



Ukrainian customs and traditions

wedding & Chirstmas celebration

by Vlada Shutka

Carpathian Mountains

are a region not only known for its breathtaking landscapes and fresh air, but also for its incredibly rich and well-preserved traditions.

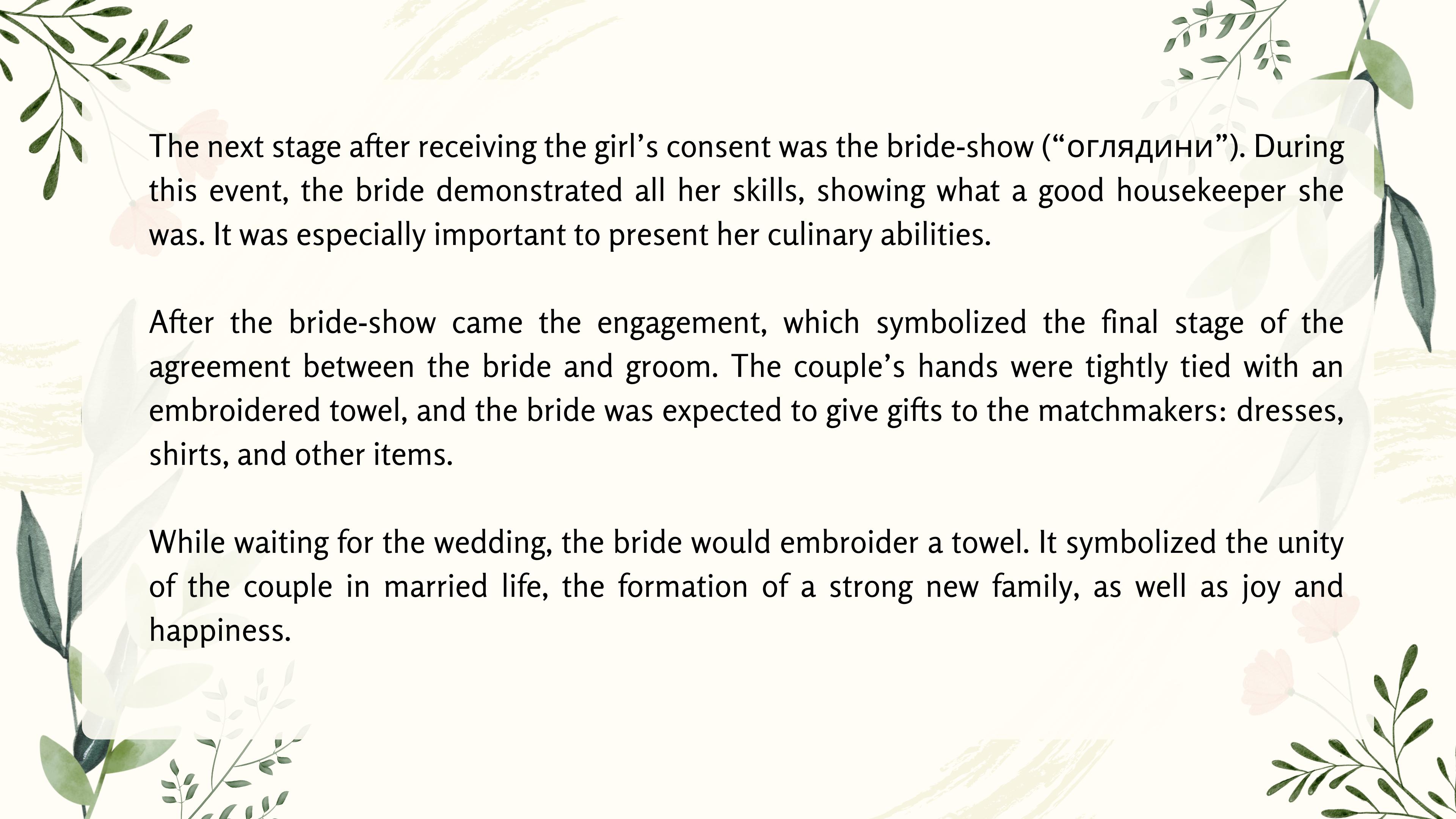
The Carpathians are home to unique groups such as the Hutsuls, Boykos, and Lemkos, whose cultural practices have survived centuries of change. Their customs are deeply rooted in ancient beliefs, natural cycles, and spiritual symbolism. What makes them especially fascinating is how strongly they are connected to the land, the seasons, and to family life.

