
УДК 398.541.398.332.41=161.2(=111)

DOI: 10.31471/2304-7402-2026-23(84)-348-369

**THE SPIRITUAL CODE OF UKRAINIAN CHRISTMAS CAROLS:
THE RECEPTION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE INCARNATION
AND CHRISTIAN VALUES IN A POETIC PERSPECTIVE**

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***Aim.** This article examines Ukrainian Christmas carols as expressions of the spiritual code of national culture, particularly through the lens of the reception of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation and Christian values. The main focus is on analyzing the poetics of both folk and church carols, their ability to interpret theological truths through artistic imagery, as well as on identifying the features of the inculturation of Christian meanings in traditional folk art. **Research methodology.** The study employs a set of scientific methods, including hermeneutic, cultural-historical, and comparative-typological approaches, as well as elements of analysis and synthesis. The methodological framework is based on a combination of literary and theological approaches, which makes it possible to interpret carol texts as syncretic phenomena of spiritual and artistic culture. **Research results.** The study demonstrates that Ukrainian Christmas carols represent the doctrine of the Incarnation in various aspects: biblical, doxological, symbolic, and folk-poetic. It has been observed that church carols are dominated by Gospelling narrative and theological clarity, whereas folk carols exhibit a synthesis of Christian and pre-Christian elements. Key images and motifs – such as the Birth of Christ, the adoration of the shepherds and the Kings, the image of the Virgin Mary, and motifs of light, joy, and salvation – have been identified, and their transformation within the national and cultural context has been analyzed. The role of carols in shaping folk theology, collective memory, and national identity is also outlined. **Scientific novelty.** The scientific novelty of the study lies in the comprehensive analysis of Ukrainian carols as texts that combine theological content with artistic form, as well as in highlighting the specific features of the reception of the dogma of the Incarnation through the prism of inculturation. It is proposed to consider carols not only as a folkloric phenomenon but also as an important element of religious culture that*

reflects the evolution of the Ukrainian worldview. **Practical significance.** The practical significance of the article lies in the possibility of applying its results in academic research in literature, folklore, and theology, as well as in the educational process – particularly in teaching courses on Ukrainian literature, cultural studies, religious studies, and cultural history, especially in the context of understanding the spiritual heritage of the Ukrainian people.

Keywords: carol, Incarnation, spiritual code, Ukrainian culture, folklore, inculturation, Christian values, poetics, integration.

Statement of the problem. Christmas carols are among the most profound and distinctive expressions of the spiritual culture of the Ukrainian people. They are not merely an element of ritual tradition, but a coherent system of images, symbols, and meanings in which both the worldview of Ukrainians and theological truths are encoded. In particular, carols convey the central Christian dogma – the mystery of the Incarnation, understood as the birth of God in human form. This mystery has become the core of Christmas joy and hope and functions as a kind of spiritual code, defined as a ‘complex of moral values, ideals, categories, and norms’ [21, p. 81]. As V. Zinko notes, carols are ‘Christmas songs that have come down to us from pre-Christian times; yet the wise missionaries of our people did not destroy them; on the contrary, they adapted these carols to glorify the Sun of Truth – Christ our God’ [10, p. 12]. Regarding the origin of the word *kolyada*, several theories have been proposed: it may derive from the Latin *calendae*, from the word *kolo* (a symbol of the sun), or from the name of the deity Kolyada. Christmas carols originated in the pre-Christian period and only later, with the spread of Christianity, did they acquire Christian motifs. In 1790, the *Bohoglasnyk* was published, which included, among other texts, 24 carols (such as Heaven and Earth Rejoice Today, The Eternal God, and In Bethlehem Today, Mary), many of which stay popular to this day. Within the Ukrainian cultural sphere, one can distinguish between pagan carols adapted to the needs of Christianity and specifically Christian carols that contain the Gospel narrative of Christ’s birth. Despite their shared purpose at the present stage – the glorification of the birth of the Son of God – biblical motifs, images, and the narrative of Jesus’ birth are represented in different ways. The dogma of the Incarnation, present in both church and folk carols, has only rarely been the subject of focused academic study, which underscores the relevance of this research.

Analysis of research. Scientists began to pay attention to the phenomenon of folk song, particularly carols and shchedrivkas, from the second half of the 19th century. In 1874-1875, the work ‘Historical Songs of the Ukrainian People’ by V. Antonovych and M. Dragomanov was published, in which the authors mention Christmas songs, and examined carols and shchedrivkas as a product of the cultural life of Kyiv Rus, in which ‘war-like energy’ flourishes, as pieces that, in an almost unchanged form, have conveyed vivid pictures of contemporary life through the centuries and

preserved the 'spirit of the age' [14, p. 130]. In 1889, Ivan Franko's research 'Our Carols' was published. He compares Ukrainian carols with European Christmas poems and examines the content of kolyads, including apocryphal motifs [20]. He proposed to distinguish between folk carols (kolyadka) and church carols (kolyada). The first is a Christmas song of non-religious content; the second is a church-religious song with a clearly expressed dogma of the Incarnation: 'The church kolyada is far more strict and restrained when it comes to the realistic depiction of details... and only here and there do two or three everyday features appear' [20, p. 21]. He divided carols into the following groups: 1) older carols, which describe the creation of the world in the spirit of pre-Christian mythology; 2) later carols, which contain memories of the princely era; and 3) carols of a home type, which depict the farming life of the large families of the past. According to S. Pylypchuk, 'I. Franko did not focus exclusively on any one thematic aspect of the carol (mythological, apocryphal, historical), but tried to give a comprehensive overview and analytical examination of all the meaning-generating elements that develop within a specific work' [14, p. 131]. In 1903, Olena Pchilka's work 'Ukrainian Christmas Carols' was published. She offers the following classification of carols: 1) spring carols; 2) legendary carols; 3) verse carols. According to V. Hnatiuk, a weakness of this study is that the author did not distinguish between folk and church carols. Instead, he pointed out that this differentiation is well known to almost every person in our country, who refers to the artificial songs, sung mainly in church and composed on the theme of Christmas, as 'kolyady', whilst folk songs, never sung in church but only beneath windows, are called 'kolyadky' or 'shchedrivky'... [4, p. 27]. F. Kolessa distinguished carols with agricultural motifs; with military motifs; with fantastical or fairy-tale elements; of a romantic nature; and with biblical themes [11]. K. Sosenko, in his book 'The Cultural and Historical Significance of the Old Ukrainian Festivals of Christmas and Generous Evening', noted that carols 'preserve historical social and economic issues – and the historical cultural evolution of ideas is so clearly evident in them...' [18, p. 2]. The editor of 'Ukrainian Christmas Carols' (1950), priest Marko Dyrda, notes: 'The deep religiosity of our people has, over the course of many centuries, created exquisite poetic literature, which reveals the tenderness of the people's soul and its great love for God the Saviour, the newborn Christ. Its content inspired the Ukrainian people to depict its beauty in folk melodies. These melodies of Ukrainian Christmas carols and shchedrivkas fill the soul of our people with rapture, and arouse in foreigners a sense of wonder at Ukraine's religious and folk heritage and art' [19, p. 3].

Eventually, researchers have become increasingly interested not only in the ethnographic aspects of carols, their structural and compositional features, and Christian motifs, but also in the doxological and Christological aspects of these treasures of Ukrainian folklore. Y. Koltun distinguishes among carols those of a mythological nature, those relating to knights, carols with a

predominance of Christian motifs, apocryphal carols, and biblical carols. Among the biblical carols, 'first and foremost is the carol which, with its solemn melody and profound meaning, sets the tone for our Christmas celebrations. This is 'God the Eternal'. Here, every word is full of meaning. Even in the very first short verse, as many as four truths of the Christian faith are set out: that God is eternal, the dogma of the Incarnation, the dogma of the Redemption of the human race, and that God is Love itself, embracing the whole world. Church carols and shchedrivkas took shape in the 18th century, and clergymen were also among their co-authors. With the growth of national consciousness in the 19th and 20th centuries, church carols and New Year's songs began to take on a national-patriotic character (the final verses of 'In Bethlehem', 'A New Joy Has Come', 'Good Evening to You') [12].

For example, T. Dlinna examines the distinctive features of the use of Ukrainian Christian carols as a source for studying folk religiosity [8], concluding that Ukrainians possess a well-developed Christianity identity reflected in a form of folk theology that is inherently Christ-centred [7].

The aim of the article is to highlight the distinctive features of Ukrainian Christian spirituality as reflected in traditional Christmas folk art. Particular attention is paid to the process of inculturation, especially how folk tradition – as exemplified by Christmas carols – has managed to interpret and apply the dogma of the Incarnation in its texts.

The object of the study is the folk and church carols of the Ukrainian people.

The subject of the study is the theological and literary analysis of the texts of Ukrainian carols in the context of the dogma of the Incarnation.

The article employs a complex of scientific **methods**: hermeneutic, comparative-typological, cultural-historical, and elements of analysis and synthesis.

Results and discussion. The birth of Jesus Christ is one of the most significant events in Christianity and a key moment in the Christian belief: 'God becomes human; universal perfection appears in the individual and mortal form of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus Christ is the physical manifestation of the universal' [2, p. 112]. The commemoration of this most significant event is depicted in Ukrainian folklore, particularly in carols, which are divided into church and folk types.

Church carols tell the story of the Holy Family's hardships, the birth of Jesus, and the journey of the Three Kings who came to pay respect to the newborn God. 'Jesus was not born or appeared somewhere in a myth. He belongs to a clearly dated time and a geographically defined space: the universal and the concrete coexist. In Him, the Word, the creative principle of all things, entered the world. The eternal Word became human, and to this is added the context of place and time. Belief is attached to this particular reality...' [15, p. 60]. These carols accurately convey the dogma of the Incarnation, essentially duplicating the Gospel narrative.

Ukrainian Christmas carols convey the doctrine of the Incarnation (the incarnation of the Son of God) in a profound and poetic manner, blending biblical themes and theological truths with folk traditions and worldviews. They praise the birth of Jesus Christ as a real human being from the Virgin Mary, depicting God who became man, being born humbly in a stable, often surrounded by ordinary Ukrainian household items. They emphasise His Divine greatness, the eternity of God and His closeness to people, and His victory over darkness.

One of the most important principles of the Christian belief is the dogma – the doctrine that the Son of God became human (Jesus Christ) without giving up being God, in order to save humanity. According to the decisions of the Councils of Ephesus (431) and Chalcedon (451), ‘in the one and same Jesus Christ, two natures – divine and human – are united. They exist ‘without fusion, without change, without mixture, and without division’ [22, p. 62]. ‘The Councils describe the hypostatic union, which unites the divine and human natures in Christ, as follows: ‘The hypostatic union is the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the one Person of the Word, and from this union there is one Christ’ /DB, I, II/. Hypostatic unity in Christ is substantial and personal, for it does not merge the two natures in Christ into one, but harmoniously unites them in such a way that they remain distinct, yet form the one Person of Christ. The Council of Chalcedon states: ‘This unity in no way destroys the difference between the two natures, divine and human /DB, 148/. These two natures are united in the Divine Person. By becoming Man, the Word of God (Christ) assumed human nature, but not a human person; therefore, Christ is the Divine Person. In Him there are two natures, but only one Divine Person. The Church Fathers clearly state that these two natures are not mixed in Christ, nor are they altered in any way, but that the divine nature is wholly divine, whilst the human nature remains wholly human. From this hypostatic union we have one Christ, Who, by virtue of this union, is God-man, that is, true God and true Man. The Word of God, the Son of God, assumed human nature in the womb of the Most Holy Virgin Mary. This unity between the two natures is unchangeable and indestructible, for Christ will remain the God-Man for ever’ [9, pp. 217–218].

The Church describes the Incarnation as the mystery of the wondrous union of the divine and human natures in the single divine Person of the Word. To bring about our saving, the Son of God (God the Word) became ‘flesh’ (John 1:14), truly becoming human. Belief in the Incarnation is a defining feature of the Christian faith.

