



*Martinstag*  
*St. Martins Day*

*A Unit Study for*  
*German Speakers and*  
*Learners*

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St. Martin's Day is a great opportunity to enjoy traditional German culture with your children. Songs, crafts, food, stories - there's so much to do! We have prepared this unit study guide so that you may have plans at your fingertips.

Viel Spass beim Singen, Basteln, und Lesen!

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## Background

### Synopsis of Martinstag

Martinstag (St. Martins Day) is the holy day of St. Martin of Tours, a Catholic saint. Originally Martinstag was celebrated in the Catholic areas of Germany and Austria (and other areas of Western Europe including Flanders, Netherlands, Portugal and Europe), but it has now spread to the more Protestant areas as well. It heralds the start of the Advent season; followed by Nikolaustag, Weihnachten, and Dreikonigstag.

In many areas of Germany, it is celebrated with a lantern parade the evening of November 11. Children carry their lighted lanterns (either homemade or store bought), singing the wonderful traditional songs. They are often led by a Roman soldier on horseback.

### Cultural Background

Martin was born in Hungary in 316 A.D., then lived in what is now Italy and France. As a teenager, he joined the Roman army, becoming a soldier like his father. He was eventually baptized into the Christian church, founded a monastery, and became Bishop of Tours (France). He died on November 8, 397 A.D. The Feast day of St. Martin is Nov. 11, the day he was buried.

**Read the story with your children** (see Resources for book recommendations)

### English synopses

Two of the most famous legends of St. Martin are "Martin and his cloak" and "Martin and the geese".

### Martin and His Cloak

One snowy winter evening, Martin and the other soldiers were returning on horseback to Amiens. At the city gate sat a beggar, so cold in his ragged clothing that he could not even ask for help. Martin did not have any money or food to give him, so he took his



sword and cut in half his heavy red soldier's cloak. That night Martin dreamed of Jesus Christ. In the dream, Christ thanked him for giving Him his cloak. This dream convinced Martin to become a Christian and be baptized.

### **Martin and the Geese**

Martin did not want to become Bishop, so he hid near some geese. The people searching for Martin heard the loudly cackling geese. They found Martin and ordained him Bishop of Tours.

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## Traditional Songs

**Listen to and learn to sing St. Martin's songs** (CD Recommendations in Resources)

1. Laterne Laterne (sing while walking in your parade)

Laterne, Laterne, Sonne, Mond und Sterne.  
Brenne auf, mein Licht, brenne auf, mein Licht,  
aber nur meine liebe Laterne nicht.

Laterne, Laterne, Sonne, Mond und Sterne.  
Sperrt ihn ein den Wind, sperrt ihn ein den Wind,  
er soll warten bis wir zu Hause Sind.

2. Ich geh' mit meine Laterne (sing at the end of your parade as you return home)

Ich geh' mit meiner Laterne  
Und meine Laterne mit mir.  
Dort oben leuchten die Sternen,  
und unten, da leuchten wir.  
Mein Licht ist aus,  
ich geh' nach Haus,  
rabimmel, rabammel, rabum.

Mein Licht ist aus,  
ich geh' nach Haus,  
rabimmel, rabammel, rabum.

3. Sankt Martin (the story of St. Martin and his cloak)

Sankt Martin, Sankt Martin, Sankt Martin



Ritt durch Schnee und Wind,  
sein Ross das trug ihn fort geschwind.  
Sankt Martin ritt mit leichtem Mut:  
Sein Mantel deckt' ihn warm und gut.

Im Schnee da sass ein armer Mann,  
hatt' Kleider nicht, hatt' Lumpen an.  
O helf mir doch in meiner Not,  
sonst ist der bittere Frost mein Tod!

Sankt Martin zog die Zügel an,  
sein Ross stand still beim armen Mann,  
Sankt Martin mit dem Schwerte teilt'  
Den warmen Mantel unverweilt.

Sankt Martin gab den halben still,  
der Bettler rasch ihm danken will.  
Sankt Martin aber ritt in Eil'  
hinweg mit seinem Mantelteil.