Ukrainian wedding

A photograph of a person's hands holding a bouquet. The bouquet is wrapped in a light-colored cloth with red and black traditional embroidery. It contains several stalks of wheat and a single red rose. The person is wearing a light-colored, patterned garment.

Let me begin with weddings, which in the Carpathians are not just a one-day celebration, but a multi-day ritual journey full of meaning, music, and symbolism. The local people treat weddings as sacred events, with many layers of tradition.

A typical Carpathian wedding begins with the matchmaking, where elders or family members help arrange the union. Once the match is agreed upon, the preparations begin — and these preparations are often as important as the ceremony itself.



The next stage after receiving the girl's consent was the bride-show ("оглядини"). During this event, the bride demonstrated all her skills, showing what a good housekeeper she was. It was especially important to present her culinary abilities.

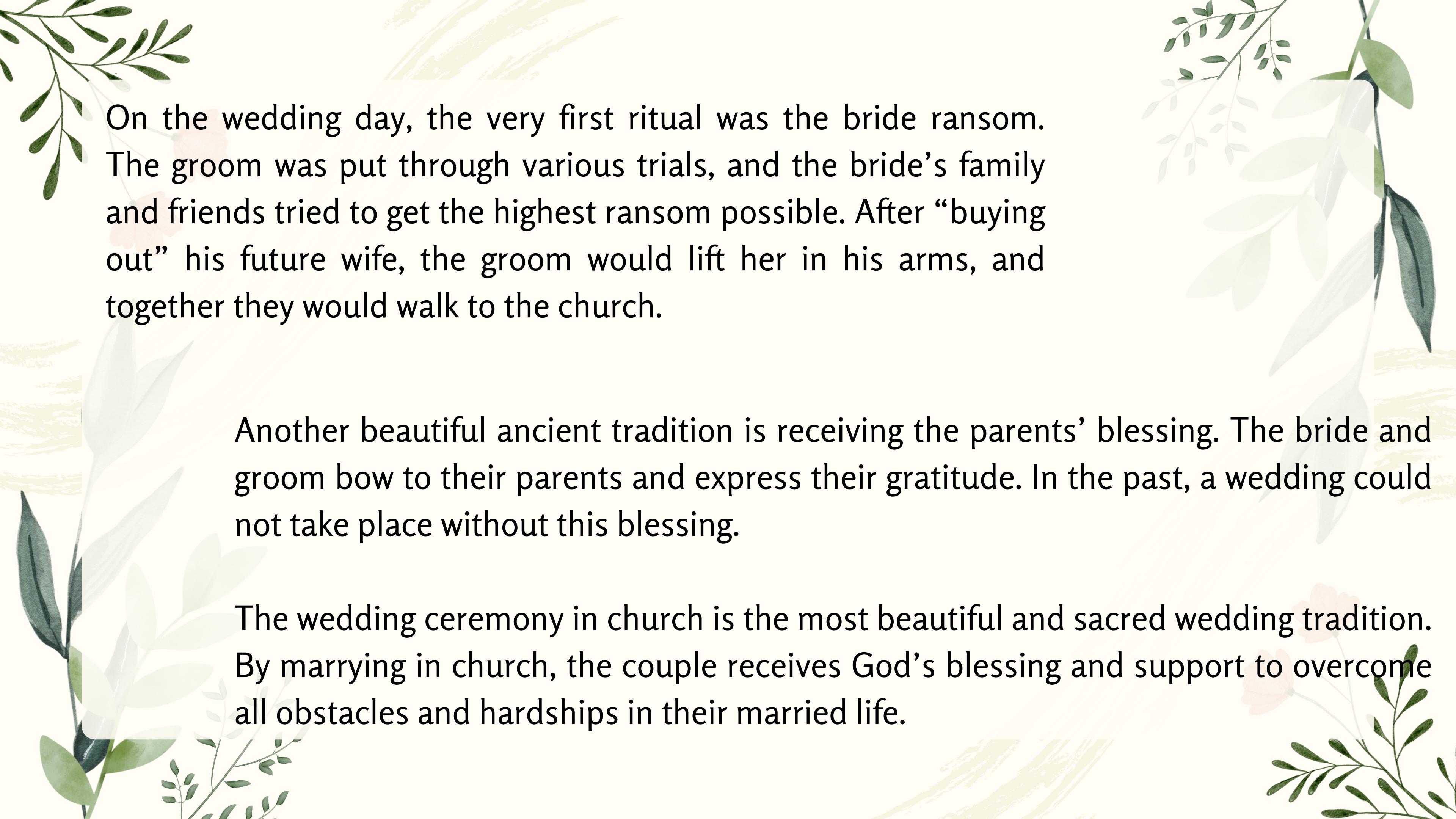
After the bride-show came the engagement, which symbolized the final stage of the agreement between the bride and groom. The couple's hands were tightly tied with an embroidered towel, and the bride was expected to give gifts to the matchmakers: dresses, shirts, and other items.

