

“Bei uns ist immer was los!”

ADVENTSSITTEN / ADVENT CUSTOMS
ADVENTSKALENDER / ADVENT CALENDAR
 calendar: der Kalender, die Kalender

GENGENBACHS RATHAUS ADVENTSKALENDER

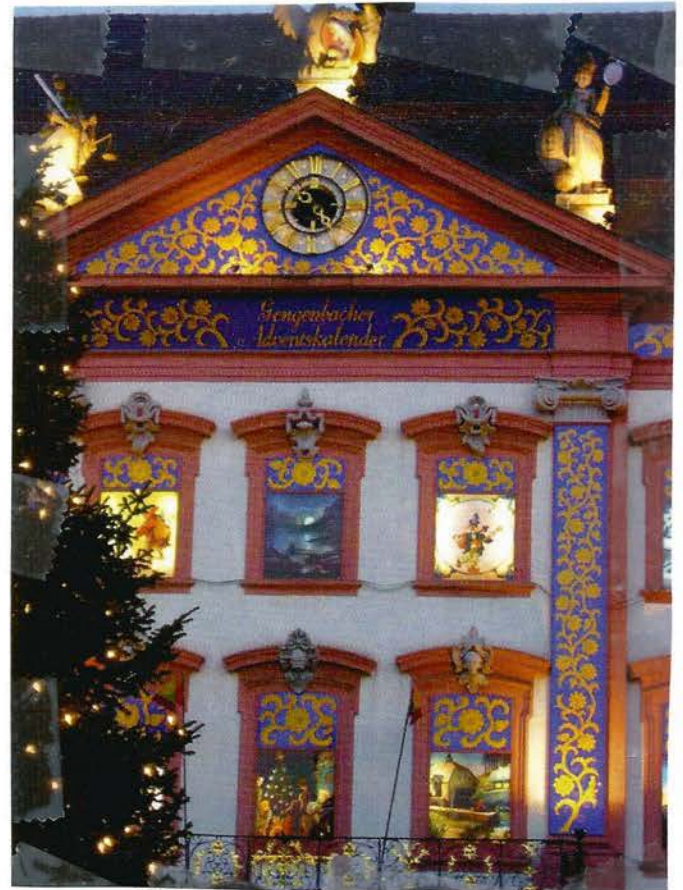
the three Magi following the divine star. The largest door, opened on Christmas Eve, usually revealed Baby Jesus lying in the manger. Today, calendars with Christian motifs are now harder to find again and have given way to ones showing Santa Claus, Christmas trees, or snowy town or landscape scenes.

The dark days of the Advent season in Germany were once a quiet time for church-going and fasting. For shop-owners in Gengenbach – until 1996 – the winter months were much too quiet. The small Christmas market at Gengenbach’s main square was beautifully framed by the neoclassical town hall (1784) and three converging streets lined with half-timbered houses from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, each street leading to another ancient tower that was once part of the original medieval town wall. Despite this picturesque setting, holiday shoppers flocked instead to the markets in larger towns like Freiburg and Offenburg.

What could they do to bring customers to Gengenbach? Build a large wooden Advent calendar next to the Christmas market in the square, it was suggested, and create a ceremony to celebrate the opening of a new window in the calendar every evening. Then one of the planners noticed that the facade of the *Rathaus*, the stately old town hall, had twenty-four windows, the exact number of December days until Christmas Eve. Why build a giant calendar? The perfect Advent calendar was already there.

Now from the first of December every year, the *Rathaus* is trimmed with panels of deep blue and golden garlands and is immediately recognizable as an Advent calendar. With the passing of the days of Advent, the windows, numbered in random order, are opened to reveal works of art. To create the calendar images, original paintings or illustrations are photographed, and then transferred to transparencies which are applied to the back sides of acrylic window panes, imitating the lustrous effect of reverse glass painting. Glowing brilliantly every evening against the dark sky, the *Rathaus* with its luminous windows is the centerpiece of Gengenbach’s charming Christmastime tableau.

A group of pictures decorates the *Rathaus* Advent calendar for three years, and then a new set of images on a new theme is assembled or specially created. The current calendar includes illustrations from many best-loved works of German and international children’s literature.



THE THEME OF THE WINDOWS CHANGES EVERY THREE YEARS.



CHRISTMAS MARKET STALLS ARE FILLED WITH QUALITY GOODS.