

## NACHWEIHNACHTZEIT / POST-CHRISTMAS SEASON

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

New Years Eve custom: Silvesterabendsitte

history of New Years Eve: die Geschichte des Silvesterabends

**Silvesterabend is named after Pope Silvester (314 to 335 A.D.), who lived during the reign of Constantine and died on December 31, 335 A.D.**



**Pope Silvester I**

Recently, the celebrating of "Silvester" (New Year's Eve) has been gaining importance. The name is derived from Pope Silvester 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.)

Sylvester was a Roman, the son of Rufinus. He was ordained a priest by Marcellinus. Chosen Pope in 314, he continued the work of organizing the peacetime Church so well begun by St. Miltiades. Sylvester saw the building of famous churches, notably the Basilica of St. Peter and the Basilica of St. John Lateran, built near the former imperial palace of that name. It is quite probable too that the first martyrology or list of Roman martyrs was drawn up in his reign. St. Sylvester died in 335. He was buried in a church which he himself had built over the Catacomb of Priscilla on the Via Salaria. His feast is kept on December 31.