

THE TREASURED POLISH CUSTOM OF

ŚWIECONKA

(pronounced *SHFEN-TSONKA*)

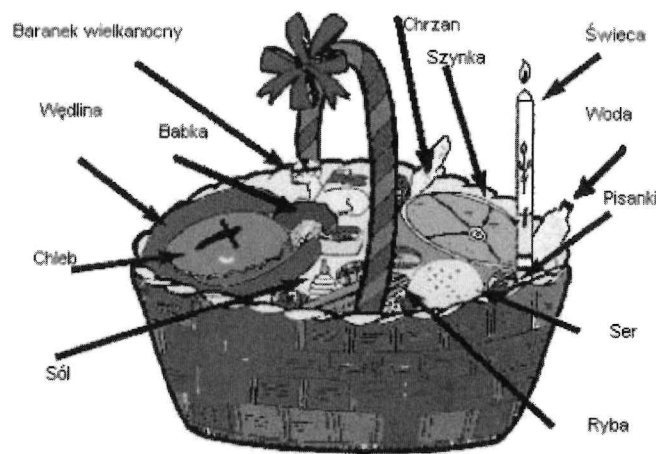


The Polish people are very religious. Most of them are Roman Catholics. For centuries, during the 40 days before Easter - called Lent - the Polish people fasted. This means they ate no meat, butter, eggs, cheese or desserts. So a big part of the Easter celebration was being able to eat these foods again.

On the day before Easter - called Holy Saturday - women prepared baskets and filled them with a little bit of each of the foods they would eat on Easter morning. In the basket they placed Polish sausage, ham, bacon, and decorated eggs - called pisanki (pee-sawn-key). From butter, they carved a lamb, which symbolized Jesus Christ, holding a banner with a cross on it. The basket also contained a round loaf of bread with a cross cut into the crust, some cheese, horseradish, salt and a candle.

The food basket was covered with a pretty cloth and the handle of the basket was decorated with colorful flowers, including pussy willows, which are a symbol of Easter in Poland. The basket was brought to the church where a priest prayed over the baskets and sprinkled them with holy water to bless the food. After the blessing, the basket was taken home and set aside until Easter morning.

On Easter morning the family attended church. When they get home, the head of the house took one of the blessed eggs, removed the shell and cut it into small pieces to share it among all the people in the family. The blessed egg is the symbol of life and eating it was believed to guarantee good health. Everyone exchanged wishes and they ate a big meal that included soup, all the blessed foods in, the basket plus other foods and desserts. Everyone had to eat at least a small piece of each of the blessed foods because this would bring them good luck.



Babka Wielkanocna (Easter cake) In America, this traditional cake is often shaped like a lamb.

Chleb (bread) - A round loaf topped with a cross or a fish, symbolic of Jesus, who is our true Bread of Life.

Chrzan (horseradish with grated red beets) - Symbolic of the Passion of Christ still in our minds but sweetened with some sugar because of the Resurrection.

Jajka (eggs) and **Pisanki** (eggs decorated with the symbols of Easter, of life, of prosperity) – Indicate new life and Christ's Resurrection from the tomb.

Kielbasa (sausage) - A spicy sausage of pork products, indicative of God's favor and generosity.

Masło (butter) This favorite dairy product is often shaped into a lamb (**Baranek Wielkanocny**) or a cross. This reminds us of the goodness of Christ that we should have toward all things.

Ser (cheese) - Shaped into a ball, it is the symbol of the moderation Christians should have at all times.

Slonina (smoked bacon), **Wędlina** (cold cuts – cured or smoked) or **Ryba** (fish) - Symbols of the overabundance of God's mercy & generosity.

Sól (salt) - So necessary an element in our physical life, that Jesus used its symbolism: "You are the salt of the earth."

Świeca (candle) is inserted into the basket to represent Christ, the Light of the World. A colorful ribbon and sometimes sprigs of greenery are attached. A linen cover is drawn over the top and it is ready for the priest's visit or for the trek to church where it is joined with the baskets of others to await the blessing that will render it fit for consumption on Easter Sunday.

Szynka (ham) - Symbolic of great joy and abundance. Some prefer lamb or veal. The lamb also reminds Catholics that the Risen Christ is the 'Lamb of God.'

Woda Święcona (Holy Water)

Additional Items often brought for blessing are wine or children's Easter baskets.