

# Happy "Baba Marta" and the Martenitsas

The month of March, according to Bulgarian tradition, marks the beginning of springtime. The first day of March is perhaps the most positive holiday in Bulgarian tradition - "Baba Marta" marks the sending off winter and welcoming spring; a time for optimism and anticipation of warmer weather, fertility and well-being.

"Baba" (баба) is the Bulgarian word for "grandmother" and *Mart* (март) is the word for the month of March. In Bulgarian folklore the name Baba Marta (*Grandma March*) refers to a grumpy old lady whose mood swings change very rapidly.



On the first day of March and for a few days afterwards, Bulgarians exchange and wear white and red tassels or small dolls called "Пижо и Пенда" (martenitsas). Martenitsas are always given as gifts - people never buy them for themselves. They are given to loved ones, friends, and those people whom one feels close to. They are worn on clothing, or around the wrist or neck.

With the beginning of March, Nature seems full of hopes and expectations. Tied to a very old pagan tradition ... by wearing the white and red woven threads,

people help remind Baba Marta to be considerate.

When one sees a stork or a blooming tree, that is a sure sign that Baba Marta is in a good mood and about to retire. Then the wearer removes the martenitsa, and hangs it on a branch of the blossoming tree.

