

Tradition of Saint Peter's Day – the theme of the 2023 Kozara ethno festival

Natural phenomena were rather mysterious for a primitive man, because he could not explain them, and they directly affected him, his life and mood. He saw them as the result of the will and action of mysterious forces, whose influence on man could be good or bad, and he tried to reduce or even completely eliminate the influence of evil forces through various ritual actions, and to strengthen the influence of good forces making his own life easier and better. These ritual actions had many elements of the old folk religion, and, over time, they were linked to certain Christian holidays, and customs would, thus, be passed on from generation to generation.

The celebration of Saint Peter's Day among the Serbian population includes a great number of ritual actions, which differ from one region to another, although their essential elements are quite similar.

The Saint Peter's Day celebration begins the evening before, when lilas, torches made of the young bark of a wild cherry or birch tree, are lit. They are lit in places where people gather, in squares and crossroads. This South Slavic custom belongs to the circle of customs resulting from the belief in the power of purification by fire, i.e. the destruction of evil beings. Lighting of lilas serves to invoke good health of livestock and prosperity of the household. Since this custom is practiced on the eve of Saint Peter's Day, which is celebrated on June 29 according to the Julian calendar and July 12 according to the Gregorian calendar, shortly after the solstice, these fires can also be explained through the solar theory, as fires aimed at strengthening the power of the Sun.