Name: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Datum: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Stunde: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Sankt Nikolaustag!**

*Santa Claus (St. Nick), as drawn by Thomas Nast for Harper’s Weekly in 1881. PHOTO: Wikimedia Commons*

**The Historic, Real St. Nicholas**  
Across the German-speaking region of Europe there are many kinds of Santa Clauses with many different names. Despite their many names, they are all basically the same mythic character. But few of them have anything to do with the *real* Saint Nicholas (**Sankt Nikolaus** or **der Heilige Nikolaus**), who was probably born around A.D. 245 in the port city of Patara in what we now call Turkey. Very little solid historical evidence exists for the man who later became the **Bishop of Myra** and the patron saint of children, sailors, students, teachers, and merchants. He is credited with several miracles and his feast day is December 6, which is the main reason he is connected with Christmas. In Austria, parts of Germany, and Switzerland, **der Heilige Nikolaus** (or **Pelznickel**) brings his gifts for children on **Nikolaustag**, Dec. 6, not Dec. 25. Nowadays, St. Nicholas Day (**der Nikolaustag**) on Dec. 6 is a preliminary round for Christmas.

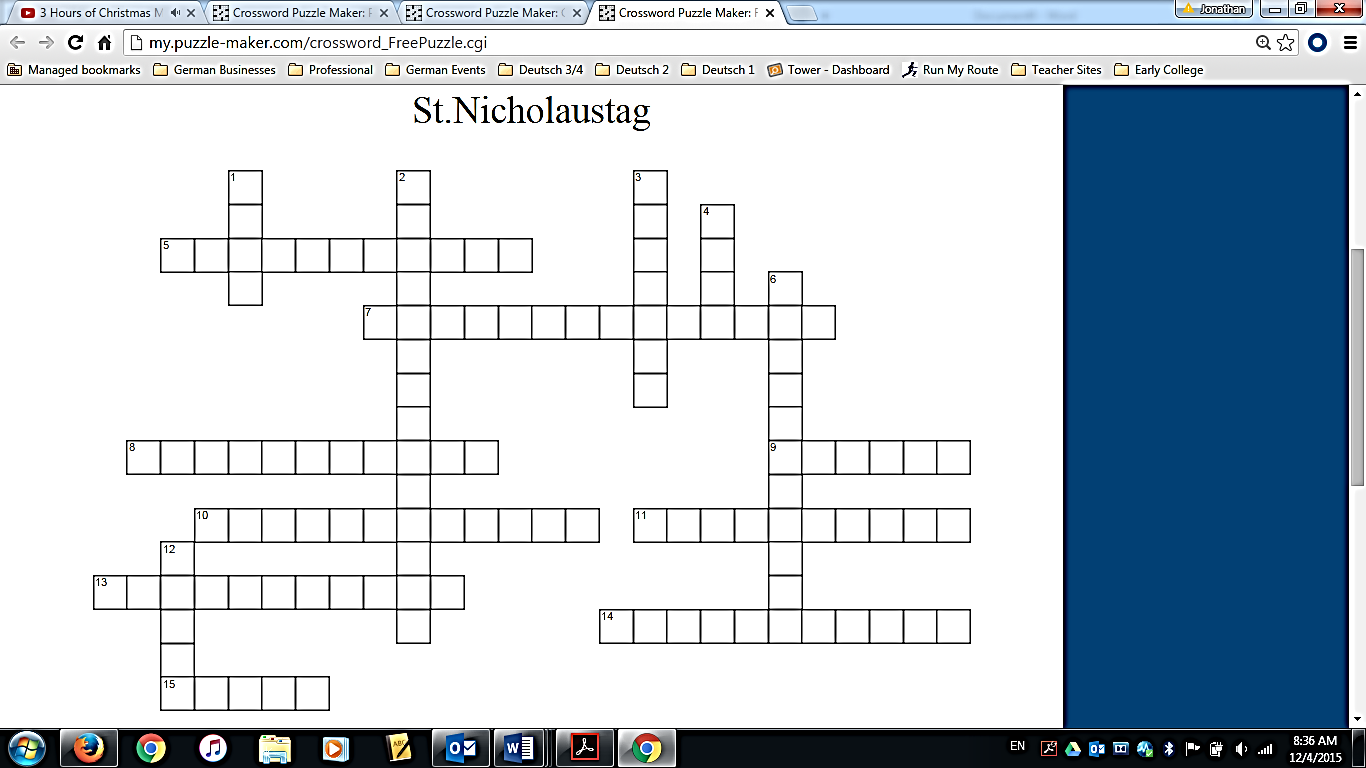
***Nikolaustag – 6. Dezember***  
On the night of December 5 (in some places, the evening of Dec. 6), in small communities in Austria and the Catholic regions of Germany, a man dressed as ***der Heilige Nikolaus*** (St. Nicholas, who resembles a bishop and carries a staff) goes from house to house to bring small gifts to the children. Accompanying him are several ragged looking, devil-like *Krampusse*, who mildly scare the children. Although Krampus/Knecht Ruprecht carries ***eine Rute*** (a switch), he only teases the children with it, while St. Nicholas hands out small gifts to the children. In some regions, there are other names for both Nikolaus and Krampus (**Knecht Ruprecht** in northern Germany). As early as 1555, St. Nicholas brought gifts on Dec. 6, the only “Christmas” gift-giving time during the Middle Ages, and Knecht Ruprecht or **Krampus** was a more ominous figure. In Alpine Europe Krampus is still a scary, devil-like figure. The [**Krampuslauf** custom](http://www.german-way.com/krampus-the-christmas-devil-of-alpine-europe/)found in Austria and Bavaria also happens around December 5 or 6, but it also can take place at various times during November or December, depending on the community.