For example, the carol ‘The Eternal God Was Born’ proclaims that the eternal God became Man, that Jesus Christ is true God, and that the Incarnation took place for the saving of mankind. It ranks first among Christmas carols, setting the tone for our Christmas celebrations with its venerable melody and profound meaning. Here, every word is full of

meaning. In the very first short verse, as many as four truths of the Christian faith are set forth: that God is eternal, the dogma of the Incarnation, the dogma of the Redemption of the human kind, and that God is Love, embracing the whole world [12]. Ivan Franko wrote the following about this carol: ‘It is a true treasure among our church hymns, and it is precisely in this song that the author has managed to rise to that pure and lofty religious mood which characterises the Gospel of Luke’s account of Christ’s Birth’ [20, p. 8]. Vasyl Simovych noted that ‘its opening words: ‘The Eternal God was born’ – express the mystery of Christ’s Birth – He who is eternal was born, came down from heaven to fulfil His divine mission, to save all His people’ [17]. The doxological structure of the carol is such:

- the union of God’s eternity and his birth in time, the proclamation of the soteriological purpose, kenosis:

*Бог предвічний народився,
Прийшов десь із небес,
Щоб спасти люд свій весь...¹ [19, p. 13]*

- христологічне проголошення:

*В Вифлємі народився,
Мєсія, Христос наш...² [19, p. 13]*

- cosmic signs of the Incarnation: angels, shepherds, the three kings, animals;

- recognition of the Mother of God as the one through whom the Incarnation was accomplished: ‘The Virgin gave birth to the Son’, ‘The Most Pure Bride gave birth to the Son’;

- the recognition of Divinity: ‘The three kings bring gifts’;

- the protection and care of God’s providence: God guides the Holy Family.

Culminating doxology:

*«Слава Богу!» заспіваймо,
Чєсть Сину Божому (...)
Поклін віддаймо»³ [19, p. 14]*

Thus, the carol fulfils important functions relating to the dogma of the Incarnation, the glorification of God, and the involvement of everyone (both those who sing it and those who hear it) in adoration.

¹ The eternal God was born,
He came down from heaven today,
To save all His people...

² Born in Bethlehem,
the Messiah, our Christ...

³ Let us sing, ‘Praise be to God!’
Glory to the Son of God (...)
Let us bow down in worship

A similar, no less well-known carol is ‘A New Joy Has Come...’, in which the mystery of Christmas is also understood through the doxology of the dogma of the Incarnation, yet a folk prayer for the family and Ukraine is added to the theological doxology.

In this carol, the Incarnation is a joyful event of universal significance, transforming and illuminating the whole world:

*Нова радість стала,
Яка не бувала,
Над Вертепом звізда ясна
У весь світ засіяла¹ [19, p. 57]*

The mystery of kenosis is revealed in these lines:

*Де Христос родився,
З Діви воплотився,
Як чоловік пеленами
Убого повився² [19, p. 15]*

The images of shepherds depict the worship of ordinary people towards God, and the doxology is heard in this passage:

*Ой Ти, Царю, Царю,
Небесний Владарю³ [19, p. 15]*

And then salvation takes on personal, family and national significance:

*Даруй літа щасливії
Сего дому господарю.
Сего дому господарю
І сій господині,
Даруй літа щасливії
Нашій славній Україні⁴ [19, p. 15]*

Christmas is viewed as a source of national hope for salvation, and blessings are sought for the Ukrainian people. In this way, the carol glorifies

¹ A new joy has dawned,
The like of which has never been,
A bright star above the stable
Has shone out across the world

² Where Christ was born,
Incarnate from the Virgin,
Wrapped in swaddling clothes
Like a poor man

³ O King, O King,
Lord of Heaven

⁴ Give happy years
To the owner of this house.
To the owner of this house
And to the lady of the house,
Give happy years
To our glorious Ukraine

God, proclaims faith in the Incarnation, and transforms the hymn of glory into a prayer for Ukraine.

The carol 'Heaven and Earth' tells us about the divine and human nature of Christ. 'Christ is born, God has become incarnate' – a refrain which affirms the Gospel truth that God became flesh, that is, was born as a human being, yet remains God. And a further emphasis on the dogma: 'The Word of the Father took body'. The significance of the Incarnation is interpreted through the symbol of light: 'In the darkness of the earth, the sun has shone'. 'The Pure Virgin gave birth to the Son' – a confirmation of Christ's divine nature and Mary's virginity. In this carol, as in many others, among the gifts brought by the Magi are frankincense, gold and myrrh. Frankincense symbolises God, gold the king, and myrrh the one who will die. Thus, the fullness of Christology is reflected: birth, life and death. At the same time, this carol is not merely a narrative but also a call to a response of faith: 'And let us worship the newborn God'. Thus, Christ is the true God in human form; His coming to earth is real and incarnate (Christ, whilst remaining a man, does not cease to be God, King of the Angels and Ruler of the World); Mary is the Mother of God; the birth of God is an event of universal significance and is the beginning and hope of the salvation of humanity.

In church carols, the doctrine of the Incarnation is presented in precisely this interpretation: the story of the birth, the doxology, the kenosis, and the soteriological purpose. All carols emphasise that God is born as a human being, the virginity of Mary, and Joseph's care for God as an earthly infant. Key plot elements include the journey of the Three Kings with gifts, the shepherds' announcements, as well as possible descriptions of the dangers facing travellers wishing to greet the newborn God, and the cruelty of King Herod.

