

# Palm Sunday – the loveliest spring holiday

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Today we celebrate Palm Sunday (Tsvetnitsa), the most beautiful spring holiday and the name day of all those named after flowers, trees and herbs. The day is also known as Willow Sunday and Flower Sunday, Vaya (Vaia), Kuklinden or (in the Western churches) Palm Sunday.

The feast is always on the Sunday after Lazarus Saturday, one week before Easter. It is dedicated to the solemn reception of Jesus Christ in Jerusalem with olive and laurel branches. It is celebrated by Orthodox Christians as well as by Catholics and Protestants.

According to ancient custom, early in the morning Christians, dressed in festive garments, go to the church for a solemn service and the blessing of water. After the church rite, the blessed faithful take consecrated willow

branches to their homes for health and protection from illness and evil. It is believed that the blessed willow has protective and regenerative power, which is why it is kept for a whole year in front of the household icon.

In the morning wreaths of willow branches are hung over the gates of every house, which protect from evil and barrenness. The maidens who performed Lazaruvane the previous day gather by the river, each bringing her own wreath and the ritual bread (kukla) kneaded in advance, and perform the custom of “kumichene”. The wreaths and pieces of the bread are placed on a small board and set afloat downstream. The maiden whose wreath comes out first is chosen as “kumitsa”, and she leads the maidens’ chain dance to her home.

On this day the Lazarus rituals and customs continue. With the kumichene of the Lazarus maidens, the cycle of maiden spring games ends. In the evening on the village square maidens and bachelors dance the Lazarus chain dance for the last time, and for the first time after the Easter fasts the chain is closed. The week that begins on the Monday after Palm Sunday is called Holy Week. During it Christians relive the Passion of Christ.

The feast usually continues with the setting of the family table. In some places a ritual dish called tavalak is prepared – fish with rice. After the festive lunch everyone gathers at the village square, where they dance cheerful open chain dances, known as buyenets.

Today is a name day for all who bear names of flowers – Zdravko, Zdravka, Detelina, Detelin, Roza, Rozaliya, Lidiya, Liliya, Tsveta, Tsvetan, Tsvetelin, Tsvetelina, Trendafil, Flora, Florina, Yavor, Yasen, Yagoda and others.