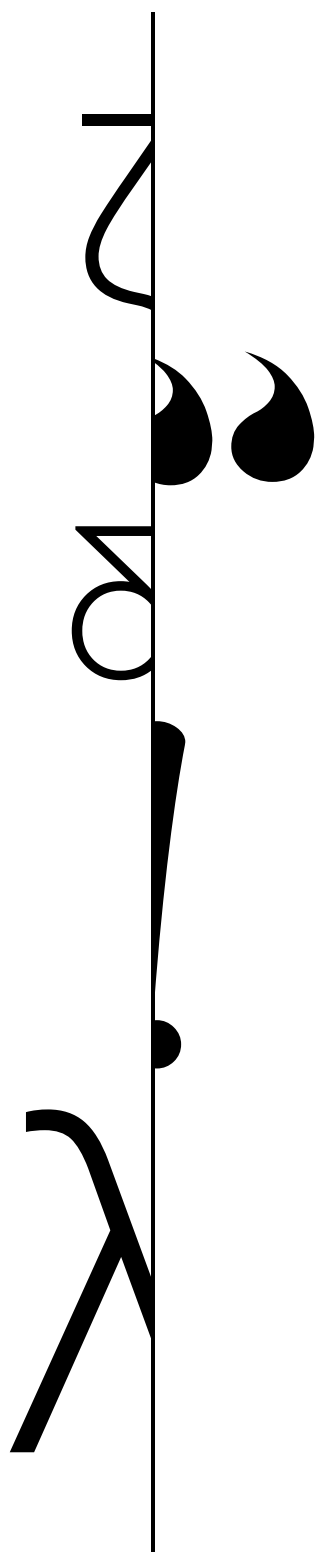


Religious and National Holiday Customs in Greece

Irene J. Karageorgou

Everything You Need to
Discover the Heart and
Soul of Greece through
Language Learning!



**TO ALL FOREIGN VISITORS WHO
REALLY WANT TO GET TO KNOW**

MY COUNTRY,
GREECE.



IRENE J. KARAGEORGOY

AROUND THE CITY

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INTRODUCTION

In Greece, we have religious and national holidays which we observe throughout the year along with many religious and cultural customs and traditions. Most customs and traditions are common all over Greece, while some others are local.

In the book "**Religious and National Holiday Customs in Greece**", which consists of 21 units, you will learn the customs and traditions we Greeks observe on the most important religious and national holidays.

More specifically:

- In **Unit 1**, with the title "**Christmas**", you will learn the cultural significance of Christmas in Greece and the cherished traditions that mark this festive holiday.
- In **Unit 2**, with the title "**New Year's Day Celebration**", you will get a glimpse into the lively and meaningful traditions that Greeks observe on New Year's Eve and learn about the customs, superstitions, and festivities that make this night a joyful and culturally significant part of Greek life.
- In **Unit 3**, with the title "**Epiphany**", you will discover the traditions and customs associated with Epiphany in Greece. You will also learn the significance of this religious holiday and the unique rituals that take place, deepening your understanding of Greek culture and spirituality.
- In **Unit 4**, with the title "**The Three Holy Hierarchs feast**", you will learn the significance and cultural practices related to the Feast of the Three Holy Hierarchs in Greek Orthodox tradition and gain insight into the historical and religious context of this observance and its relevance within Greek culture.
- In **Unit 5**, with the title "**Carnival Celebrations (Apokria)**", you will delve into the festive and unique celebration of "Apokria" and discover the traditions, customs, and cultural significance of this pre-Lent carnival season in Greece.
- In **Unit 6**, with the title "**Ash or 'Clean' Monday**", you will learn the cultural and religious significance of Ash Monday (also Clean Monday) in Greek tradition. You will also learn about the customs, rituals, and the special dietary practices observed on this day, which marks the beginning of Lent in the Greek Orthodox calendar.
- In **Unit 7**, with the title "**Greek Independence Day - March 25**", you will discover the historical and cultural significance of Greek Independence Day celebrated on March 25th and explore the

traditions, events, and commemorations that mark this important national holiday in Greece.

