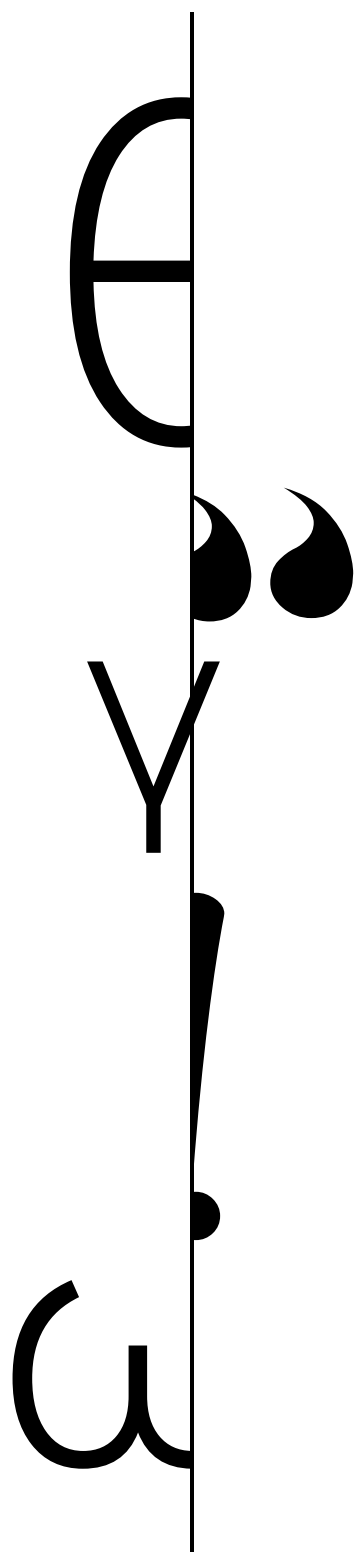


Religious
and National
Holiday Customs
in Greece

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

RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL HOLIDAY
CUSTOMS IN GREECE

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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.