



The Italian Christmas Traditions

Natale (Christmas) is a family holiday, a time to stay at home (and eat!) with loved ones. But customs also vary from city to city, from which dishes are served to when to open presents, making every region an interesting place to enjoy the holidays.



Day of the Immaculate Conception

Christmas officially starts with the Day of the Immaculate Conception of Mary on December 8. This is when people decorate streets and homes and when some Christmas markets start.



Decorations and huge Christmas trees can be found in main piazzas, like in front of the Colosseum in Rome.





Along with the fancy lights and trees, *presepi* (cribs) are displayed in many churches and piazzas. The art of *presepi* is a tradition in many parts of Italy. If you want to go to the source, go to Naples; the southern Italian city is world-famous for its handmade *presepi*.

Living crib (“Presepe vivente”).
This is a crib with people
wearing traditional costumes
showing the scenes of the
Nativity.



The “zampognaro”

A typical musician that you can see in the streets of Sicilian towns is the “zampognaro”, who plays a special bagpipe. In this photo, he is wearing an ancient traditional costume.



To prepare for
Christmas Day,
Italians avoid
meat on *la*
Vigilia (Christmas
Eve). Although the
idea is to eat
simple food, most
people have many
courses of fish...



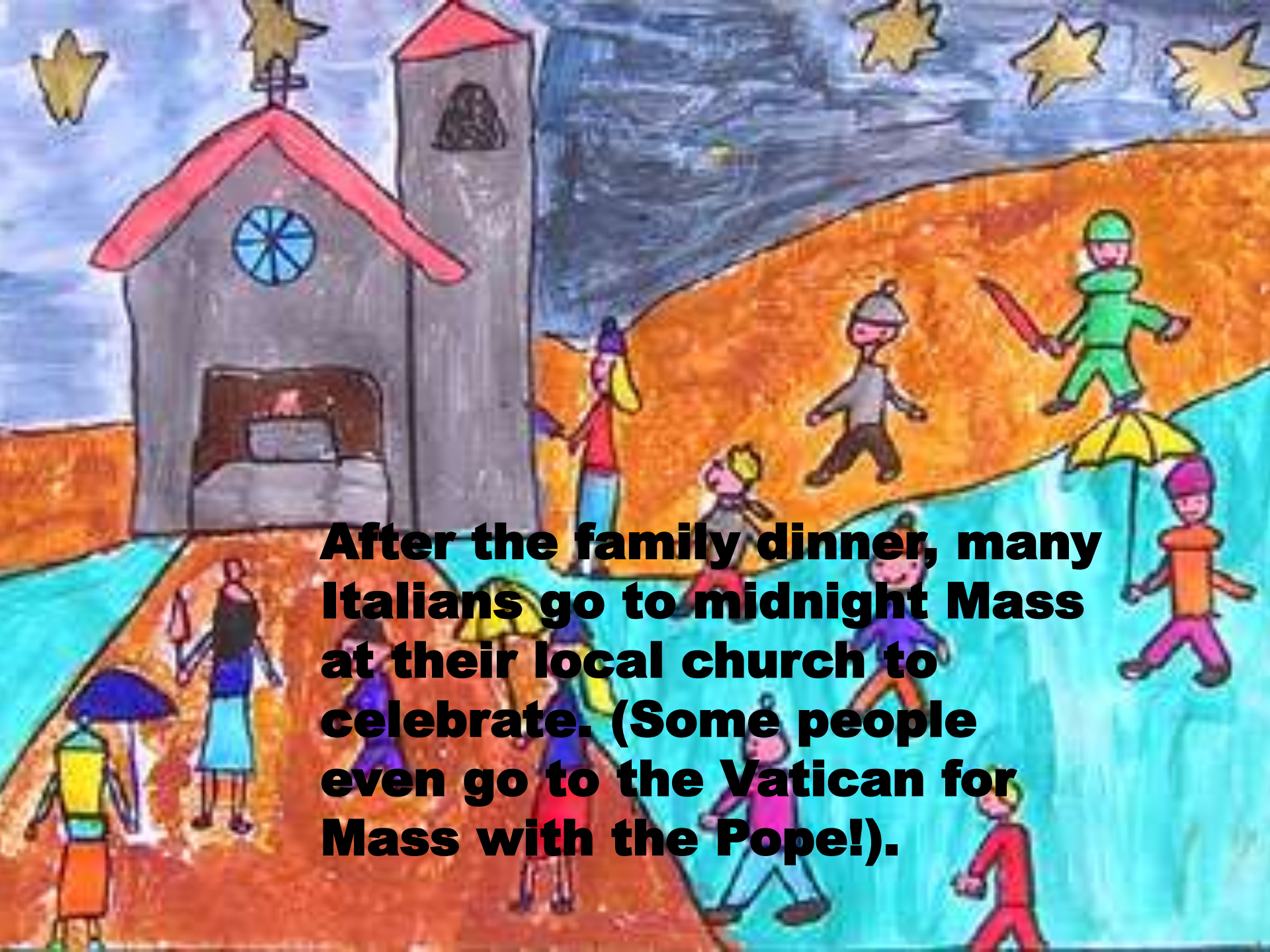


Italy's Christmas sweets include panettone and pandoro . Panettone contains candied fruit and raisins, while pandoro is made with a lot of butter. Children usually prefer pandoro.

Black chocolate rice

Black rice is a typical Christmas dessert made of rice, bitter cocoa and toasted almonds that give it its typical black colour.





After the family dinner, many Italians go to midnight Mass at their local church to celebrate. (Some people even go to the Vatican for Mass with the Pope!).

A detailed photograph of a Christmas dinner table. In the background, a decorated Christmas tree with lights and ornaments stands on the left, and a fireplace with a warm fire is on the right. The table is laden with various Italian dishes: a large roasted ham, a whole roasted bird, several bowls of risotto and pasta, a large platter of bread, a cheese board with various cheeses and crackers, and several small bowls of condiments like mustard and pickles. The scene is warmly lit, creating a cozy holiday atmosphere.

**After the “light”
Christmas Eve dinner, on
Christmas Day Italians
invite their family and
friends for a large lunch.**

**Children (and adults) open
their presents on
Christmas morning.... but
some children can't wait
for the morning and open
them on Christmas Eve.**



Epiphany

On 6 January the epiphany is celebrated. According to legend, the witch brings sweets to the best children and charcoal to the bad ones. We say “l’epifania tutte le feste porta via”, it means that Christmas holidays are over.



Merry Christmas from Italy!

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