- In **Unit 8**, with the title "**Holy Thursday**", you will discover the customs, religious significance, and practices specific to Holy Thursday as an integral part of the Easter Week in Greek Orthodox tradition. You will explore the rituals and observances that contribute to the profound spirituality of this significant period in Greek Christian culture.
- In **Unit 9**, with the title "**Good Friday**", you will explore the customs, religious significance, and unique observances of Good Friday within the context of Greek Orthodox tradition and delve into the solemnity and rituals that make this day a profound and essential part of Greek Christian culture, especially during Easter Week.
- In **Unit 10**, with the title "**Holy Saturday**", you will discover the customs, religious significance, and unique traditions of Holy Saturday within the context of Greek Orthodox Easter celebrations. You will explore the rituals and observances that mark this special day and contribute to the rich spiritual tapestry of Greek Christian culture.
- In **Unit 11**, with the title "**Easter Sunday**", you will explore the customs, religious significance, and unique observances of Easter Sunday in the context of Greek Orthodox tradition as well as the differences from Western Christianity traditions. You will delve into the celebrations and rituals that make this day a joyful and spiritually meaningful part of Greek Christian culture.
- In **Unit 12**, with the title "**May Day**", you will learn about the observance of May Day and International Workers' Day in Greece and explore the historical context, traditions, and significance of these holidays within the framework of Greek culture and the labor movement.
- In **Unit 13**, with the title "**Pentecost**" you will learn about the customs, religious significance, and distinctive observances of Pentecost within the context of Greek Orthodox tradition. You will explore the rituals and celebrations that highlight the spiritual importance of this day in Greek Christian culture.
- In **Unit 14**, with the title "**The Holy Spirit feast**" you will discover the customs, religious significance, and unique observances of Holy Spirit Monday within the context of Greek Orthodox tradition and explore the rituals and traditions that contribute to the spiritual depth of this day in Greek Christian culture.
- In **Unit 15**, with the title "**The Dormition of the Mother of God feast**" you will explore the customs, religious significance, and unique observances of the Dormition of the Mother of God feast celebrated on August 15. You will delve into the rituals and celebrations that honor this special day in Greek Christian culture.

- In **Unit 16**, with the title "**The October 28 Anniversary**", you will explore the historical and cultural significance of Greek "No!" Day, celebrated on October 28th. You will learn about the events, and traditions that mark this important national holiday, which commemorates Greece's refusal to surrender during World War II.
- In **Unit 17**, with the title "**The November 17 Polytechnic anniversary**", you will discover the historical and cultural significance of the Athens Polytechnic Student Uprising on November 17th. You will learn about the events, traditions, and commemorations that honor the brave actions of students who played a crucial role in Greek history and democracy.
- In **Unit 18**, with the title "**Patron Saints of Professions**", you will learn the patron saints associated with various professions in Greek culture and explore the customs and traditions related to these saints and their role in providing guidance and protection to practitioners in their respective fields.
- In **Unit 19**, with the title "**Patron Saints of Cities**", you will discover the patron saints associated with different cities in Greece and explore the historical and cultural significance of these saints and their role in the spiritual life and identity of the cities they protect.
- In **Unit 20**, with the title "**Name day**", you will explore the rich tradition of Name day celebrations in Greek culture and learn about the significance and the customs and rituals of this unique and deeply cherished aspect of Greek social and religious life.
- In **Unit 21**, you will practice with comprehension exercises.

When you complete this Unit, you will have achieved the following:

- Acquire knowledge of the most significant religious holidays celebrated in Greece.
- Gain an understanding of key historical events in Modern Greek history.
- Familiarize yourself with the traditions associated with holiday periods.
- Recognize that these traditions provide frequent opportunities for celebration, communication, and connection with loved ones in Greek culture.