Another key plot element is the birth of Jesus Christ in a manger on a bed of straw and his swaddling in cloths: 'Christ was born in a manger on a bed of straw' ('Joyful News to the World Today'), 'She gave birth in a stable, swaddled him in a manger' ('The News is Proclaimed'), 'He was born of the Virgin and laid in a manger' ('The Land of Judea'), 'In a poor stable, in a manger on the straw, the Lord rested' ('A Star in the Sky'). 'The child, tightly swaddled in swaddling clothes, is as if a foreshadowing of the hour of His death: He was sacrificed from the beginning, as we shall understand even better when we reflect on the word concerning the Firstborn. Thus the manger was transformed into an extraordinary altar' [15, p. 63]. St Augustine reflected that 'He who filled the whole world found no room in the inn; laid in the manger, He became our food' [23]. That is, in the manger lies He who is the true bread that gives eternal life. 'Thus, the manger points to God's table, to which man is invited to receive God's bread' [15, p. 64].

In the carols, God is mentioned as Jesus, the Son of God, the Child, the Lord, the King, the Ruler, the Eternal One, the Messiah, and the Infant. Mary

is referred to as the Virgin, the Immaculate, the Most Pure, the Pure, and the Mother. The news of the birth is joyful, glad, and bright.

Joseph is mentioned only briefly in the Holy Scriptures: «Her husband Joseph; being a man of honour» (Matthew 1: 19). Perhaps that is why he is not actually present in the carols; and if he is, he is focused on father's routine: 'And Joseph the Elder cheers the Child' ('God Is Born'), 'The angel spoke to Joseph' ('God Eternal'), 'Joseph comforts the Virgin, helps to swaddle the Child' ('News in Bethlehem'), 'Old Joseph entertains Him' ('Heaven and Earth Rejoice'). Through the symbolism of this image, the carols remind us that Jesus, as a human child, needs care; that He is God in human form, who needs everything that any newborn baby needs.

It is also worth mentioning carols that feature Old Testament motifs and characters. For example, Rachel or David ('Stand, David, with your harp', 'Do not cry, Rachel', 'God has seen'). The carol 'God Has Seen' is a text with distinct eschatological motifs: from the near-destruction of the world ('God has seen, the Creator has seen, that the whole world is perishing') to the victory of the martyrs and the triumph with Christ ('The three kings, having found Christ, reign with Him in heaven'). At the heart of this carol is not the story of Christ's birth, but the drama of struggle and salvation, including the victory over paganism:

Невгасне Боже Сонце мало світові засіяти

Від Диви і тьму невіри у поган геть прогнати¹ [19, р. 24]

Christ appears as the new Adam, who will restore the lost paradise²:

Видів Бог, видів Сотворитель, що весь мір помирає,

Архангела Гавриїла в Назарет посилає,

Возвістити тайну йому: Бог зійшов до Вифлеєму,

Щасний город Вифлеєму, двері відчинив Едему³ [19, р. 24]

In this Christmas carol, the newborns killed by Herod are shown as the first martyrs for the Christian faith, thereby emphasizing an important truth: suffering for Christ is the path to memory and glory. In this context, the image of Rachel stands out:

Рахиле! Перестань вже над своїми дітьми ридати!

Ах, як маю перестати, я бо нещасна мати?

Ирод діти убиває, в мене серце умліває,

Мліє серце, а я мати, як же мені не ридати? [19, с. 25]

¹ The unquenchable Sun of God was to shine upon the world,
Born of the Virgin, to banish the darkness of unbelief from the pagans

² From the Holy Scriptures

³ God saw, the Creator saw, that the whole world was perishing,
He sent the Archangel Gabriel to Nazareth,
To reveal the mystery to him: God had come down to Bethlehem,
Blessed city of Bethlehem, He opened the gates of Eden

Rachel is not only a specific character but also a symbol of mothers crying over their children. This is the pain that humanity has endured since the sin of Adam and Eve. Yet her weeping also becomes a cry of hope:

*Ой, не плач, не сльози, Рахиле, не ридай гірко нині,
Щоб жалких не чути стонів по глухій цій пустині;
Бо сини у небо входять, а доньки синів знов зродять.
Хто на Бога уповає, того рід не вимирає.
Три царі найшовши Христа, у небі з Ним володіють.
Ірод і люципер од ненависти скаженіють,
Немовлята повбивали, вінцем слави їх прибрали!¹ [19, p. 25]*

These words convey a sense of resurrection and a deep faith in God's mercy.

The version "Don't cry, Rachel! Look, the children are safe" is more emotionally profound; it is structured as a dialogue between a sorrowful mother and a voice that calms her:

*Покинь ридати, нещасна мати!
Ірод убивця, злий кровопивця, злий кровопивця...
"Як не ридати, жалю не знати?
Сина накрила свіжа могила, свіжа могила..."
Схаменися, мати, син в небі багатий.
Хто умер за Бога, того перемога!² [19, p. 51]*

In this carol, as in the previous one, sorrow, pain, crying, and loss are dominant themes, echoing the motif of Calvary; therefore, the joyful news of the Son of God—who will put an end to suffering and save humankind, and whose martyrs for His faith will be with Him—is all the more striking and redemptive. Here, joy is different, existing in a deeper existential dimension; it stems not from praise, but from the realization that it is important not only to know of God's coming, but also to be with Him, which is why the dogma of the Resurrection stands alongside the dogma of the Incarnation.

The carol 'Arise, David, with Your Harp' is featured in the doxology. David, who once sang of the coming Messiah, now rejoices at His birth:

¹ Oh, do not cry, do not weep, Rachel; do not wail bitterly today,
Lest pitiful moans be heard in this desolate wilderness;
For the sons are entering heaven, and the daughters will bear sons again.
Those who trust in God shall not see their line die out.
The three kings, having found Christ, reign with Him in heaven.
Herod and Lucifer are mad with hatred,
They slaughtered the infants, crowned them with glory...

² Herod the murderer, the wicked bloodthirsty tyrant, the wicked bloodthirsty tyrant...
"How can I not cry, how can I not feel sorrow?
A fresh grave covers my son, a fresh grave..."
Take heart, mother; your son is rich in heaven.
He who dies for God is victorious!

