

## S4.3 WORK, LEISURE and CELEBRATIONS

**S4.3.4 - Let's research traditional Maltese feasts and identify characteristics that are still present today.**

### **Maltese Feasts and Traditions**

In Malta and Gozo we celebrate many different kinds of feasts. Most of these feasts are of Christian origin. However, there are many customs and traditions tied to them. We will now talk about some of these feasts. The main feasts we are going to discuss are: Christmas, Easter, the 'Imnarja' and the village feast.

It is important to note how the way we celebrate these feasts has changed through the years. In some cases the celebrations have remained the same. For example, we always used to attend the Triduum in church during the village feast but the morning band march is a custom which only began 30 years ago.

### **Christmas**

1. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of December we celebrate the birth of Christ in a grotto in Bethlehem - **Christmas**. How do we prepare for this feast? We decorate our houses, shops and classrooms. We decorate the Christmas tree with fairy lights; most important of all, we celebrate the birth of baby Jesus by setting up the **crib**. We start preparing the vetch from very early on.



2. Some children are lucky enough to be chosen to study the Christmas sermon by heart so that they can recite it during midnight mass.

3. Cribmaking has been practised in Malta for a very long time. This tradition is still very popular in Malta. During Christmas time a lot of people go around Malta and Gozo to see all sorts of cribs, motorised cribs, large and small cribs, full of all types of clay or plastic figurines.



4. There are two types of figurines: those dressed in Palestinian clothing and those dressed in Maltese clothing.

5. The first crib was made by St Francis in the year 1223. This first crib included a man and a woman dressed up as Holy Mary and St Joseph, a manger holding a wax baby Jesus, shepherds, a choir of children dressed as angels, and a live cow and donkey. St Francis built a wooden hut in the street, in front of the church, in the town of Greccio. Above the door he stuck a large yellow paper star.

## Easter

1. In Easter, we celebrate the day Jesus Christ rose from the dead, after being buried for three days, and after having



suffered the most horrible passion and dying on the cross.

2. On this day, many parishes hold a procession with the statue of the Risen Christ, accompanied by the local band. This procession is different from the others because it has become a tradition, for those who carry the statue, to occasionally run with it during the procession.
3. In Easter everyone likes to eat pastry figures, 'figolli'. This is a very old custom. Pastry figures come in a lot of different shapes. They are covered in either chocolate or icing.
4. To make a pastry figure, we first make the dough and then we cut it into different shapes. We put in a layer of filling and cover it with a second piece of dough. Then we bake the figures in the oven and later, we decorate them. We finally put a chocolate egg on the figure, mostly in the middle.

## The 'Innarja'

On the 29<sup>th</sup> June we celebrate the feast of St Peter and St Paul, or as it is better known amongst the Maltese people- the 'Innarja'.

During the 'Innarja' animal races are held at Saqqajja, in Rabat. In the photo one can see the tribune from where the Grandmaster used to watch the Innarja races.



An exhibition of fruit, vegetables and animals is held in Boschetto during the Imnarja. There are also animal races.

Boschetto with Verdala  
Palace in the  
background.



On the eve of the feast many people go to Boschetto to feast on rabbit and listen to folk music.

This feast is also celebrated in the parish of Nadur in Gozo.

## The Village Feast

1. Almost all Maltese and Gozitan towns and villages hold a feast in honour of their patron saint. During the celebrations the village is decorated. The church is decorated both on the inside and the outside with lights. Damask is hung on the walls inside the church.



The statue is taken out of its niche and flower bouquets are placed in front of it. The streets are decorated with lights and statues and hung with valances. Both the balconies and the flag posts are decorated with lights.

2. There are also firework displays, both on the ground and in the sky - Catherine-wheels and fireworks which light up the sky with their beautiful colours. These attract the attention of many Maltese people and tourists who visit Malta during the summer.
3. Bands play a special part in the festivities. Marches are played and special concerts are held. During the week of the feast, especially during the triduum, the band plays marches along the village streets. Large band stands are put up in the square for the band programmes.
4. There are also special celebrations in the church and firework displays of all kinds. Maltese and Gozitan feasts are a popular tourist attraction.
5. On the day of the feast there is the morning band march and in the evening there is the procession with the statue of the patron saint. Petards are let off as the statue is being taken out of the church. The feast ends as soon as the statue is taken back into the church.
6. The day after the feast many people take the day off and go out, very often spending the day by the sea.

## Did you know?

1. The Christmas crib can be made in a number of different ways, the most common of which is with papier-mâché.



2. Pastry figures, 'figolli', are a type of sweet commonly associated with Easter; many parish priests even bless the children's 'figolli' on the church parvis on Easter Sunday.

3. In the days following Easter many people bless their houses.

Many customs began whilst the Knights were in Malta and are still practised today, like, for example: the 'Imnarja' in Boschetto with its agricultural exhibitions, folk singing and animal races.

### A. Write True or False

1. The 'Imnarja' and the feast of the Ascension of Our Lady are public holidays. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Boschetto is near Rabat, Malta. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The boy's sermon is a custom related to Easter. \_\_\_\_\_
4. In the 'Imnarja' there are many pantomimes in theatres and halls. \_\_\_\_\_
5. We put the vetch around Baby Jesus. \_\_\_\_\_
6. The Triduum are the three days of preparation before the feast. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Advent is the time of preparation for Christmas. \_\_\_\_\_

**B. Answer the following questions about 'Imnarja'**

1. To which saints is the feast of 'Imnarja' dedicated by the church?

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2. When do we celebrate 'Imnarja'?

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3. Where is 'Imnarja' celebrated?

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4. Which food and drink is traditionally associated with 'Imnarja'?

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5. What activities take place during this feast?

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6. Where are the horse races held?

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7. What takes place in Boschetto on the day of the feast?

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**C. Colour** - The following are all associated with our village feast. Colour the activities that take place outside green, and those that take place inside the church yellow.

Nougat Stands	The Translocation: a procession held on the eve of the feast	Panegyric - A long sermon on the day of the feast	Instrumental Programme
Merry-making during the morning march	Ground firework display	Sky firework display	Petards
Crackers	Damask	Dais or platform	Valances and ornamental flags
Choral mass	Organs and orchestra	Antiphon	Band marches

**D. Write a paragraph about the feast celebrated in your town or village.**

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