

Reading Level 1: Christmas traditions

23rd December 2013**Topics:** Christmas, festivals, St Nicholas**Learning points:**

- vocabulary
- present simple tense

1 When do you normally see your first Christmas decorations? Normally, I see the first signs of Christmas at the
2 end of September. And when do you usually¹ hear your first Christmas carols? In Austria, the shops usually
3 wait until December starts, but in England the shoppers start to hear them in November.

4

5 December 6th is the feast day of Saint Nicholas and can be the official start of Christmas. Do you know that one
6 story about St Nicholas is that he gave a poor family a purse with gold coins? He put it down the chimney and it
7 fell into the stockings that were drying by the fire. In England, Father Christmas comes down the chimney, and
8 children still² hang stockings up for their presents. Now, St Nicolas sometimes brings gifts of food to children –
9 if they are good – and a Knecht Ruprecht – or a Krampus – punishes³ the bad children.

10

11 Advent always starts four Sundays before Christmas Eve. One tradition is to make an advent wreath⁴ of
12 evergreen branches and to light four candles in it, one for each Sunday of advent. Advent calendars are also
13 popular⁵. Of course, there are presents to buy, food to prepare and cards to write (my mother sends and
14 receives about 200 each year!) In England, people bring in a Christmas tree one or two weeks before Christmas
15 and decorate it with electric lights and tinsel. Families normally put their presents under the Christmas tree
16 before Christmas, too. In Austria, people often don't decorate the tree until Christmas Eve – and the presents
17 only arrive then, too.

18

19 When I was a child, groups of carol singers went through each village. They sang Christmas carols outside
20 people's houses and the neighbours came out and often sang too. This tradition has nearly stopped in England.
21 Christmas pantomimes in theatres (often with celebrities) are getting more and more popular with families.

22

23 The 24th December – Christmas Eve – is one of the biggest shopping days in England. In Germany and Austria,
24 this is the most special evening, when the Christkind comes. In Germany, the Christkind is an angel – the
25 messenger of Christ – and can bring presents. Martin Luther wanted the presents on Christmas Eve, when Jesus
26 was born, and not on Christmas Day. In England, many people go to Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve or go to
27 church on Christmas Day. For lots of people, this is the only church service they go to all year.

28

29 In England, the Royal Family are the only people who open their presents on Christmas Eve! Christmas Day (the
30 25th) is the most important day in Britain. We open presents in the morning and then cook and eat the big
31 Christmas dinner. This is a roast dinner, with roast potatoes, roast vegetables and a roast turkey⁶. We also eat
32 mince pies and Christmas pudding – with brandy butter. Then we watch the Queen's Speech and the
33 blockbuster film on TV! Boxing Day (the 26th) is a big sporting day in England.

34

35 Do you know that in Scotland, Christmas Day was a normal working day until the 1960s or 1970s?
36 New Year's Eve – called Hogmanay in Scotland – is much bigger than Christmas, with big street parties, public
37 concerts and firework displays.

¹ usually = gewöhnlich, normalerweise

² still = immer noch

³ punish = bestrafen

⁴ advent wreath = Weihnachtskranz

⁵ popular = beliebt, weit verbreitet

⁶ turkey = Truthahn

Present Simple tense

Most of this text is about permanent facts – traditions that don't change.

- 1) Can you find the time words for the Present Simple tense (eg. 'every day') in lines 1, 2, 8, 11,,15 and 16?
- 2) What is the Auxiliary Verb for the Present Simple (lines 1, 2, 5, 16)?
- 3)
 - a. When must we use the Auxiliary Verb?
 - b. When can we leave the Auxiliary Verb out? What verb form do we use then?
- 4) Look in lines 7-9. What is different about the verb? Why?
- 5) Lines 19-21 are not the Present Simple - the verbs are different. Can you see this?

Answers

- 1) normally, usually, sometimes, always, often
- 2) do
- 3)
 - a. With all questions and negatives
 - b. With positive sentences. Then we use the 1st verb form
- 4) The verb has an 's' at the end. This is because the person is the 3rd Person Singular (he/she/it) – Father Christmas, St Nicolas or Knecht Ruprecht.