*Богу рожденному співаймо,
І всі весело заграймо:
Співаймо і граймо,
Співаймо і граймо,
Днесь у рождестві Його,
Яко Творця нашого прославляймо!¹ [19, р. 88-89]*

We must glorify God the Creator, and He who created the world now comes into it. In style and structure, this carol resembles Psalm 148 with its call to glorify the Lord: ‘1 Alleluia. Let heaven praise Yahweh: praise him, heavenly heights, 2 praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his armies! 3 Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, shining stars, 4 praise him, highest heavens, and waters above the heavens!’ Everyone and everything praises the Lord. There is no fear or anxiety here for the fate of the unborn or already born Jesus; there is no cruel Herod, no danger – only doxological joy in which the whole world stands still: angels, people, the sun, the moon, hail, waters, mountains...

The carol ‘He Shines Brighter Than the Sun’ has a similar mood, in which all living things rejoice in the Creator:

*Діброви, поля славлять враз Царя,
Святкує щиро днесь вселенна вся² [19, р. 36]*

A distinctive feature of this carol is its prayerful appeal to the Mother of God; through the Incarnation, the world’s original harmony is restored, the reconciliation of the Old and New Testaments is depicted, and Jesus’s inheritance is shown.

Church carols contain numerous allusions to the Old Testament: the image of God as a stronghold, taken from the Psalms (‘My flesh and my heart are pining with love, my heart’s Rock, my own, God for ever!’ (Ps. 73:26), ‘My refuge, my fortress, my God to whom I trust!’ (Ps. 91:2)), comparisons between man and nature (‘Man lasts no longer than grass, no longer than a wild flower he lives’ (Ps. 103:15)), ‘Planted in the house of Yahweh, they will flourish in the courts of our God’ (Ps. 91:13)). In Christmas carols, the whole world often rejoices because Jesus was born. We also find such images in the Psalms: ‘Rejoice, O Zion’ (Ps. 48:11), ‘I shall immortalise your name, nations will sing your praises for ever and ever’ (Ps. 45:18). The Psalms in carols use the designation of God as King of the world. But of course, the creators of

¹ Let us sing to the newborn God,
And let us all celebrate joyfully:
Let us sing and play,
Let us sing and play,
On this day of His birth,
Let us glorify Him, our Creator!

² The oak groves and fields all praise the King,
Today the whole Universe is celebrating with joy

carols drew more heavily on the New Testament, sometimes actually quoting the Gospel. The Bible also served as a linguistic and literary source for these Christmas poetic texts.

Folk carols also play an important role in the modern cultural life of Ukrainians; since ancient times, they have constituted a specific group of solemn songs performed during winter holidays, particularly the most important one—the winter solstice. These songs of praise became known as *kolyady* or *kolyadky*. After the Christianization of Ukraine, our ancestors combined the majesty of this event with the Christmas celebration, introducing religious elements into the carols: the birth of God, and images of Mary and Jesus. New Christian prayers, while adopting ancient songs, also adopted the old agricultural calendar, which is why Christmas carols may mention spring, plowing, and grape harvesting. The vast majority of Ukrainian Christmas carols originate from pre-Christian times but have lost their original meaning, becoming Christmas songs. With the arrival of Christianity, the caroling ritual was transferred to the Christmas holidays. Thus, archaic motifs, images, and symbols began to intertwine with biblical ones (the birth of Jesus, God's coming to earth). The Gospel legend was intertwined with elements of the calendar, and ritual and solemn motifs found their way into legendary themes [5].

I. Franko also pointed to the pre-Christian origins of the oldest Christmas carols, noting that under the influence of Christian tradition, 'pagan' elements were gradually supplanted, and 'the clergy promoted... works of ecclesiastical piety among the people, to replace with them... carols of secular content and other ritual songs' [20, p. 7]. K. Sosenko noted the authenticity and originality of ancient carols, which contain 'such important issues of ancient religion, with distinct signs of Ukrainian originality; they preserve both ancient social and economic issues, and the historical and cultural evolution of the ideas they express is so clearly visible in them that the influence of foreign ideology on carols and *shchedrivkas* is very minimal' [18, p. 2]. And V. Hnatiuk viewed the carol in its entirety as a folk opera [3, p. 5].

In carols of ancient origin, the events take place not only in winter, but at any time of year: 'They're frying sturgeon, for a birthday. The Virgin Mary gave birth to a Son' ('And this Landlord's'), 'The Virgin Mary built a church' ('The Virgin Mary built a church'), 'Oh, lily, lily! Oh, there are curtains in the church, Good swaddling clothes will be for my Son' ('Oh, lily'), 'Oh, in the vineyard' ('Oh, in the garden, garden'). Ancient Ukrainian songs blend with the Christian custom of celebrating Christmas, becoming an integral part of it.

As N. Danyliuk notes, 'folklore texts not only reflect national and linguistic characteristics but also create their own folk-poetic worldview, which is based on mythological concepts, folk beliefs, traditional stereotypes, and standard assessments of the environment and human beings' [6, p. 45].

Such texts of the winter cycle synthesized those Gospel episodes that have a dominant historical-theological significance for revealing the dogma of the Incarnation, but it resonated in them in a special way. F. Kolessa emphasized that the Ukrainian kolyada ‘reveals a very complex set of rituals and songs, which includes the following elements: 1) traditional agrarian magic and local cults from the tribal era; 2) borrowings and adaptations from Greco-Roman culture both in the pre-Christian era and later; 3) a strange combination of pagan and Christian rituals, beliefs, and song motifs characteristic of dual faith’ [11, pp. 23–24]. Carols reflect an idealized household life, and the husband may be called the sun, the wife the moon, and their children the stars. With the Christianization of carols, their main purpose remains: to glorify those to whom they are sung, with wishes for their happiness, wealth, and health. The wish-fulfilling element plays an important role in them, as they create an idealized family life and a cozy home free from grief, poverty, hardship, sorrow, and disagreement.

