

**"Bei uns ist immer was los!"**

## Myths lost in the mists of time

Among the most widespread legendary European Christmas tree tales is one involving St. Boniface (approx. 675-755) and one involving Martin Luther (1483-1546), although both are allegedly steeped more in myth than in fact.

Luther may, however, according to various online reports, have been one of the first people in Germany to suggest placing lit candles on a tree on Christmas Eve, a tradition which continues to this day.

## Where's the pickle?

And there never has, moreover, been a "pickle" hidden inside a Christmas tree in Germany, despite what many packages of glass pickle ornaments sold beyond Germany's borders might lead folks to believe in a bid to boost sales of, well, glass pickle ornaments, "natürlich" (naturally).

As one Web site has put it: "A very old Christmas eve tradition in Germany was to hide a pickle (ornament) deep in the branches of the family Christmas Tree. The parents hung the pickle last after all the other ornaments were in place. In the morning they knew the most observant child would receive an extra gift from St. Nicholas. The first adult who finds the pickle traditionally gets good luck for the whole year."

## Naughty or nice

While this is really a cute story and sounds like a fun Christmastime "legend," most Germans would tell you that they've never heard of such a tradition. (In the interest of full disclosure, we have received several queries over the years about this "custom" here at the German Embassy in Washington. The reply was always the same: "No, this is not a widespread or well-known German custom.")

They would, however, confirm that St. Nicholas actually does not arrive in Germany on Christmas Day. Instead he shows up on December 6, when children used to put out a shoe the night before to receive either gifts if they were nice or - if they were naughty - some lumps of coal as a form of punishment. (Most kids used to get some nuts or fruit - rare wintertime treats before the 20th century - or gingerbread cookies.)

In Austria, there is also a horned, furry "devil-goat-man" known as the "Krampus" who allegedly will appear to "punish" and "scare" you on December 6 if you've been bad. (This is why Austrians sometimes have little "Krampus" figures among some of their Christmas decorations or holiday party giveaways, although today this old tradition really is just hinted at in a spirit of teasing fun.)

## Christmas Eve tradition

German families, moreover, always open their presents on Christmas Eve, not on Christmas Day, so there is no "finding a pickle in the morning" either.

That said, German kids have just as much fun opening their gifts on December 6 and on Christmas Eve as American kids do on Christmas Morning - the sense of anticipation and excitement bordering on giddy hysteria is the same for all children, all over the world. As most adults who grew up with their own Christmas traditions fondly recall, it really is one of the best things ever about being a kid.

Happy Holidays!

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