

The Christmas Encyclopedia

Second Edition

William D. Crump



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Written by Jim Davis. Produced and directed
by Phil Roman. A Phil Roman Production in
association with United Media-Mendelson
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tury Fox Video. 24 min.

The Gathering

(1977). Made-for-television drama with
one sequel.

Having sacrificed a fulfilling family life
for the pursuit of success, Adam Thornton
(Edward Asner), president of Thornton Indus-
tries, suddenly faces Christmas with the news
that he is terminally ill. Though estranged
from his four grown children and separated
from his wife Kate (Maureen Stapleton) for
years, Adam solicits Kate's help to reunite the
family one last time at Christmas before he
dies. His children, Julie (Rebecca Balding),
Tom (Lawrence Pressman), Peggy (Gail Strick-
land), and Adam "Bud" Jr. (Gregory Harri-
son), are scattered across the continent. A
regretful Adam especially wishes a reconcilia-
tion with Bud, his youngest, whose sentiments
against the Vietnam War had offended Adam
to the point that he had expelled his son from
home. Bud had then left the country and fled
to Canada under a false identity to escape the
draft.

After Kate issues the invitations, taking
care only to plead that Adam wishes to see his
children again (he would not have them return
simply because of his illness), she and Adam
make preparations by decorating the family
homeplace and the Christmas tree together, as
though they had never separated. The holiday
spirit overtakes Adam, who, rummaging
through the attic for toys to give to his grand-
children, finds and repairs a doll house and an
electric train.

On Christmas Eve, the three older chil-
dren arrive with their families to fellowship,
love, carols, and a rendering of "A Visit from
St. Nicholas," all of which Adam considers
quite a miraculous event, given his neglect of
former days. Only Tom suspects his father's
motives for calling everyone together when
Adam, opening a gift box of fireworks from Dr.
John Hodges (John Randolph), refers to him as
"my doctor," an unusual phrase for the self-
reliant Adam. Yet Tom keeps the secret, and

the two are drawn closer as they light up the
Christmas Eve darkness with fireworks.

Bud's arrival on Christmas Day brings the
long-expected meeting and forgiveness, along
with two new family members whom Adam
has never seen: Bud's wife Toni (Stephanie
Zimbalist) and infant son, christened Adam
Thornton III that same day in a home cere-
mony. Before everyone departs, Adam's last acts
of generosity include offering Bud and Julie's
unemployed husband, George (Bruce Davi-
son), positions in his company.

In 1978, this program won an Emmy for
Outstanding Drama Special and received Emmy
nominations for Outstanding Art Direction,
Outstanding Directing, Outstanding Lead
Actress (Stapleton), and Outstanding Writing.

With Sarah Cunningham, Veronica
Hamel, James Karen, and Edward Winter.
Written by James Poe. Produced by Harry R.
Sherman. Directed by Randal Kleiser. Hanna-
Barbera Productions. VHS: Goodtimes Home
Video. 94 min.

A sequel, *The Gathering, Part II*, followed
in 1979. Kate assumes control of Thornton
Industries and receives amorous advances from
a wealthy industrialist (Efrem Zimbalist, Jr.),
who wishes to buy the business. The Thornton
children are not sure of this suitor's true inten-
tions and rally at Christmastime to protect
Kate. Written by Harry Longstreet and Renee
Longstreet. Produced by Joel Rogosin. Directed
by Charles S. Dubin. Hanna-Barbera Produc-
tions. Video N/A. 98 min.

See also *Christmas Eve* (1986), a later tele-
vision drama which closely parallels *The Gath-
ering*.

Gentle Mary Laid Her Child

See *Good King Wenceslas* (song)

George Balanchine's "The Nutcracker"

See *The Nutcracker*

Germany

This nation has enjoyed Christmas since
the eighth century, when the English Benedic-
tine missionary Winfrid, St. Boniface (c. 675-
754), brought Christianity to the Germanic
tribes of Europe. It is the country from which

scratcher that he
ding to Garfield.
e not nearly as

ceived an Emmy
Animated Pro-

, Thom Huges,
Harrington, Jr.,
and Lou Rawls.



Knecht Ruprecht or Krampus, the devilish companion of St. Nicholas who carries the toy bag and helps St. Nick decide who is to get a gift, and who is to be punished. Old engraving reprinted in Phillip Snyder, *The Joys of Christmas Past: A Social History* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1985).

a number of worldwide holiday customs originated (for example, Advent wreaths, Advent candles, Advent calendars, and Christmas trees), richly interwoven with pagan rites of pre-Christian times.