Unit 1:

CHRISTMAS

Christmas is the favorite winter holiday of Greek Orthodox. The religious meaning, the plethora of customs observed and the combination of religious and folk traditions create an atmosphere of joy, solidarity and social giving.

In this unit, you will learn the significance of Christmas to us, Greeks, and the customs observed on this day.

Specifically you will learn:

- The significance of Christmas.
- What we celebrate on Christmas Day.
- 3 customs and traditions observed before Christmas.
- 2 customs and traditions observed on Christmas Eve.
- 2 customs and traditions observed on Christmas Day.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHRISTMAS AND CHRISTMAS DAY

Christmas for us Orthodox is one of the biggest religious holiday, as the birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated on this day. This fixed feast, is celebrated every year on December 25, and here in Greece, both Christmas Day and Boxing Day are public holidays. However, in the mind of the people "Christmas" is the whole festive period extending from the eve of Christ's birth, December 24, until Epiphany, on January 6. The time period which includes Christmas, New Year's Day and Epiphany is also known as "The Twelve Days of Christmas" in folklore.

CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

A. ADVENT SEASON CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1st custom: Christmas Lent

Christmas Lent begins on November 15 and ends in the early hours of December 25. By the term "fasting" we mean the abstinence of Christians from certain foods of mainly animal origin.

2nd custom: Decorating the Christmas tree

The Christmas tree is a real or artificial decorated fir tree that we place in our living room. We put a star on the top and we place a crèche at the base. The crèche is the representation of the Nativity scene with effigies of the Virgin Mary, Christ, Joseph, the three Wise Men, the three shepherds, angels as well as some animals inside it. The tree is also decorated with twinkling lights. However, this custom is not of Greek origin, but it was introduced and established in Greece during the reign of the Bavarian

King Otto. The Christmas tree and all the Christmas decorations in general are kept up in houses until the Feast of Epiphany on January 6. However, in some regions in Greece -mainly islands- many people choose to put up a decorated model boat in their homes, apart from the Christmas tree. In fact, this is the traditional Greek Christmas custom, which is linked to the Greek maritime tradition.

3rd custom: Preparation of traditional Christmas sweets

"Kourabiedes" and "melomakarona" are traditional Greek Christmas sweets made a few days before Christmas and can be found in every home. "Kourabiedes" are a kind of butter cookies dusted with lots of icing sugar and "melomakarona" are a kind of cinnamon cookies immersed in honey syrup.

B. CHRISTMAS EVE CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1st custom: Preparation of Christmas bread

"Christopsomo", i.e. the bread of Christ, is a round-shaped sweet bread whose surface is decorated with a cross made of the same dough. On Christmas Day, the host first carves the shape of a cross into the Christmas bread and then cuts it and shares it with the guests attending the meal.

2nd custom: Christmas carols

In general, carols are festive songs, traditionally sung by children on the eve of major religious holidays. So early in the morning of Christmas Eve, children go to houses and shops and sing Christmas carols holding a Christmas triangle in their hand. The triangle is a musical instrument that has a triangular shape and is struck with a metal beater. With the Christmas carols, children announce the joyful news of Christ's birth musically. The tenants of the houses or shops give the children a tip and wish to see them again "Next year!".

C. CHRISTMAS DAY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1st custom: Church service

Early in the morning on Christmas Day, around 5 am, the faithful all dressed up go to Church to attend the Christmas Divine Liturgy. Shortly before the end of the Divine Liturgy, those who have fasted can receive communion.

2nd custom: Family gathering

On Christmas afternoon, we usually gather at home -the family and close relatives- for a traditional meal. The Christmas meal is mainly stuffed pork or turkey.

On Christmas Day men called Christos and women called Christina or Chrysa celebrate their Name day.

Finally on Christmas Day, we offer wishes to each other and to the people who celebrate their Name

day. You can find these wishes in the unit "Christmas Wishes in Greek" and "Name Day Wishes in Greek" respectively, which are parts of the thematic unit of the book "Expressions of the Heart: Greek Wishes for Every Occasion".



SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS OF THE UNIT

Christmas

- When we Greeks say "Christmas" we mean:
 - Christmas Day, December 25, on which we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.
 - The twelve-day period that includes Christmas Day, New Year's Day and Epiphany.
- Christmas Day and Boxing Day are public holidays in Greece.
- On Christmas Day, Christos, Christina and Chrysa celebrate their Name day.

Christmas customs and traditions

A. Advent Season

- We begin the forty-day Christmas Lent.
- We decorate the Christmas tree or the traditional Christmas boat.
- We make "kourabiedes" and "melomakarona".

B. Christmas Eve

- We make the Christmas bread.
- Children sing Christmas carols.

C. Christmas Day

- In the morning, we attend church service.
- At noon, we all celebrate together as a family and have pork or turkey for a meal.

Unit 2:

NEW YEAR'S DAY CELEBRATION

The celebration of the New Year's Day holds a special place both in the Orthodox calendar and the social life of the Greeks since it is the second important celebration of the Twelve Days of Christmas. It is a day full of customs, traditions and popular beliefs in order to attract good luck, since the first day of the New Year foretells the happy and auspicious outcome of the whole year.

In this unit you will learn the significance of New Year's Day to us Greeks and the customs and traditions we observe in order to welcome the New Year.

Specifically, you will learn:

- The significance of New Year's Day.
- What we celebrate on New Year's Day.
- 5 customs and traditions observed on New Year's Eve.
- 5 customs and traditions observed on New Year's Day.

SIGNIFICANCE AND CELEBRATION OF NEW YEAR'S DAY

New Year's Day is a fixed holiday which is celebrated every year a week after Christmas and specifically on January 1. It is a double celebration, because on this day we celebrate not only the first day of the New Year but the Name day of Saint Basil (Santa Claus), who, according to tradition, brings gifts to the children on the eve of his Name day. New Year's Day and the following day are public holidays in Greece.

CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE CELEBRATION OF THE NEW YEAR

A. NEW YEAR'S EVE CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1st custom: New Year carols

On the morning of New Year's Eve, children go to houses and shops and, after addressing the typical question "Shall we sing?", they sing carols with the accompaniment of their metal triangle. These New Year's carols talk about the coming of Santa Claus and the New Year, while the last verses are wishes for the hosts. Once the children finish the singing, the hosts give them a tip and wish to see them again "Next Year!".

2nd custom: Preparation of the "vasilopita cake"

"Vasilopita" is a type of a round-shape cake prepared on New Year's Eve. The number of the New Year is designed on the top with icing, cinnamon or chocolate. A coin, which is called "florin", is usually put inside the cake for good luck.

3rd custom: Evening family gatherings

These are the well-known "New Year's Eve's Parties", which take place either at home or in dance halls where relatives and friends gather and have fun while waiting for the change of the year. The municipalities also organize cultural events with the participation of artists which peak with the change of the year, that is as soon as the clock strikes 12 midnight.

4th custom: Purchasing state lottery tickets

On New Year's Eve, many people buy state lottery tickets, which "promise" large sums of money to those who choose the ticket with the number that will be drawn.

5th custom: Playing cards

The "chase of fortune" continues with the custom of card gambling, whereby many people are accustomed to playing card games either at family gatherings at home or in gambling clubs trying their luck as they await the arrival of the New Year.

B. NEW YEAR'S DAY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1st custom: Cutting the cake

When the clock strikes 12 and the New Year comes, it is the custom for the man of the house to cut the "vasilopita cake". Before cutting it, he knifes a cross and then he starts cutting a piece of the "vasilopita cake" for every member of the family or visitor. The first pieces are offered to Jesus, Holy Mary, the House and then, the guests. The person who finds the hidden golden coin (florin) is considered to be the lucky person of the year.

