

NACHWEIHNACHTZEIT / POST CHRISTMAS SEASON

der 31. Dezember: Silvesterabend / New Year's Eve

WHY ON EARTH DO GERMANS CALL NEW YEAR SILVESTER?

der Silvester — New Year's Eve

The German name for New Year's Eve comes from [Pope Sylvester I](#), whose saint feast day is December 31st. Germans celebrate *Silvester* with lots of fireworks and champagne.

Why do Germans call New Year's Eve *Silvester*?

No your friend isn't planning to ring in the New Year with someone named Sylvester instead of you. *Silvester* is the German name for New Year's Eve – owing to the fourth century Pope Sylvester I. Eventually made a saint by the Catholic Church, his feast day is observed on December 31.

St. Sylvester's day became associated with New Year's Eve with the reform of the Gregorian calendar in 1582, when the last day of the year was fixed at December 31. But despite the holiday's Christian name, many German New Year's traditions can be traced back to the pagan *Rauhnächte* practices of heathen Germanic tribes, which took place at the end of December and beginning of January.

Instead of recognizing a single day as the winter solstice, the Germanic tribes observed twelve *Rauhnächte* – hairy nights, so called due to the furry forms of the deep winter demons – or *Raumnächte* – smoky nights, due to the practice of smoking the spirits out of one's house on January 5. Bringing very little sun to the northern regions, the twelve *Rauhnächte* were considered days outside of time, when the solar and lunar years were allowed to re-synchronise. *Silvester* took place right in the middle of the twelve *Rauhnächte* and was the night of the god Wotan's wild hunt, a time of particular commotion and celebration.

Recently, the celebrating of "Silvester" (New Year's Eve) has been gaining importance. The name is derived from Pope Sylvester I, 314–335, who is the Roman-Catholic saint of December 31.

Why is December 31 called *Silvester* in German? We don't know when Saint Sylvester—or Sankt Silvester—was born, but he was pope (*Papst*) from 314 until he died in Rome on December 31, 335. Legend says that Pope Sylvester cured Roman emperor Constantine I of leprosy (*Ausatz*)—after converting him to Christianity, of course. For this, the grateful emperor supposedly granted the pope the so-called Donation of Constantine, giving him extensive rights to land and power. (This gift now seems to be a forgery going back to the eighth century.)

New Year Eve is called as 'Silvester' in Germany, as a mark of honor to the Saint Sylvester, who used to live in Germany in fourth century.

Saint Sylvester is credited as the one who mended leprosy, and baptized Constantine the Great, the Roman Ruler. Saint Sylvester is also credited as the only Pope to have met the recognized members of the family of Jesus.

German-speaking countries call the 31st of December "Silvester" instead of New Year's Eve. The name's roots in the existence of St. Sylvester, whose feast took place on the 31st of December 335 - the day of his burial in the Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome, Italy. Some other countries also refer to New Year's Eve as the Feast of Saint Sylvester or Saint Sylvester's Day. Now, what do Germans do on Silvester?