

## HIMMELFAHRTSTAG / ASCENSION DAY

1. **Was?** Ascension Day is a legal and a public holiday in Germany. Ascension day is also known as Vatertag / Father's Day in some areas of Germany.
2. **Wann?** Ascension Day falls on the 40th day after Easter (39 days after Easter Sunday, 10 days before Whitsuntide (Pentecost), and always on a Thursday. It has been celebrated since 370 AD.
3. **Warum?** Ascension Day marks the day Christ ascended into heaven to take up his rightful place at the right hand of God.
4. **Sitten und Bräuche / customs and traditions**
  - Ascension Day is considered to be especially propitious.
  - Wreaths and branches of certain herbs are blessed and hung on the doors of stables or ceilings of houses for protection against storm damage.
  - Equestrian processions take place in Kötzing in the Bayerischer Wald.

After Easter, the next church feast in the ecclesiastical calendar is Ascension Day, which is called "Himmelfahrt" in German. According to the Bible, Christ's ascent into heaven took place 40 days after Easter; thus, Ascension Day always falls on a Thursday.

**ASCENSION THURSDAY**—A figure of Jesus Christ is drawn up to the top of the church to the sound of trumpets.

It is supposed to rain on this day because the heavens have opened to let Christ through. This day is also always Father's Day in Germany.

### Old Beliefs

Formerly, there were also some popular beliefs connected with Pentecost, Ascension Day and other times of this season: certain herbs were believed to have curative powers only when picked on a Whitsunday morning (or on other special days), or at sunrise, if the person gathering them did not speak a word. Also water scooped up at this time was attributed with curative powers. Some ancient spring customs have survived in certain regions either because the young people enjoy them, or because they allow proud parents to show off their children, or because parents and teachers believe in their educational value. In some villages, the youngsters get together, wrap one child in a cloak of green twigs and then lead him through the village, while they sing songs or ask for little gifts. Elsewhere, either a couple is adorned the same way or a girl in a white dress is led through the village as the "May Bride" or "Whitsun Bride." These customs are related to the children's parades ("Sommertagsumzüge") on Mid-Lent Sunday (the fourth Sunday after Ash Wednesday), which take place in the Pfalz, northern Baden and southern Hessen. Sometimes winter is symbolized in the parades by a person dressed in straw while spring is represented by a figure adorned with green twigs.

### Riders' Processions

Another old custom related to the spring and early summer season is not being followed very much any more. This is the practice of taking formal rides around the fields, or forming "riders' processions." Although they were not customary everywhere, these rides were much more common in former times than they are today. In most

villages, there are not even enough horses left. But wherever the custom survives (not only at Pentecost, but also at Easter, Ascension Day or other days), it is a big event for the villagers and an attraction for the tourists. In order to take a "Flurumritt" (ride around the fields), a group of horsemen assembles — consisting of either all the horseowners of the village or only the unmarried young men, or some other groups. Then they either ride around the borders of the village fields or they go to some special places located on the village's lands. In villages that are predominantly Catholic, the priest accompanies them. Because of his presence, and because of the banners and the religious songs, the ride takes on the character of a religious procession. On this occasion, the priest may also bless the fields and ask for God's help that the crops will grow.