2nd custom: Santa Claus gifts

At midnight it is the custom to exchange gifts. If there are children in the family, we put the gifts under the Christmas tree for them to find when they wake up in the morning pretending that Santa Claus brought them.

3rd custom: Church service

Early in the morning of New Year's Day people go to church to attend the church service for Saint Basil.

4th custom: Breaking a pomegranate

This is an ancient custom. This red fruit is the symbol of good luck so when we come back from church the man of the house -usually the father- smashes a pomegranate at the house door. The more the scattered seeds, the happier times the New Year will bring.

5th custom: "first footing" (podariko)

It is the good or bad luck that the first visitor of the house will bring on New Year's Day. The first person that gets into the house is believed to give us a start for the year (podariko). For this reason we usually invite young kids to give us a start since they are considered to be lucky and pure. We ask them to step inside right foot first in order to bring good luck to our homes.

On this day, men with the name Vassilis and women with the name Vasiliki or Vasso celebrate their Name day.

Finally on New Year's Day we exchange warm wishes with each other and those who celebrate their Name day. You can find these wishes in the unit "Christmas Wishes in Greek" and "Name Day Wishes in Greek", respectively, which are parts of the thematic unit of the book "Expressions of the Heart: Greek Wishes for Every Occasion".



SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS OF THE UNIT

New Year

- On New Year's Day we celebrate the New Year and Saint Basil's feast.
- New Year's Day and the following day are public holidays in Greece.
- On New Year's Day, Vassilis, Vasiliki and Vasso celebrate their Name day.

New Year customs and traditions

A. New Year's Eve

- In the morning the children sing carols in the neighborhood.
- We make "vasilopita" cake.
- Those chasing their fortune buy state lottery tickets.
- In the evening, families gather at home or in dance halls waiting for the change of the year.
- We usually play lucky games.

B. New Year's Day

- When the New Year comes, we cut the "vasilopita" cake.
- In the morning of New Year's Day the children open their presents.
- We also go to church in the morning.
- When we return home from church, we break a pomegranate for good luck.
- During the day we wait for a lucky person for "podariko".

Unit 3:

EPIPHANY

The circle of the major holidays of the Twelvetide that opened with Christmas closes with the feast of "Epiphany". The feast of "Epiphany", which is also widely known as the celebration of Lights, is celebrated with particular splendor by the Orthodox Church.

In this unit you will learn the significance of the feast of Epiphany to us Greeks and the customs and traditions observed on this day in Greece.

Specifically you will learn:

- The significance of Epiphany.
- What we celebrate on this day.
- 4 common Greek customs and traditions we follow on the Eve of Epiphany.
- 3 common Greek customs and traditions we follow on Epiphany Day.
- 2 local customs and traditions that revive on Epiphany Day.

EPIPHANY FEAST SIGNIFICANCE

Epiphany is the third and last major Christian holiday of the Christmas season and on this day we Orthodox Greeks commemorate the baptism of Jesus Christ by Saint John the Baptist in Jordan River. In Greece, Epiphany is a fixed feast, celebrated on January 6 and it is also a public holiday. On this day, many customs are revived throughout Greece as well as local customs and traditions.

CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS ASSOCIATED WITH THE FEAST OF EPIPHANY

A. COMMON GREEK CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

A. 1. EPIPHANY EVE CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1st custom: Church service

In the morning the faithful go to church and attend the service of the Great Hours. The service takes its name from the fact that it takes place at certain times, includes readings and troparia with wishes and poetic hymns inspired by the religious event of Jesus' baptism.

2nd custom: Great Blessing of Waters

Inside the church, after the end of the Divine Liturgy, the Great Blessing of Water takes place; a special service of the Orthodox Church during which the water in the Baptismal font, a large copper container called a "kolympithra", is sanctified by the priest with wishes.

3rd custom: Sanctification of houses

According to custom, after the Divine Liturgy and the Great Blessing of Water, the priest visits all the houses of his parish, holding a cross and a vessel with holy water in which he immerses branches of basil. With the branches of basil, he sprinkles and "sanctifies" all the areas of the house, so that all evil is removed.

