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Mexican Christmas

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A Mexican Christmas

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Gala Campos Oaxaca

Christmas in Mexico is a big deal: festivities begin early the morning of December 24th, when all of the women in the house get ready to start cooking and baking. The men set up all the arrangements for the celebration: chairs, tables, and decorations. After the food and the settings are done, most of the older adults go back to their rooms and take a nap while the younger people keep hanging out.

At exactly 8:00 pm, everyone is ready to go to Mass. Since we are celebrating the birth of Jesus, we usually bring a candle and light it in church to represent the light that the Lord brings with him. Once we are back from church we start setting up tables and warming up the food. In the meantime, we play board games such as “[basta](#),” which is about words and categories. At approximately 11:00 pm, we gather around the table and start eating appetizers and prepare the nativity set. The nativity set goes around the base of the Christmas tree and usually includes a figure of mother Mary, Joseph, an ox (whose mission was to keep baby Jesus warm), a donkey (representing the humblest animal), and an angel, representing love and goodness. At midnight we take the figure that represents baby Jesus and the youngest member of the family calms it while we all sing Christmas carols. This ritual lasts approximately 15 minutes and after that we finally get the chance to eat.

A typical Christmas dinner consists of stuffed turkey, chicken, bacalhau (a salty fish prepared with my grandma’s secret recipe), green spaghetti, lettuce-apple salad, which contains blueberries, nuts, and honey mustard dressing, sweet Christmas salad, mashed potatoes, and black refried beans with “aguacatillo,” a kind of avocado. Finally, for dessert we have something called “buñuelos,” which are Mexican-style donuts. They are made of corn and can be filled with apple. We do not eat red meat during Christmas dinner, similar to the Easter vigil. Rather than abstaining from eating meat because of the death of Jesus, we don’t eat meat because of His birth.

Once we are finished with eating, we have a small gift exchange. The gifts are usually cards, small toys, or candy, just to show appreciation to family members. Christmas is a time to gather with family and celebrate the birth of Jesus; the presents represent the gifts that Jesus brings with his birth. After distributing the gifts, we turn on the karaoke and sing and dance to all kinds of music, from salsa to electro-dance. The celebration is usually done at 4 or 5 in the morning.

A Mexican Christmas is full of fun, music, and dance. It is so magical how in spite of the variety of ages, we still share a lot of traits. It is also a blessing that in spite of the bad things happening in my country, we can still share the love and celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ.