Hikulden – traditions and customs

Author(s): Растителна защита

Date: 06.12.2020   *Issue:* 12/2020

On 6 December the Church commemorates Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker of Myra, while in the folk calendar the feast is known as Nikulden – one of the greatest Bulgarian holidays dedicated to Saint Nicholas – patron of sailors, fishermen and the boundless sea depths, as well as of shipwrecked people in distress. According to the folk-Christian myth about the division of the world, the seas, rivers and lakes fell to him. He is the master of the entire underwater world – the fish and the water demons.

In modern times Saint Nicholas is also venerated as a patron by bankers, merchants and hunters.

Tradition prescribes

On this day Christmas trees are decorated, and fish whose body is covered with scales (most often a stuffed carp) is served on the table. According to folk belief, when the saint was at sea, a strong wave broke through the wooden bottom of his boat. To save his companions, he reached into the water, took out a carp and plugged the hole with it.

Usually, the festive table includes ribnik, which is prepared from carp stuffed with rice, onions, walnuts, raisins and bulgur, then wrapped in leavened dough and baked. The housewife also kneads a ritual bread decorated with a fishing motif. The table must also necessarily include meatless dishes such as stuffed vine or cabbage leaves, beans, peppers, boiled corn and wheat.

The bone from the head of the fish (the carp) is not thrown away, but is buried in the ground, cast into running water or burned, so that both fertility and family prosperity may be preserved and multiplied. The largest carp scales are placed in the wallet – to bring money throughout the year. In the past, mothers used the bone from the carp's head (which resembles a cross) as a small amulet, which they sewed into the clothes of young children to protect them from illnesses.

On Nikulden, the following celebrate their name day: Nikolay, Nikola, Nikolina, Nina, Nino, Nikoleta, Nenka and Kolyo.