

# CHRISTMAS in Italy

## NATIVITY

A Nativity scene is one of the most important ways of celebrating Christmas in Italy. St. Francis of Assisi used the scene of Jesus' birth to teach the Christmas story. He visited Bethlehem the year before and saw where it is believed Jesus was born. Many Italian families have a Nativity scene in their home. Naples, Italy is famous for its Nativity cribs and crib making. These are known as "Presepe Napoletano" (Neapolitan Cribs). The first crib scene in Naples was thought to be displayed in 1025 in the Church of Saint Mary of the Crib. Neapolitan cribs are special because they contain everyday objects, such as houses, waterfalls, food, animals and figures of famous people and politicians. Naples has the largest crib scene in the world with over 600 objects on it!



## CAROLING

An old Italian custom is caroling and playing songs on shepherd's pipes. They wear shepherd's sandals and hats while performing.



## ST. NICHOLAS DAY

Many families celebrate St. Nicholas Day on December 6<sup>th</sup>. They write letters to St. Nicholas to ask for gifts. They either hang a sock or put a plate on the table on the table of St. Nicholas Day's Eve. If the children have been good throughout the year they receive fruits, nuts, and sweets from St. Nicholas. The naughty ones also get a sweet, but one that looks like coal.

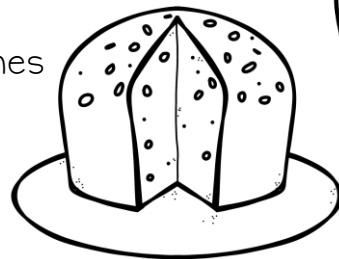
## THE FEAST OF THE SEVEN FISHES

Many Italian-American families serve a large Christmas Eve meal of various fish dishes. This Feast of the Seven Fishes seems to have roots in southern Italy and was brought to the United States by Italian immigrants in the 1880s. It is more popular in America now than it is in Italy.

## CHRISTMAS EVE

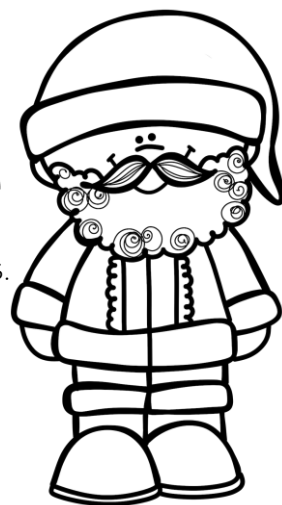
It is common for Italians to not have meat, and now sometimes dairy, on Christmas Eve. Usually, a light seafood meal is consumed, and people attend a Midnight Mass service. The types of fish and preparation are served in various ways depending on the regions of Italy. When Italians return from

Mass, they may have a slice of Italian Cake known as "Panettone," a dry fruity sponge cake. They also often have a cup of hot chocolate. Chocolate yule logs or "Tronchetto di Natale" are popular in Italy too.



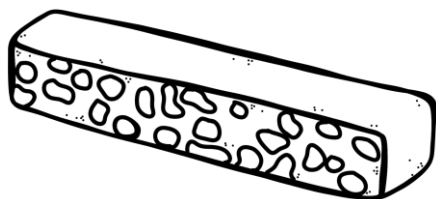
## BABBO NATALE

"Babbo Natale" or Father Christmas, brings presents to children on Christmas Eve. He is a skinnier and more regal looking version of Santa Claus. Many Italians now hang Christmas stockings for Babbo Natale to fill. Children write letters to him asking for gifts. Babbo Natale also has reindeer with the names: Cometa, Ballerina, Fulmine, Donnola, Freccia, Saltarello, Donato, and Cupido.



