

# Stella Maris Star of the Sea Festival



This Southern Italian Sea Festival celebrates the riches from the sea. By celebrating Stella Maris, people are able to give thanks for the abundance from the sea in their lives. The festival is celebrated annually in September.

Italy is surrounded by sea on three sides. The sea, for thousands of years, has been a source of work, pleasure and food. Mariners, ship builders and fishermen have proved this. Holidaymakers and coastal dwellers also make the most of the sea and enjoy seaside living. An old Italian proverb states 'the sea brings fortune'. The seas of the Mediterranean and Adriatic abound with a rich source of food including many varieties of fish and shellfish. Mussels, clams, oysters, prawns, anchovies, sardines, octopi and squid are added to the Italian cuisine. Shellfish in particular are popular throughout the country and are readily available. Dried, smoked, salted and pickled varieties of fish are also enjoyed in Antipasto dishes and as appetizers.

The star according to Italian sailors and fishermen is a symbol for good luck. It is believed to bring protection to one when at sea, and to bring riches within the catch. Therefore a starfish in the nets is an especially lucky omen.

In Roman mythology Neptune was the original Lord of the Universe but he was banished, by Zeus the greatest of the gods, to the underwater kingdom where he became the turbulent god of the Oceans. To vent his anger about being disposed, Neptune used his trident (the three pronged fork) to stir and wreak havoc (by shattering rocks, calling forth storms, churning the sea water, hurling the water on land, causing floods, and violently pitching and shaking the earth). His offspring the Tritons (Mer-people who are half human and half fish) traveled with Neptune and becalmed the sea after his rages. The other side of Neptune reveals a generous soul who guides ships to safety and fills fishermen's nets with bounties from the sea. Neptune's benevolence must be recognized and acknowledge, to placate him, before he demonstrates another pique of rage. One must also be aware that the sea is a powerful force, being as much a source of death as it is life.

Throughout the festival everyone eats and enjoys fish, giving thanks for the Harvest of the Sea.

A wide variety of dishes are cooked including barbeques. Everybody enjoys and cooks traditional but personal special fish recipes. Maritime style decorations add atmosphere and Starfish may suddenly appear for table decorations.