

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

ADVENTSSITTEN / ADVENT CUSTOMS

- 1. Only somebody who has lived in Germany for a few years can understand what Christmas means to a German.**
 - **It is a warm holiday among friends.**
 - **People light candles and get amusement from giving gifts.**
 - **Advent is the expectation from this, the impatient waiting is the symbol for the Advent wreath.**
 - **Members of the family or groups of friends customarily sit around the lighted wreath, sing seasonal carols, and prepare handmade Christmas gifts.**
- 2. On each of the four Advent Sundays, “Rorate” services feature excellent performances.**
- 3. The Klöpfelnächte or knocking nights begin on November 30, the feast of St. Andrew. Children go from house to house and expect to receive gifts.**

Advent's position between the old and the new years makes this season something special right up to the present day. The churches see it as the start of the new church year whereas in secular terms Advent Sunday signals the final weeks of the old year. For the Catholic Church, Advent was for many centuries a time for repentance and fasting. The church liturgy was directed towards something still to happen in the future so it is not surprising that many events were endowed with a significance extending beyond the immediate moment. St. Nicholas's attendant was originally there to drive away evil. Masked figures performed this function in Southern Germany by rampaging through the villages so as to chase away demons wishing to establish themselves in this dark time. Other companions, totally enveloped in straw, served the same function. Such figures were even better established in Northern Germany — particularly Pomerania and East Prussia — where they rule alone without St. Nicholas. Terrifying figures of a man on a withe horse, a stork, and witches, all embodied by people, were intended to drive out terror and fear of darkness. All these antagonists were emanations of the superstition in which this time of year is so rich. In the Erzgebirge on the fourth Sunday in Advent, people went so far as to put out lights and food in hallways in order to keep evil spirits from entering the house itself.

In Switzerland, Austria, and Bavaria, young men went from house to house, knocking on the shutters and doors, on the last three Thursdays in Advent. Here again the object was to drive away evil. The nuts, grains, peas, and beans that rained into rooms when the Julklapp came served the same purpose.

There is a more recent custom linked with the Advent wreath. This was introduced within a very short time by long-distance lorry drivers, and has already spread throughout the Federal Republic and to neighbouring countries. At the start of Advent, these drivers put a small plastic Christmas tree in their cabins. The coloured bulbs on the tree are connected to the lorry's battery and lit up after dark.