Christmas is preceded by Advent and its associated customs and symbols. Also commencing at this time is the *Christkindlmarkt* (Christ Child market), a large, open-air market hosted in virtually every German city, sporting all manner of Christmas merchandise. The largest and most famous of these markets is that in Nuremberg, an annual tradition of more than 400 years. Roman Catholics erect a *Krippe* (crib), a Nativity scene, in churches and homes. Often these displays are heirlooms featuring wooden figures hundreds of years old, hand-carved by family ancestors.

On December 5, the eve of St. Nicholas's Day, men dressed as the bishop St. Nicholas in full clerical attire ride about cities on white horses, while children set out their shoes for the saint to fill with toys and treats overnight. A St. Nicholas personage usually visits homes in neighborhoods for the traditional quizzing of children in church doctrine and the assessing of their behavior over the past year. Accompanying St. Nicholas is a personification of Satan, known, depending on the region, by a host of names such as Knecht Ruprecht, Krampus, Grampus, Hans Muff, Hans Trapp, Butz, Klaubauf, Bartel, Budelfrau, Pelznickel, Bel-snickel, Habersack, Klaasbuur, Burklaas, Rauklas, Ru-klas, Bullerklaas, Aschenklas, Shaggy Goat, or simply Rider. A hideous, fur-clad figure with blackened face, dark beard, long tail, and red, serpentine tongue, this antithesis of St. Nicholas growls, rattles chains, and sports a whip with which to "beat" naughty children and those ignorant of their catechism. Some characters tote bags or baskets in which they threaten to stuff and whisk away the little offenders. Traditionally, as the Satan figure is



A German youth, perhaps a baker's boy, carries perhaps a Weihnachtstollen, Stollen, or fruit loaf under each arm. From the German magazine *Deutscher Kinderfreund*, 1910.

about to spring, saves the children. In their shoes on children find with the Evil One.

St. Nicholas's of pagan rituals. Nicholas personages, recalling Yule festivals, wh away the spirits c sheaves and wearin *tenmandelhaut* (F Bavarian Alps rur din with cow bell they symbolically, pagan belief that n would drive away t lowing this comm oring St. Nichola accompany the sai to house delivering a scene derived fr Riddle-Riddle Me carry the single w

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about to spring, St. Nicholas intervenes and saves the children from a fate worse than death. In their shoes on St. Nicholas's Day, naughty children find switches, coal, or dirt, gifts from the Evil One.

St. Nicholas's Day continues with vestiges of pagan rituals. In southern Germany, St. Nicholas personages lead processions to bonfire ceremonies, recalling the bonfires of ancient Yule festivals, which were believed to drive away the spirits of darkness. Donning straw sheaves and wearing grotesque masks, the *Buttenmandelhaut* (Riddle-Raddle Men) of the Bavarian Alps run through valleys creating a din with cow bells and other noisemakers as they symbolically drive away evil, recalling the pagan belief that not only fire, but loud noises, would drive away the evil spirits of winter. Following this commotion and a ceremony honoring St. Nicholas, the Riddle-Raddle Men accompany the saint as he journeys from house to house delivering gifts to children. Finally, in a scene derived from pagan fertility rites, the Riddle-Raddle Men enter homes and simply carry the single women outdoors.

On the three Thursdays before Christmas, Bavarian children observe *Klopfelnachten* (Knocking Nights), a ritual similar to Halloween in the United States. Wearing masks, they go about creating as much noise as possible to banish evil spirits. After reciting rhymes beginning with the work "knock" at each home visited, the children then receive treats from the host.

By Christmas Eve, the seasonal baking is completed, featuring such confections as gingerbread men and gingerbread houses, *Springerle* (cookies with raised designs), *Lebkuchen* (spiced cookies with candied fruit), *Stollen* (candied fruit loaf or fruit cake), *Pfefferküsse* (pepper nuts), *Aachener Printen* (Aachen almond biscuits), and marzipan (almond confection molded into the shapes of animals or other characters). Families decorate their Christmas trees behind closed doors, and children are not allowed to view the tree until it has been decorated with the traditional gingerbread or marzipan figures, candles, and *Wunderkerzen* (sparklers). A tinkling bell then signals that the children may enter the room and partake of the tree's culinary delights.

