

Christmas — ARausistuaq (N), Rausistuaq (N), ARusistuaq (S)

GUANGKUTA ARUSISTUARTAARTUKUT JANUARY-ML. – WE ALWAYS CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS IN JANUARY.



Photo: Icon corner with Christmas Tree, Afognak Village, Courtesy of the Knagin Family.

Many of Kodiak’s Alutiiq families celebrate Christmas twice each year: American Christmas on December 25 and Russian Orthodox Christmas on January 7. Although both events commemorate the birth of Christ, they are quite different.

American Christmas features decorations, feasting, gift-giving, and a visit from Santa Claus. For many years, the U.S. Coast Guard Officer’s Spouses Association has collected donations of toys and money from across the United States to sponsor a Santa to the Villages program. With help from the Coast Guard, they send Santa to each of Kodiak’s rural communities to deliver gifts. Santa’s visit is a beloved event that children look forward to each year. In the 1960s, children watched with excitement as a low-flying plane dropped bags full of toys with the aid of parachutes. In the 1980s, the Firebush, a 180-foot buoy tender, transported Santa around the island. In recent years, Santa and a group of his elves have traveled by HH-60 Jayhawk helicopter, stopping for a visit in each community school.

On January 7, Christmas by the Julian calendar that tracks the Orthodox year, Alutiiq families participate in a spiritual celebration of Christmas. For three nights, carolers travel from house to house carrying a large, brightly decorated, twirling star, “starring”, which symbolizes the Star of Bethlehem. They announce the birth of Jesus with songs in English, Slavonic, and Alutiiq and are offered snacks and warm drinks in return. Each caroling visit ends with a rendition of “Many Years,” the Orthodox hymn for blessings and long life. At this season, villagers also participate in “masking” a merging of European folklore and Alutiiq practices.