The power of nature is transformed into God’s power, but the agrarian-magical element stays: wheat, bread, and kutia in the rituals. The joyful news goes around the world; this new joy is shared with all of humanity, and in the homes of the owners who receive this news, there is prosperity, and everything is solemn, festive, and beautiful:

*А у цього хазяїна
На його подвір'ї
Горять свічі три воскові
У його дворі
Печуть рибу осятрину,
Та на вродини.
Це Марія Діва чиста
Сина родила¹ [19, p. 131]*

In the carol cited above, scenes of everyday life are combined with Christmas symbols. The images of the host and the yard create a model of an orderly world, the Universe. The image of three candles symbolizes the Holy Trinity and the light of divine grace. The mention of sturgeon and a birthday party hints at a festive banquet. The event of Christmas has already been named, but not yet fully understood, for the emphasis is on Mary’s divine nature, not that of her Son. He is referred to simply as God, Savior, Lord, and

¹ And at this master’s house,
In his yard,
Three wax candles are burning;
In his yard,
They’re roasting sturgeon,
And celebrating a birthday.
It is the Virgin Mary,
Who gave birth to her Son

God without further specification. The sacred perspective deepens when the angels tell Mary that her son must be named Jesus. This image reminds us of another episode from the Bible – the Annunciation. In this carol, the dominant elements are the human dimension and the folk tradition of interpreting Christmas: the celebration of a child's birth, thoughts on what to name him, human joy rather than divine. The image of three candles may have originally functioned as a solar symbol, and later been interpreted as a sign of the Holy Trinity; the banquet as a fruitfulness ritual can be tentatively interpreted as the appearance of Eucharistic symbolism. In the First Letter to the Corinthians (11:20–26), the Apostle Paul refers to the Eucharist as the Lord's Supper. The Kingdom of God is also described as a banquet to which people are invited (Gospel of Luke 14:15–24, Gospel of Matthew 22:1–14). It is likely that the original version of the carol referred to the cyclical renewal of the world, to the reactivation of the myth of creation, but in this version we have a unique event – the Incarnation – which is neither cyclical nor repetitive, but singular and unrepeatable. Christianization occurs not through the displacement of the old, but through inculturation: the form is preserved, but the emphasis of the content shifts. As for the sturgeon mentioned in the carol, it should not be equated with fish as a symbol of Christianity (it is not mentioned in the Holy Scriptures as a separate species); it is a symbol of abundance and a sumptuous feast.

Archaic agrarian-magical motifs form the structural foundation of the carol 'Good Evening to You...' [19, pp. 133–134], but Christian doctrine enriches it with new meaning, resulting in a text in which the pagan elements do not disappear but become vehicles for Christian significance. 'Good evening to you, master of the house' – remnants of veneration, where the master and mistress were sacred figures, symbols of prosperity and fertility, mediators between the clan and the cosmos. The repetition of 'Rejoice, oh rejoice, earth' is a call to joy, as the earth is renewed after winter. 'Set the tables...' – a hint at a feast. But in the updated version of the carol, the dogma of the Incarnation becomes central. Cyclical time stops existing, replaced by linear time with a specific starting point – the birth of Jesus. Time will now be sanctified through the repeated celebration of Christian events. Thus, the master and mistress of the house are now not only the guarantors of a good harvest, but those who receive the good news; the earth rejoices not only in its own awakening, but as a creation of the Lord (recall the Psalms) that receives the Savior.

The carol 'The Virgin Mary Built a Church' is notable for its unique syncretism of folk and Christian theology:

Діва Марія церкву строїла, радуїся!

Ой радуїся, земле, вже Син Божий народився.

З трьома дверима, із трьома вікнами, радуїся!

*Ой радуйся, земле, вже Син Божий народився!*¹ [19, р. 132]

The Virgin Mary builds a church with three windows: the sun peeks through the first, the moon through the second, and the Lord's angel through the third, the news of the birth of the Son of God resounds as a refrain. Of course, this does not refer to literal building, but to the construction of a sacred space, and subsequently to the conception of the Mother of God as a sanctuary. The sun and the moon are transformed from pagan symbols of life and nature into signs of the divine presence. The appearance of the angel becomes the key moment and symbol of the Incarnation.

In the carol 'Oh, in the garden, garden, vineyard...', the Christmas refrain is combined with an archaic marriage and initiation motif:

Ой у саду, саду, саду-винограду.

Радуйся! Радуйся, земле, Син Божий народився!

А у тому саду сивий коник грає.

А до того коня ніхто не приступить.

А тільки приступить молодий Іванко.

Іванко приступив, сіделечко наклав.

Сіделечко наклав, сам сів та й поїхав.

*Сам сів та й поїхав аж до королівни*² [19, р. 137-138]

The original imagery of the garden and the vineyard had nothing to do with Christian symbolism; however, in a Christian context, these images can be reinterpreted – for example, the Garden of Eden or the people of Israel as God's vineyard. Yet this carol doesn't have that kind of reinterpretation yet. The image of the horse is significant as a symbol of the trials undergone by those who must complete the initiation rite to attain a new status – marriage. The refrain after each line shifts this song into a Christian context. Thus, the archaic marriage-initiation plot is incorporated into the Christmas tradition and begins to coexist with the dogma of the Incarnation.

The dogma of the Incarnation comes to the foreground, but not through the Gospel narratives; rather, it is conveyed through apocryphal stories or, within the context of a doxological dimension, effectively without a specifically Christian narrative, as in the carol 'The Stars Have Lit Up All of

¹ The Virgin Mary built a church, rejoice!
Rejoice, earth, for the Son of God is born.
With three doors and three windows, rejoice!