Nikolaus and Krampus don’t always make a personal appearance. In some places today, children still leave their ***Schuhe*** (shoes) by the window or the door on the night of Dec. 5. They awaken the next day (Dec. 6) to discover small **gifts** and goodies stuffed into the shoes, left by St. Nicholas. This is similar to the American Santa Claus custom, although the dates are different. Also similar to American custom, the children may leave a wish list for Nikolaus to pass on to the ***Weihnachtsmann*** (Father Christmas) for Christmas.

**Heiligabend – 24. Dezember**  
**Christmas Eve** is now the most important day of the German celebration. But there’s no Santa Claus coming down the chimney (and no chimney!), no reindeer (the German Santa rides a white horse), no waiting for Christmas morning! Families with young children often keep the living room or other room closed off, revealing the Christmas tree to the excited youngsters only at the last minute. The decorated ***Tannenbaum*** is the center of the *Bescherung*, the exchanging of gifts, which takes place on Christmas Eve, either before or after dinner. Neither Santa Claus nor St. Nicholas brings children their gifts for Christmas. In most regions, the angelic, fairy-like ***Christkindl*** or the more secular *Weihnachtsmann* is the bringer of gifts that don’t come from other family members or friends on Christmas Eve. In religious families, there also may be readings of Christmas-related passages from the Bible. Many people attend midnight mass (***Christmette***), where they sing carols, much as on the occasion of the first Christmas Eve performance of “[**Stille Nacht**](http://night)” (“Silent Night”) in Oberndorf, Austria in 1818.

<http://www.german-way.com/history-and-culture/holidays-and-celebrations/christmas/saint-nicholas/>

**Sankt Nikolaustag!**



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|  | **ACROSS** | |  |
|  | 5 | An angelic, fairy-like figure who brings presents on Christmas Eve. |  |
|  | 7 | The name of Krampus in northern Germany. |  |
|  | 8 | The holiday celebrated on December 6th in honor of St. Nicholas. |  |
|  | 9 | the country where the real Nicholas was probably born. |  |
|  | 10 | The day on which German children see the tree and get presents. |  |
|  | 11 | The German name for Christmas tree, center of the celebration. |  |
|  | 13 | December 24th, the most important day of the German Christmas celebration. |  |
|  | 14 | “Silent Night” Christmas carol sung by many Germans. |  |
|  | 15 | In some places children leave out \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ on the window or door for goodies. |  |
|  | **Down** | |  |
|  | 1 | Later St. Nicholas became the Bishop of \_\_\_\_\_\_. |  |
|  | 2 | “Father Christmas”, the more secular bringer of presents. |  |
|  | 3 | St. Nicholas is often accompanied by small devil-like creatures known as \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. |  |
|  | 4 | Krampus teases small children with a small switch called eine \_\_\_\_\_\_. |  |
|  | 6 | Midnight mass celebrated by many Germans. |  |
|  | 12 | On the night of December 5th or 6th a person dresses up as St. Nicholas and brings children small \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. |  |