4th custom: Carols of Lights

On the eve of Epiphany that is on January 5, children go out into their neighborhoods and sing carols in houses and shops to convey the news of Jesus' baptism. Those who hear them tip the children and wish them to come again next year.

A. 2. EPIPHANY DAY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1st custom: Church service

In the morning of the day of Epiphany, the faithful attend the church service after which the Blessing of Waters takes place for the second time. The clergy and the faithful go in procession with the cross to the nearest body of water-sea, river, lake or reservoir nearby- and perform the Great Blessing of Waters ceremony. The priest throws the cross into the water and reads wishes to bless the water.

2nd custom: Retraction of the cross

This custom is revived only in areas where the Great Blessing of Waters takes place at the sea, lake or river. According to this custom, the priest casts the cross into the water and many of the faithful, usually young men, dive into the icy waters to retrieve the cross. The person who catches the cross in the water and hands it back to the priest, is considered to be blessed and lucky, and those present wish him good luck throughout the year.

3rd custom: Receiving Holy Water

When the ceremony of the Great Blessing of Waters is completed, the Holy Water is placed in a large container in churches and those who wish can take a small amount of this water in small bottles. The faithful drink the Holy Water and bless their houses, their properties and their cars by sprinkling it for good luck. According to tradition, Holy Water is kept in bottles for the whole year for good mental and physical health.

B. LOCAL CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Apart from the customs followed throughout the country, there are also local customs, which the local residents revive every year. Here are two of them:

1. The custom of the "Arapides"

According to this custom, men and children disguise themselves in mostly black animal skin clothes and wear bells and masks. They go out into the streets of the villages and with the deafening noise made by the bells, they are believed to be exorcising evil and bringing the joyful message of life. As soon as the act is over, all people join in a frantic dance. This custom is revived every year on the Day

of Lights in Northern Greece, specifically in the villages of Kavala and Drama.

2. The custom of oranges

According to this custom, the faithful who will dive into the sea to catch the cross during the Great Blessing of Waters ceremony also hold 2-3 oranges tied in a rope. They hold the oranges to sanctify the waters and then take them home as a blessing. This custom is revived on the Day of Lights in Lefkada, which is an Ionian island.

On Epiphany day, people with the name Fotis, Fotini, Fanis, Fani, Ourania and Iordanis celebrate their Name day.

On the day of Epiphany, we send wishes to celebrators. You can find these wishes in the unit "Christmas Wishes in Greek" and "Name Day Wishes in Greek" respectively, which are parts of the thematic unit of the book "Expressions of the Heart: Greek Wishes for Every Occasion".



SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS OF THE UNIT

Epiphany

- On Epiphany Day we celebrate the baptism of Jesus Christ by Saint John the Baptist in the Jordan River and the waters are sanctified with a special church ceremony.
- Epiphany Day is a public holiday.
- On this day, Fotis, Fotini, Fanis, Fani, Ourania and Iordanis celebrate their Name day.

Epiphany customs and traditions

A. Common customs and traditions

- **Epiphany Eve**
 - The Divine Liturgy is held in church.
 - Blessing of Waters.
 - After the ceremony, the priest visits and sanctifies the houses of his parish.
 - The children sing the carols of the Lights.
- **Epiphany Day**
 - The Divine Liturgy is held in church, after which the Great Blessing of Waters takes place at the nearest body of water.
 - When the ceremony takes place at a sea, lake or river, many believers dive to retrieve the Cross from the icy waters.
 - After this ceremony is completed, the faithful return to church to take some Holy Water home.

B. Local customs and traditions

1. The custom of the "Arapides" in villages of Kavala and Drama.
2. The custom of oranges in Lefkada.

Unit 4:

THE THREE HOLY HIERARCHS FEAST

The Three Hierarchs feast is a special celebration in Greece. It is dedicated to three important personalities of the Orthodox Church who besides their Christian work also promoted the value of knowledge and true education.