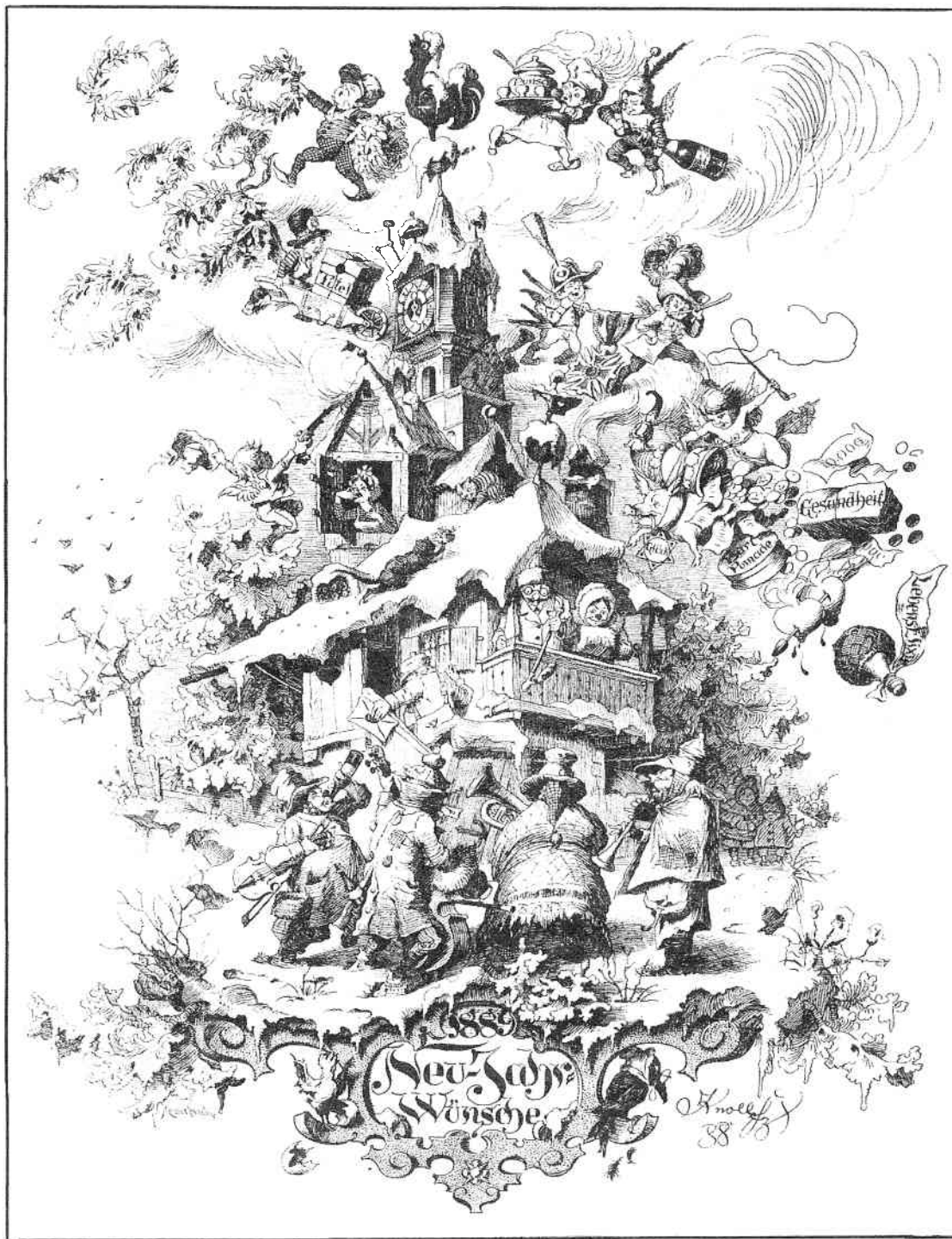
Children also receive gifts on Christmas Eve, the traditional gift-bearer being either the Roman Catholic *Christkindl* (Christ Child) or the Protestant *Weihnachtsmann* (Christmas Man). These spirits sprang from the influence of Martin Luther (1483–1546), the German Roman Catholic priest who initiated the Protestant Reformation. Observing that the Church made much ado about honoring St. Nicholas at Christmastime, Luther strongly advocated a Christ-centered season with far less emphasis on the saint. After the Reformation, Catholics adopted the concept of the *Christkindlein* ("little Christ Child," later shortened to *Christkindl*) as the Christmas gift-bearer, yet it was inconceivable to imagine the Son of God in such a role. Therefore, tradition has held that an angelic messenger brings the gifts instead. Also confusingly termed the *Christkindl*, this spirit is depicted as a little girl with golden wings, clad in a white robe and jeweled crown, and who carries a tiny fir tree, a symbol of eternal life. The *Christkindl* supposedly helps to decorate the Christmas tree, and it is she who rings the bell when all the gifts are spread beneath it. The Protestants, on the other hand, rejecting all saints and Church-sanctioned entities as gift-bearers, created the *Weihnachtsmann* as an altered conception of St. Nicholas. His appearance is remarkably similar to that of the American Santa Claus.

In past centuries, parents in northern German villages sent their children's gifts to one man who, attired as *Knecht Ruprecht*, visited all the village homes on Christmas Night in the name of his master Jesus. After hearing an account of the children's behavior, he either distributed the gifts or presented the parents with a rod and urged them to discipline the naughty ones.