Rejoice, earth, for the Son of God is born!
² Oh, in the garden, garden, vineyard garden.
Rejoice! Rejoice, earth, for the Son of God is born!
And in that garden, a gray horse plays.
And no one will ride that horse.
Only young Ivan will ride it.
Ivan rode it, put the saddle on.
Put the saddle on, sat down himself, and rode off.
Sat down himself and rode all the way to the princess

Ukraine'. New joy descends not upon the whole world, but specifically upon Ukraine, announcing to it that God is born: 'Christ is born, God has become incarnate'. Thus, in this carol, Herod is not a character but a symbol of evil and slavery. The lines 'All of Ukraine receives the news: Christ is born... The Dnieper awoke, forgetting the harsh winter, and sent the news to the fast Prut: Christ is born... And the Prut calls out to the swift Dniester, The Dniester sends the news to the Bug' are used to create an effect of geographical coverage of Ukraine (the relevant hydronyms), which receives the joyful news. The Incarnation, as a universal event, takes root in the Ukrainian landscape and becomes the personal history of our people. This is a very important aspect of the reception of Christianity by Ukrainians, who will continue to draw parallels between Christ's suffering and their own suffering and historical fate (for instance, recent parallels between Ukraine's suffering during the Russian-Ukrainian war and the Way of the Cross of Jesus Christ). The dogma of the Incarnation is presented in this carol on several levels: God became man, his birth will bring salvation and liberation, victory over evil will be achieved, its doxological nature, and the interpretation of the birth through the Ukrainian experience.

A similar portrayal of the doctrine of the Incarnation appears in the Christmas carol 'Good news has come, brothers,' where the Son of God 'loves truth and honesty' and 'prepares punishment for his enemies.' The appeal for freedom for the Ukrainian people sounds even stronger:

*Ісусе Христе, світу Владико,
Терпить наш нарід горе велике,
Змилосердіся і заступися,
Не дай упасти під хрестом!
Терпить наш нарід велике горе,
Спливає з нього сліз-крови море,
Кривда лютує і бенкетує,
Неправда сіла на престіл!
Ісусе Христе, Дитино Божя,
Звільни наш нарід з кайдан ворожих,
Щоб ми розцвіли, щоб ми зраділи
Твоїм Божественним Різдом¹ [19, р. 114]*

¹ Jesus Christ, Lord of the world,
Our people are suffering great sorrow,
Have mercy and intercede,
Do not let us fall at the foot of the cross!
Our people are suffering great sorrow,
A sea of tears and blood flows from them,
Injustice rages and feasts,
Untruth has taken the throne!
Jesus Christ, Child of God,

In this Christmas carol, the focus is not on celebrating the birth of Jesus, but on praying to Him for Ukraine's salvation; yet there is an understanding that it is God who will help us to endure in times of trouble:

*З Твоїм Божественним Різдом,
Христе, Сповниться наше бажання чисте:
Ми зло поборем і ще заорем
На ріднім полі власний лан!¹ [19, р. 115]*

The carol "It's Christmas Today" is an interesting example of the folk reception of the dogma of the Incarnation:

*Нині в нас Різдво Божого Дитяти,
Ми, українці, йдемо Його вітати:
Лемки красно співають,
Подольки враз грають,
Волиняк щось міркує,
Бойко легко танцює,
Поліщук плясає,
Гуцул трембітає² [19, р. 115]*

Jesus' divine nature is clearly defined, but it is not shepherds and kings who come to greet him, but all Ukrainians, and the carol highlights the unity of Ukrainian ethnic groups. The text is filled with joy, playfulness, laughter, and dancing. Even the baby Jesus 'claps his hands with gladness'. The hymns and festive performances focus not on magical assurances of well-being, but on expressing love for God, who became human, 'So that the Child be joyful', 'So that the Child love us sincerely', 'This Child is our true God; whoever He loves will be happy'.

The Christianization process is taking place not merely as a formal replacement of pagan gods and rituals, but also spiritually through Jesus' invitation to the Ukrainian land and into the hearts of its people. That is why it is not just the world that rejoices, but Ukraine; salvation is not only for all

Deliver our people from the enemy's chains,
That we may flourish, that we may rejoice
In Your Holy Birth

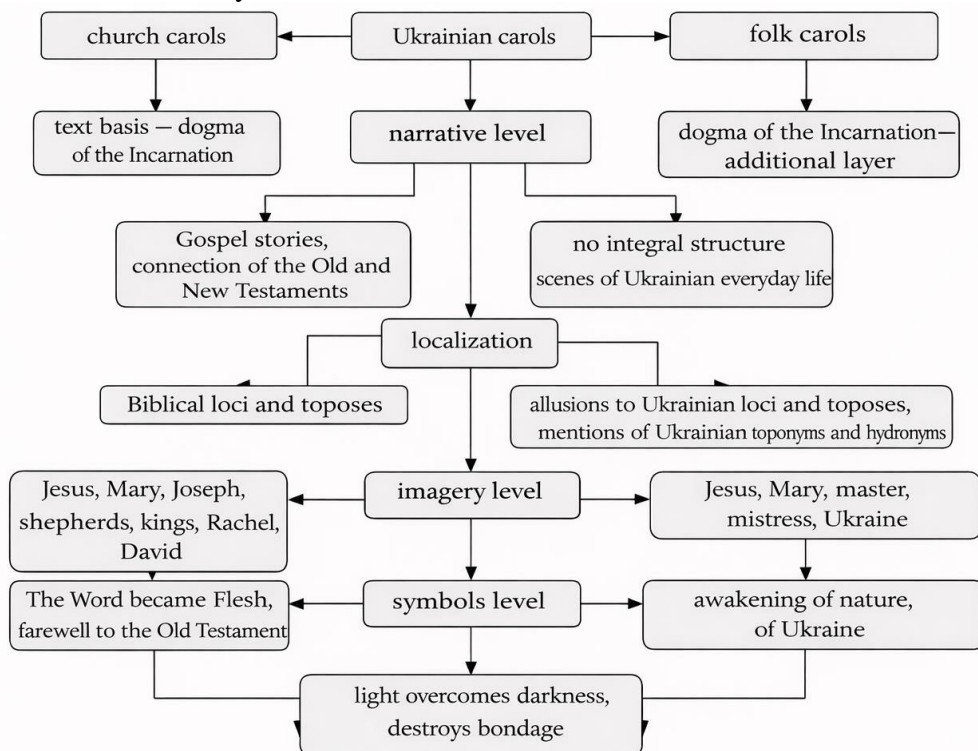
¹ On Your Divine Birth,
Christ, may our pure desire be fulfilled:
We will overcome evil and then plow
Our own field on our native land!