In this unit you will learn the significance of the Three Holy Hierarchs feast to us Greeks and how we usually celebrate this day.

Specifically you will learn:

- Who the Three Holy Hierarchs were.
- The significance of the Three Holy Hierarchs feast.
- 2 customs and traditions observed by the Orthodox Church, students and teachers in order to honor the Three Holy Hierarchs.

THE THREE HOLY HIERARCHS FEAST

The Three Holy Hierarchs were John the Chrysostom, Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian. These three Saints were three great bishops of the 4th century AD and, although each of them has his own separate feast, they are celebrated together every year on January 30.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE THREE HIERARCHS FEAST

On the day of the Three Holy Hierarchs feast we celebrate the contribution of these three eminent Saints to the shaping of Christian theology and their struggle to make Greek Education accessible to all. That is why the day of their feast is considered a celebration of Education and it is especially honored by students and teachers in Greece.

THE THREE HOLY HIERARCHS FEAST DAY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1st custom: Church service

On this day, in the morning, all students attend church service and take part in the "artoclasia", the special ceremony in which the priest blesses five loaves of leavened bread. This leavened bread is a special kind of bread coated with powdered sugar. After the loaves are cut into smaller pieces, they are distributed to students and teachers.

2nd custom: School celebration

The students, after going to church, return to school and have a school celebration to honor these

three great men of Education and Church. During the celebration, the work, lives and actions of these three spiritual men are emphasized and promoted.



SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS OF THE UNIT

The Three Holy Hierarchs feast

- The Three Holy Hierarchs were Basil the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John the Chrysostom.
- We honor them every year on January 30.
- Their feast is a celebration of Education and the Orthodox Church.

The Three Holy Hierarchs feast customs and traditions

- Church service attended by students and teachers.
- School celebration after church.

Unit 5:

CARNIVAL CELEBRATIONS (APOKRIA)

The festival of "Apokria" is a different celebration, associated with both Christianity and the ancient Greek Dionysian cult. Although "Apokria" is included in the Orthodox calendar, it has elements found in the pagan rituals of the ancient Greeks in honor of god Dionysus.

In this unit you will learn the significance of "Apokria" and the customs observed in Greece during this time.

Specifically you will learn:

- The significance of "Apokria".
- The origins of this celebration.
- 2 common Greek customs and traditions for the carnival season.
- 2 local customs and traditions.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF "APOKRIA"

"Apokria" is a mobile festive period that lasts 3 weeks. During this time, Christians gradually prepare for the 40-day Easter Lent. Etymologically, the word "Apokria" means abstaining from eating meat.

ORIGINS OF THE FESTIVAL

The roots of the festival can be found in ancient Greece, specifically in the spring "Dionysian festivals", during which the celebrants of god Dionysus dressed up, drank wine, sang enthusiastic songs (the dithyrambs) and danced in an atmosphere of euphoria. This way they honored god Dionysus, said goodbye to winter and darkness and welcomed spring and light. Later, with the establishment of Christianity, "Apokria" was added to the Orthodox calendar and the festival was set to commence 60 days before Easter, usually in February or early March. With the end of "Apokria", the Great Lent (fasting period before Easter) begins.

"APOKRIA" FESTIVAL CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

A. COMMON CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1st custom: Roasting meat on Charred Thursday ("Tsiknopempti")

On Charred Thursday, as we call the Thursday of the 2nd week of "Apokria", the custom of grilling meat is revived. On this day all houses and neighborhoods in Greece are dominated by a pervasive smell of burning meat. It is also common for taverns to be packed with people who want to have fun. The day takes its name from the spreading smoke of the roasting meat ("tsikna"). It is called "Tsiknopempti" –

Charred Thursday. "Tsiknopempti" became part of the Orthodox tradition as a day of feasting and relaxation before Lent.

