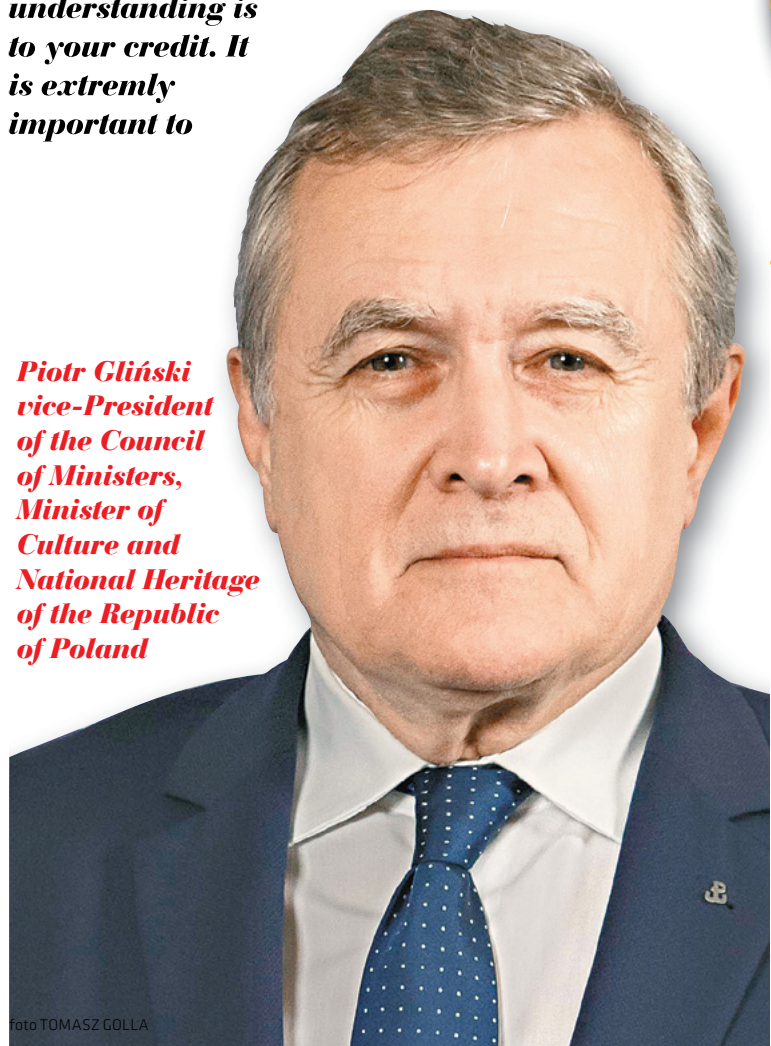


Dear Countrymen, On the day when we share Christmas wafer, I would like to deeply thank Poles living outside of our homeland for engagement and effort that you put in cultivating patriotic traditions and keeping the memory of Polish history and culture. I'm grateful to you for raising new generations in truly European, Christian values, with Poland – our homeland – in their hearts. It is a true joy for me to see our countryman being appreciated and highly regarded. Your memory of Polish roots and cultivating Polish traditions is highly appreciated. You are the best ambassadors of Poland and building great transnational understanding is to your credit. It is extremely important to

Piotr Gliński
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us. Polish community consists of people living in Poland and you, Poles living abroad, who always have our country and it's best interest at heart. May the Christmas season fill all your homes with joyful family atmosphere and let spread this joy of togetherness on all Polish communities. Let the Polish solidarity gene be with you not only on Christmas day and let it create the spirit of respect and love, as they have the power to change the world. May the thoughts of our homeland be inspirational and bring you success in all your endeavors. Wishing you and your families peaceful, merry Christmas and a happy blissful New Year!.

Polish Chri

Whole families gather around the table - from small children to elderly family members. Sharing the Christmas wafer, singing Christmas carols and giving each other presents from under the Christmas tree brings a sense of togetherness. Feasting by the Christmas tree and celebrating the Christ's birth harks back to prehistoric times when people and animals lived in harmony in paradise.



Christmas Wafer

The sharing of bread is a reference to the Last Supper, when Jesus blessed the bread and distributed it, giving rise to the Eucharist. The tradition of sharing a wafer refers to the prayer „Our Father” - „...give us this day our daily bread”. The first Christians had a ritual of giving sacrificial loaves. Sharing them was a spiritual communion between members of a community.

In the Middle Ages sacrificial loaves were exchanged between churches and monasteries, and then distributed to the faithful with a request to break them on Christmas Day. The custom of breaking a thin wafer made of wheat flour and water reached Poland at the end of the 18th century. Besides Poles, today the wafer is also shared by Catholics in Lithuania, Slovakia, Belarus, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and Italy.

S h a r i n g

a wafer is often associated with the most precious memories of childhood - accompanying parents and grandparents as they wrote folded Christmas cards with a small wafer inside. The large ones, to be shared at the table, were wrapped in embossed paper with colorful angels and the Baby Jesus in a manger long after World War II. Children used to collect these pictures and put them between the pages of books, and later used them to decorate their school notebooks for religion.

Breaking the wafer strengthens family ties. Extending a hand with the wafer to the other person means „I forgive you,” I wish you happiness and prosperity. It is a symbolic banishing of evil and replacing it with good.



The First Star

The sighting of the star means that it is time to sit down at the table. The tradition of looking for the first star in the sky is a reference to the wise men from the East who, on their way to Bethlehem, were guided by a comet visible in the sky. Looking for it in the sky used to be the task of the master of the house. Later this role was taken over by children who could not wait for the Christmas Eve dinner, the presents distributed afterwards and playing with them near the Christmas tree.

Santa Claus, the Angel and Gwiazdor

In different regions of Poland, different characters give out gifts. Santa Claus gives presents in Masovia, in the central and eastern regions of Poland, an area roughly coinciding with the Russian partition. Those who live in Wielkopolska, Western Pomerania, Kujawy, Lubuskie, and Kashubia are given presents by Gwiazdor („Star”). Its name comes from a rotating star carried on a spar. It carries a sack full of gifts on its back, but also holds a rod, ready to punish naughty children without mercy. An angel visits people living in Malopolska and Podkarpacie regions. When a bell



rings on the Christmas tree, it is a sign that it has been hit by a flying angel. In the south-east of Poland and in some regions of Lower Silesia, a Christmas star dressed in a flowing white robe busily delivers presents, but she has nothing in common with a helping Grandfather Frost Snowflake who appears in a small area of Podlasie. In parts of Warmia and Mazury, gifts are given to children by Szemel, a Warmian Lajkonik - a pony as white as snow. Upper Silesia waits every year for the gift-giving Baby Jesus, associated with the figure of Jesus Christ. The most fairy-tale traditions have dwarves carrying Christmas gifts, which can be seen in Roztocze and in the San valley on Christmas Eve.