In Bavaria on Christmas Eve, the Berchten Runners (named for Berchta, a variant of Hertha, Norse goddess of the home) don grotesques masks and parade about, rhetorically asking what people have done for them during the year. Makers of mischief, they must be placated with gifts. In the city of Berchtesgaden, the minutes before midnight ring with gunfire as shooters attempt to drive away the last remaining evil spirits before Christmas arrives. Around most of the country, it is cus-



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llen, or fruit loaf
erman magazine



The Yule of 1889 is "blown in" by a troupe of musicians with horns, while the householders, their cats, and the postman are surrounded by a sky full of symbolic figures for a happy New Year. From the German magazine *Fliegende Blätter*, December 30, 1888.

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tomary to visit the graves of loved ones on Christmas Eve and place lighted candles or small Christmas trees with candles by their tombstones. Another Christmas Eve custom is *Herbergsuchen* ("Searching for Shelter"), a custom similar to the Latin American *Las Posadas*, in which groups reenact the Holy Couple's search for shelter in Bethlehem and which terminates with *Mitternachtsmette* (Midnight Mass) (see *Las Posadas*).

Christmas Eve dinner may consist of roast goose with stuffing, turkey, carp, *Spätzle* (dumplings), *Königinpasteten* (meat-filled "kings' pastries"), vegetables, *Bayerisches Kraut* (Bavarian red cabbage), potato salad, spiced cakes, *Stollen*, marzipan, assorted cookies, and wines. Protestant church services are held in the afternoon or evening, Catholics attend Midnight Mass, and *Turmblasen* (brass ensembles) herald the coming of Christmas as they play chorales from church towers. This latter tradition, called "Blowing in the Yule [or Christmas]," is often repeated on New Year's Eve (see *Blowing in the Yule*).

Christmas Day is spent in resting and visiting family members. December 26, "Second Christmas Day" (St. Stephen's Day), is a legal holiday. Because St. Stephen is the patron saint of horses, many cities host mounted processions in honor of this saint.

The 12 days of Christmas, from Christmas Day to Epiphany (January 6), are known as *Die Zwölf Rauchnächte* ("The Twelve Smoking Nights"), a vestige of *Jul* (Yule), so named because it is customary during this period to burn incense and build bonfires, the smoke of which was once believed to dispel evil spirits at Yuletide. Additionally, people wear demon masks and make loud noises.

New Year's Eve, St. Sylvester's Day, honors the early fourth century Pope St. Sylvester I. Typically featured are gunfire, fireworks, other forms of noisemaking, and parties. Citizens of Bavaria turn off their lights just prior to midnight, then turn them on to welcome the new year.

Community parties on Epiphany often feature two pastries, each with a single bean baked inside, which derive from medieval Twelfth Night customs. The man and woman finding the beans become the Bean King and

Queen of the event and are vested with authority to issue ridiculous commands, which all guests must obey. Should the king and queen both be single, superstition holds that they will eventually marry. Other superstitions include the consecrating of salt and chalk. The salt is fed to the livestock, and with the chalk people write the traditional names of the three Wise Men, Melchior, Gaspar, and Balthazar, on their homes, thus providing protection for their property. In Bavarian Processions of Light, people carry torches and lanterns through the streets and light bonfires on mountains. *Sternsinger* (star singers), groups dressed as the Magi, make rounds singing carols, and one person carries a lighted star on a pole. Pastors bless homes with holy water, by burning incense, and by writing "G+M+B," the Magi's initials, on door posts.

"Merry Christmas" in Germany is *Fröhliche Weihnachten*.

See also *Advent; Christmas Tree; Epiphany; Saint Nicholas; Saint Nicholas's Day; Yule*.

Gesù Bambino

("The Infant Jesus"). Best-known composition of the Italian American organist and composer Pietro A. Yon (1886–1943). Originally written in Italian, with an English version provided by Frederick Martens, "Gesù Bambino" centers around the Nativity, recalling the legend of flowers blooming at Christ's birth ("When blossoms flowered 'mid the snows") and applying other metaphorical attributes such as the "Christmas Rose" and "King of Love and Light" to the Child. Following each verse is the familiar refrain to the carol "Adeste Fideles": "O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord." The carol's popularity is attested by the various vocal and instrumental arrangements that have appeared.

Pietro A. Yon served as organist for St. Peter's in Rome (1905–1907), after which he immigrated to the United States. Securing posts as an organist in New York City, first at St. Francis-Xavier's (1907–1919, 1921–1926), then at St. Patrick's Cathedral (a post held for some 17 years until his death), Yon was renowned as an organist, composer, and teacher. In addition to numerous organ com-



, their cats, and
German mag-