2nd custom: The carnival

The carnival is the brightest and most popular custom of "Apokria", which is organized on the 3rd and last Sunday of the festival in all cities and towns in Greece. People of all ages parade through the main streets, wearing masks and homemade or bought costumes stirring the crowds with their fun and ingenuity. The best-known urban carnival in Greece is the Patras carnival. Huge floats with carnival decorations and hundreds of people dressed in colorful costumes fill the streets of the city with music and dancing until late at night.

B. LOCAL CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1. "The Janissaries and the Boules"

It is a traditional dance act which has its roots in antiquity as it is connected with the Dionysian cult, but was also enriched with elements from the period of the Turkish occupation. Only men take part in this act playing the female roles as well, but without mocking them. The "Janissary-dancers" wear traditional costumes (fustanelles) and face masks. "Boules" also wear masks and loose dresses. The dancers pour into the streets and alleys of the city dancing to the music by the "zournas" and the "dauli" instruments. This custom is revived in Naoussa, Macedonia every year on the Sunday of "Apokria".

2. "The Tzamales"

The "Tzamales" are large bonfires lit in the squares of the towns which burn until the morning of Ash Monday. An all-night party with dancing is set up around the "Tzamales", while the participants are offered wine and hot bean soup. This custom is revived in Ioannina annually on the Sunday of "Apokria".

In addition, on the last Sunday of "Apokria" festival we exchange wishes which you can find in the unit "Wishes for Apokries and Clean Monday in Greek" which is part of the book "Expressions of the Heart: Greek Wishes for Every Occasion".



SUMMARY OF THE MAIN POINTS OF THE UNIT

"Apokria" Festival

- The festival of "Apokria" has its roots in the pagan ceremonies of antiquity.
- In Christian times the festival has acquired a religious content as the Orthodox prepare for

Easter Lent.

- The Carnival period lasts for 3 weeks.

"Apokria" customs and traditions

A. Common customs and traditions

- On the Thursday of the 2nd week, we revive the custom of "tsiknisma" and the day is known as "Tsiknopempti".
- On the Sunday of the 3rd week the carnival custom is revived.

B. Local customs and traditions

1. "The Janissaries and the Boules" in Naoussa.
2. "The Tzamales" in Ioannina.

Unit 6:

ASH OR "CLEAN" MONDAY

After Carnival Sunday follows Ash or "Clean" Monday. This day is a day of celebration full of customs, special foods, folk festivals, dances and trips to nature. Ash Monday, marks the end of the carnival and the beginning of Lent.

In this unit you will learn the significance of Ash Monday for us Greeks and the customs observed on this day.

Specifically you will learn:

- The significance of Ash Monday.
- What we celebrate on Ash Monday.
- 3 common Greek customs and traditions.
- 4 local customs and traditions.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ASH MONDAY AND WHAT WE CELEBRATE ON THIS DAY

Ash Monday, for us Greeks, is a religious and cultural feast. It marks the beginning of the Great Lent and at the same time, the end of "Apokria". It is called "Kathara" which means "clean" in Greek because on this day Christians are "cleansed" spiritually and physically, that is, they stop having fun and prepare themselves for the Great Lent and the celebration of Easter. Ash Monday is a moveable feast, also called "Kuluma", because we tend to celebrate it with mass nature outings. This day is a public holiday.

ASH MONDAY CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

A. COMMON GREEK CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

1st custom: Kite flying

On the morning of Ash Monday, families or groups of friends head out to the countryside to fly kites. A kite is a light -usually hexagonal- frame made of wood or plastic covered with thin colorful paper or plastic. A long strip like a tail is added to the frame and a long rope is also attached, the end of which is held by the person who flies. With the appropriate handling the kite rises and flies high with the help of the wind.

2nd custom: Preparation and consumption of "lagana"

"Lagana" is a type of crispy bread which is made without yeast and is sprinkled with sesame seeds. The bread is about 2 cm thick and flattened in shape. It is sold at bakeries which are open on this particular day, or it is made at home. "Lagana", whether ready-made or handmade, is the bread that