



Important Notes

Students **do** have written Spanish homework over break if they didn't finish in class today. 6th and 7th graders should also be marking oral home practice on their Quarter 2 trackers (due January 10th). Teacher information: Señora (Heather) Ragen. I only teach on Tuesdays, so please contact me via e-mail at hragen@stpaulgenese.net or on my cell phone (414-881-9586) if you have any questions.

Class Activities

Today we had a "Fiesta" in Spanish class. We enjoyed some tasty treats, listened to some latino music, learned Christmas vocabulary words in Spanish, and discussed some of the ways Christmas is celebrated in Spanish-speaking countries (see below). Students also had an opportunity to use their pesos (rewarded for winning games and exceeding expectations in class throughout the quarter) to purchase treats in Señora Ragen's *Mercado*, or Market. Prizes included stickers, pencils and candy. Thanks to everyone who brought food and/or supplies for our fiestas!- ¡Muchas Gracias!

¡Feliz Navidad! Happy Christmas to all and a blessed start to the New Year! - Señora Ragen

Christmas Celebrations

Las Posadas

Every December from the 16th-24th many people in Mexico have parties called *Posadas*. Neighbors are led through the street by an Angel (a small child in costume). Other children dressed as Mary and Joseph walk along with adults singing carols and carrying candles. When they reach the designated house, one group goes inside to play the innkeepers and the other group stays outside to beg for shelter, reenacting the journey of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. When the innkeepers finally invite the travelers into the *Posada* (shelter), a big fiesta begins. Refreshments, music and piñatas are typically part of the celebration each night.



Nochebuena

Literally, *Nochebuena* means "good night." It is the Spanish term for Christmas Eve. Many families observe the tradition of attending a midnight mass called *Misa del gallo* (Mass of the rooster) to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Three Kings' Day

This festival is called Little Christmas in some European countries. In most Spanish-speaking countries it is called *Three Kings' Day*, or the *Twelfth Night*. You have probably heard about the three kings, or wise men (Melchor, Gaspar, and Baltasar) who followed the star to find the Christ child, Jesus. Some people believe they reached Bethlehem when Jesus was 12 days old – on January 6th with gifts to honor the newborn king. Long ago, children in Spain and southern Europe began to think the Three Kings brought their Christmas gifts too. That is how the custom of giving and receiving holiday presents in January came about. Traditions vary from region to region, but in many places, children leave their shoes on a window ledge or doorstep on the night of January 5th. A basin of water and some hay might be left for the weary horses/camels of the Three Kings. On the morning of January 6th the water and hay are gone. The children's shoes are filled with candies, fruits and little toys if they are well behaved (coal if they are naughty). On the afternoon of January 6th, many families gather to eat *Cake of the Magi*, or Three Kings Cake. The cake is shaped like a ring to look like a crown. It is topped with candied cherries and pineapple to look like jewels. The cake also has surprises baked inside. They could be shiny coins, tiny dolls or other small gifts. The first grown-up to receive a piece of cake with a gift inside must host the Three Kings party the following year.



Other traditions

There are few Christmas trees in private homes; much more common is the *nacimiento*, nativity scene (also called *Belén* or *pesebre*). Customs vary from country to country and region to region. Singing Christmas carols or *villancicos* is popular. In Puerto Rico children dress as Wise Men and groups of carolers called *parrandas* go from house to house singing traditional songs. In some parts of Colombia Christmas traditions include floating a huge, paper-covered balloon. Costa Rican nativity scenes are decorated with orchids. Teenagers in Caracas Venezuela go roller skating after midnight and then head to church where a special mass is said for them. Celebrations in Peru include bullfights. The common theme found in all of these celebrations is special time taken with family and friends to honor and rejoice in the birth of Jesus.

