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Spanish 2

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French Christmas Traditions

Christmas is an important holiday in France. Many families have traditions that have been passed down through the generations. Some of these traditions are religious traditions, but others are not. December 6 is an important date for French children in the north. December 6 is the feast day of Saint Nicolas. This is the day that le Pere Noel – Father Christmas - comes with gifts and treats. le Père Fouettard, Father Spanker, is le Père Noel's alter ego. Le Père Fouettard decides whether children have been good or bad and 'rewards' bad children with a spanking ("BBC").

Christmas decorations are up weeks before Christmas. The Christmas lights and other holiday decorations in Paris are famous. The nativity scene, or crèche, is found in churches and homes ("Holidays"). The crèche appears a few days before Christmas, set on a table in a corner of the living room. "Some families also decorate a Christmas tree with colorful stars, lights, and tinsel, but the *creche* is much more important" ("TLC"). A crèche will have the figures of Joseph, Mary, baby Jesus, and the shepherds and three wise men. ("Holidays"). In Provence, in the southern part of France, the crèche becomes more elaborate. Moss, stones, and evergreen branches are brought by the children as decorations. "When the candles are lit, the *creche* becomes the centerpiece of the Christmas celebration. The children gather around it to sing carols every night until Epiphany, on January 6" ("TLC").

Christmas Eve is celebrated by Catholics in France by attending Midnight Mass. Afterwards, the families gather in restaurants (“Holidays”) to eat a feast called le réveillon. “This usually consists of oysters, les huîtres, snails, les escargots, seafood, les fruits de mer, smoked salmon, saumon fumé or le caviar as a starter, followed by goose, l’oie, or some other roasted bird for the main course” (“BBC”).

Christmas Day is when children open gifts, with friends and relatives visiting throughout the day (“Holidays”). In southern France, shoes are put by children by the fire on Christmas Eve. Christmas morning, the shoes are “filled with presents from le Père Noël and fruit, nuts and small toys hanging on the tree” (“BBC”).

Lunch or dinner is an elaborate feast, featuring some kind of poultry, such as turkey, goose, or chicken. Cooking methods will vary from region to region. Most French families will also buy or make “an elaborate chocolate cake baked in the shape of and decorated like a log of wood called *bûche de noel*” (“Holidays”).

While children almost always open all their presents on Christmas Day, their parents may decide to wait until New Year’s Eve to open gifts. La Saint Sylvestre is more of an adult celebration.

Christmas in France is a time of food, family, and friendship. As these traditions suggest, the French celebrate the holiday with joy.

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