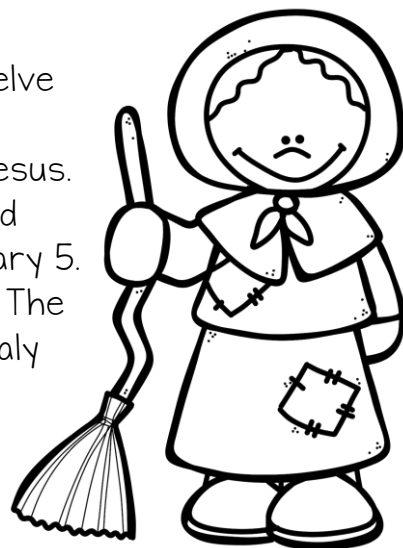
## MARKETS

Throughout December, there is a festive feeling in Italy. Christmas markets in Italian towns have various stalls with foods, Christmas sweets, and gifts.



## EPIPHANY

Epiphany, the Feast of the Three Kings, is celebrated twelve days after Christmas on January 6. It is the time when Christians remember the three Wise Men who visited Jesus. On Epiphany night, Italian children believe an old lady called "Befana" brings presents for them on the night of January 5. Children put stockings by the fireplace for Befana to fill. The Three Kings may bring a present in parts of northern Italy instead of Befana.



Name \_\_\_\_\_

# CHRISTMAS in Italy



**MATCHING:** Match each term with its description.

1. ____ Babbo Natale	A. First Nativity crib scene was located here
2. ____ St. Francis	B. Scenes of the birth of Jesus popular in Italy
3. ____ Panettone	C. Place to shop during the holiday season in Italy
4. ____ market	D. An old lady who is thought to bring presents
5. ____ Befana	E. First used Nativity cribs to teach about Jesus
6. ____ Seven Fishes	F. Honored on December 6 <sup>th</sup> in Italy
7. ____ Nativity	G. Father Christmas or Santa in Italy
8. ____ St. Nicholas	H. Children wear sandals of this person while caroling
9. ____ Shepherd	I. Dry, fruity sponge cake
10. ____ Naples	J. Popular meal among Italian-Americans

**TRUE OR FALSE?:** Place a check in the correct column.

STATEMENT	T	F
11. Babbo Natale is thought to bring presents on Christmas Eve in Italy.		
12. Most Italians eat turkey for the Christmas meal.		
13. Befana is thought to bring children presents on Christmas Eve.		
14. Babbo Natale is a slimmer version of Santa Claus.		
15. Naples is famous for their Nativity cribs.		
16. Children get treats from St. Nicholas on Christmas Eve.		
17. Babbo Natale does not have reindeer.		
18. The Feast of Seven Fishes is popular with Italian-Americans.		
19. St. Francis Assisi used the Nativity scene to teach the story of Jesus.		
20. Italian children set out their shoes on St. Nicholas Day.		

## MULTIPLE CHOICE: Choose the best answer.

21. Which Italian city has the largest Nativity scene?

- A. Rome
- B. Naples
- C. Venice
- D. Florence



22. Which of the following best completes the analogy?

St. Nicholas : December 6<sup>th</sup> :: Befana : \_\_\_\_\_

- A. January 6<sup>th</sup>
- B. December 25<sup>th</sup>
- C. December 24<sup>th</sup>
- D. January 5<sup>th</sup>

23. What is often consumed by Italians on the Christmas meal?

- A. Turkey
- B. Goose
- C. Fish
- D. Beef



24. What is the purpose of Epiphany?

- A. To honor the birth of Jesus.
- B. To honor the Three Kings visiting Jesus.
- C. To honor Babbo Natale.
- D. To honor Befana.

25. What do children who have been naughty receive on St. Nicholas Day?

- A. Nothing at all
- B. Coal
- C. Sticks wrapped with a ribbon
- D. Sweets that look like coal

26. Which statement would be least necessary to include in a summary of the selection?

- A. Italy has many Christmas traditions.
- B. Italians have several "people" who bring presents to children.
- C. The Nativity scene is an important tradition in Italy.
- D. The first Nativity scene was displayed in 1025 in Italy.