While waiting for the wedding, the bride would embroider a towel. It symbolized the unity of the couple in married life, the formation of a strong new family, as well as joy and happiness.

The shirt ransom is another ancient tradition. The bride was the one who prepared the wedding shirt for the groom, and on the eve of the celebration or in the morning of the wedding day, the bridesmaids — or any girls or boys sent by the bride — would go to the groom's house. There, the groomsmen had to pay a ransom for the shirt.

On the eve of the wedding itself, a bachelorette evening was held, during which the bride's friends would wash her, and she, in turn, would cry and grieve. After that, the bride would begin to weave ribbons into the branches of trees.





On the wedding day, the very first ritual was the bride ransom. The groom was put through various trials, and the bride's family and friends tried to get the highest ransom possible. After "buying out" his future wife, the groom would lift her in his arms, and together they would walk to the church.

Another beautiful ancient tradition is receiving the parents' blessing. The bride and groom bow to their parents and express their gratitude. In the past, a wedding could not take place without this blessing.

The wedding ceremony in church is the most beautiful and sacred wedding tradition. By marrying in church, the couple receives God's blessing and support to overcome all obstacles and hardships in their married life.

Traditional Carpathian weddings are also known for "весільний коровай", a ritual wedding bread, richly decorated with birds, flowers, and the sun. It's not just food - it's a symbol of fertility, unity, and blessings. The korovai is shared among guests at the feast and is considered sacred.

One of the most touching traditions was the unbraiding of the bride's braid. This symbolized that she had now become a wife.



wedding bread

Now, let's move on to *Chrismas*, which is also full of deep traditions in the Carpathian region. Nowadays Christmas in Ukraine is celebrated on December 24-25. The night of December 24 is called Holy Evening.



The preparations begin early in the day. Families clean the house, prepare twelve traditional meatless dishes — such as kutia (a sweet grain dish with honey and poppy seeds), varenyky, mushrooms, and borshch.

A very important ritual object is the Didukh — a sheaf of wheat placed in the corner of the house, which symbolizes the ancestors and the connection to the land. It reminds everyone that Christmas is a time to honor family



After the festive meal, children and young people go caroling — a custom called "колядування". In the Carpathians, this is done in groups, often dressed in traditional clothing or costumes. One specific form of caroling is the "vertep", a kind of traveling nativity play with humorous and sometimes even satirical scenes. The carolers visit homes, sing songs, bless the house, and are given sweets or small gifts in return.



Conclusion

To conclude, both weddings and Christmas rituals in the Ukrainian Carpathians are deeply symbolic, spiritual, and social. They connect people to their families, to the natural world, and to something greater than themselves. These traditions may change with time, but the values behind them — love, faith, community, and respect for life's cycles — remain strong.

Thank You!