11 depending on affordability) because these numbers were believed to bring luck in the new year.
8. Although meat on Wigilia tables is no longer banned (since 2003), Poles continue to follow the meatless tradition. Fish reigns with numerous variations of herring and carp dishes. Red beet soup with *uszka* (bite-size dumplings filled with mushroom and/or sauerkraut) and wild mushroom soup are traditional choice. Poppy seed pastries and gingerbread cookies are dessert favorites.
9. The time for Christmas gifts comes after the supper is over and families gather around the Christmas tree - which in many households is decorated on the day of Wigilia. The evening continues to the tune of *kolędy* (Christmas carols). And there is a lot to sing because Poland has over 1000 carols, more than any other catholic country.
10. Wigilia festivities end with the solemn Midnight Mass. It's Polish name is *Pasterka* (the Shepherds Mass) in reference to shepherds heading to Bethlehem. The festive mass tends to be long because it include singing carols. It is also typically so well attended that many can only listen to it from outside.

2023 WIGILIA PROGRAM

Irena Frączek, Master of Ceremonies

- 4:30 p.m. Social Hour (cash bar available)
- 5:25 p.m. Last call to take seats
- 5:30 p.m. Welcome Greeting (Irena Frączek)
- 5:35 p.m. Wigilia Prayer (Szymon Woźniczka)
- 5:40 p.m. Opłatek (Zolnik Family)
- 5:45 p.m. Dinner begins
- 6:45 p.m. Christmas Story (Irena Frączek)
- Who Brings the Christmas Gifts?
- 7:00 p.m. Święty Mikołaj (St. Nicholas)
- 7:15 p.m. Recognition of PHC Scholarship winners
- 7:20 p.m. Recognition of PHC volunteers
- 7:30 p.m. Kolędy (Christmas Carols-optional)
- 8:00 p.m. Closing Prayer (Ralph Tyksinski)
- 8:15 p.m. End of Program