² Today is the Christmas of the Child of God,
We Ukrainians go to greet Him:
The Lemkos sing beautifully,
The Podolians play their instruments,
The Volhynian thinks about something,
The Boiko dances gracefully,
The Polissian dances,
The Hutsul plays the trembita

people, but for Ukrainians; Mary walks through a Ukrainian garden, enters into Ukrainian church, and her care for the newborn God reminds us to care for Ukrainian babies.

As we can see, Ukrainian Christmas carols bring together all the Gospel episodes associated with the doctrine of the Incarnation: the population census of the Roman Empire, Herod's fear that God would be born, and his order to kill the infants, the Holy Family's journey to Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus, the angel's announcement to the shepherds and their worship of Jesus, the appearance of the star that led the three kings to Christ, and their presentation of gifts. However, this dogma is expressed differently in various groups of carols. In church carols, the focus is on the biblical narrative; in folk carols, we observe a syncretism of paganism and Christianity; and in some of the oldest carols, only the doxological component is present, without the Gospel narrative.

Schematically:



Conclusions. Christmas is the mystery of the Saviour's coming into the world, which contains the most important mysteries of the Christian faith: the mystery of the Holy Trinity and the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. It is a celebration of God's love, for through His birth Christ demonstrated the greatest love for humanity, drawing heaven down to them. Christmas customs give rise to profound religious feelings, as well as a civic and national sense of solidarity and unity, and an expression of reverence for

God and humanity. Our Christmas traditions have undergone a complex historical development with many layers, numerous prohibitions, and a search not only for the Bethlehem of God but also for the national one. 'The logic of Christmas is quite clear: Joy can only be found in self-sacrifice. And this also means self-giving. In the fact that Jesus Christ 'humbled himself, taking the form of a servant', Christmas came to pass, the becoming man of God' [1]. The Ukrainian people live by his inspiration. Christmas is a time of exceptional joy and a warm family atmosphere, filled with hopes so beautifully expressed through the traditions of Christmas Eve, the solemn services in church, and our wonderful carols. This is the time when the sweet and enchanting sounds of Christmas carols, mingled with the voices of children and the elderly, ring out from all corners of Ukraine. Here one hears: 'Your Christmas, Christ our God...'. Further on: 'Heaven and earth now rejoice'. Meanwhile, a voice can be heard from afar: 'Herod was greatly distressed that the King of Kings had been born. Herod went all the way to hell to seek advice from Lucifer!' From beneath various houses come 'A new joy has dawned', 'The Eternal God is born', 'Rejoice, universe', 'Come, people, and bow down before this Child of God!', 'Let us cast aside our evil habits – let us hasten to renewal!', 'We crown you with happiness, health...' In the earliest layer of Christmas carols, the world is interpreted through images of the master of the house, the mistress of the house, the courtyard, the home, the garden, and the phenomena of nature and the elements. Gradually, these images are transformed, taking on new meanings and becoming integrated into the context of the Nativity of Christ. Celestial elements begin to function as symbols and signs of the divine presence. The depiction of Jesus Christ also changes – from an abstract Child to the true God and Saviour, with a clear detailing of the dogma of the Incarnation. Christmas carols play an important role, where a distinct doxological orientation is combined with the joy of the Incarnation, and a personal appeal to Christ is combined with a national dimension and a plea for good fortune and freedom for Ukraine. Ukrainian carols are a phenomenon of the Christian reinterpretation of the pagan worldview, as well as vivid examples of theological poetics, fulfilling liturgical, didactic and identity-forming functions. We must not forget these important Christmas traditions of the Ukrainian people, for they are our 'lifblood', without which we would be nothing.

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ДУХОВНИЙ КОД УКРАЇНСЬКИХ КОЛЯДОК: РЕЦЕПЦІЯ ДОГМАТУ ВОПЛОЧЕННЯ ТА ХРИСТІЯНСЬКИХ ЦІННОСТЕЙ У ПОЕТИКАЛЬНОМУ ВИМІРІ

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Мета. У статті розглянуто українські колядки як носії духовного коду національної культури, зокрема крізь призму рецепції християнського догмату Воплочення та християнських цінностей. Основну увагу зосереджено на аналізі поезики народних і церковних колядок, їх здатності інтерпретувати богословські істини через художні образи, а також на виявленні особливостей інкультурації християнських смислів у традиційній народній творчості. **Дослідницька методика.** У дослідженні використано комплекс наукових методів, зокрема герменевтичний, культурно-історичний, порівняльно-типологічний, а також елементи аналізу і синтезу. Методологічну основу становить поєднання літературознавчого та богословського підходів, що дозволяє інтерпретувати тексти колядок як синкретичні явища духовної та художньої культури. **Результати дослідження.** У ході дослідження виявлено, що українські колядки репрезентують догмат Воплочення у різних вимірах: біблійному, доксологічному, символічному та народнопоетичному. Простежено, що у церковних колядках домінує євангельський сюжет і богословська чіткість, тоді як у народних – синтез християнських і дохристиянських елементів. Визначено ключові образи та мотиви

(народження Христа, поклоніння пастухів і царів, образ Богородиці, мотиви світла, радості, спасіння), а також показано, як вони трансформуються у національно-культурному контексті. Окреслено роль колядок у формуванні народного богослов'я, колективної пам'яті та національної ідентичності. **Наукова новизна дослідження** полягає у комплексному аналізі українських колядок як текстів, що поєднують богословський зміст і художню форму, а також у висвітленні специфіки рецепції догмату Воплочення через призму інкультурації. Запропоновано розгляд колядок не лише як фольклорного явища, а як важливого елементу духовної культури, що відображає еволюцію світоглядних уявлень українців. **Практичне значення статті** полягає у можливості використання її результатів у наукових дослідженнях з літературознавства, фольклористики та богослов'я, а також у навчальному процесі – під час викладання курсів з української літератури, культурології, релігієзнавства та історії культури, зокрема у контексті осмислення духовної спадщини українського народу.

Ключові слова: колядка, Воплочення, духовний код, українська культура, народна творчість, інкультурація, християнські цінності, поетика, інтеграція.