## Crafts

### Build a Lantern

- Paperbag Lantern (very easy) – <http://www.martin-von-tours.de/laternen/laternenbasteln/index.html>
- Plastic Milk Jug Lantern (easy): Cut the top off of a plastic milk jug. Decorate with stickers, glue on pieces of tissue paper, or even feathers. Punch holes in the top to connect a wire handle.
- Milk Carton Lantern (easy): Take a ½ gallon milk carton. Cut out the sides, leaving a one inch margin all around. Glue on colored tissue paper. Make a hanger from string at the top so it can hang from a stick (bamboo or long thin sticks from your garden will work well for this).
- Round cardstock lantern (intermediate) – [http://www.martino-von-tours.de/laternen/laternenbasteln/runde\\_papplaterne.html](http://www.martino-von-tours.de/laternen/laternenbasteln/runde_papplaterne.html)

Print out and decorate your lanterns with pictures from <http://www.martin-von-tours.de/laternen/bildvorlagen/index.html>

Lighting your lantern: Many people use real candles, however other options are safer. We recommend battery powered candles, light sticks (available in many colors around Halloween), and flashlights. Some children in Germany use a plastic rod that lights up.



Photo: Bux  
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/34921672@N00/2108404222/>



Photo: Thea Fortune

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## Food

- Bake Weckmänner. These yummy yeast breads in the shape of a man often appear at Martinstag celebrations. Recipe at <http://www.germanfoods.org/consumer/recipes/weckmann.cfm>
- Think fall! Enjoy foods like warm apple cider and hot cocoa.
- Cut out cookies in the shape of a goose.



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## Extensions

You can further your St. Martin's experience by doing the following projects and activities:

- Host a Laternen-Werkstatt to make lanterns with friends. Even if they don't speak German they can benefit from learning about the holiday
- Host a lantern parade (Laternenumzug) in the evening. Have children sing appropriate songs while parading through the neighborhood or park with their lit lanterns. Provide warm drinks and snacks to serve at the end of the parade.
- Produce a play about St. Martin and the legend of the Cloak, or use puppets or a felt board.
- St. Martin's Day provides a wonderful opportunity for discussing how we can help others less fortunate than ourselves. Have a food, coat or blanket drive and discuss how St. Martin chose to be a good person and help those less fortunate. Coats and blankets would tie in well with the legend of the cloak.
- Discuss the weather. How is November weather similar or different from where you live?

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## Insider Tips

Some symbols of St. Martin include lanterns, geese, Weckmänner

Because Martin was a Roman soldier, you'll often see Roman themed toys (i.e. Playmobil has a Sankt Martin figure) at this time of year.

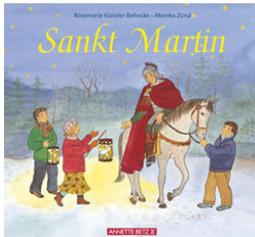
In the plays held in Germany, many sponsored by the town or local kindergartens, the St. Martin figure arrives on a horse wearing a soldiers costume with a red cloak, and they act out the story of St. Martin and his cloak. Sometimes held in the town square around a bonfire and with warming treats like hot apple cider, the children parade with their lit lanterns and sing Martinstag songs (laternenumzug).

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## Resources

### Books and CDs

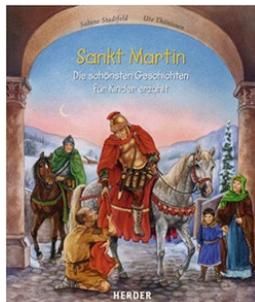
St. Martin's Day books and CDs are available from Alphabet Garten. Many German songbooks (Liederbücher) also have songs for Martinstag, including the songs listed above. Here are a few options:



Sankt Martin

By: Rosemarie Künzler-Behncke

<http://www.alphabet-garten.com/store/index.php?app=ccp0&ns=prodshow&ref=B112641>



Sankt Martin. Die schönsten Geschichten für Kinder erzählt

By: Sabine Stadtfeld

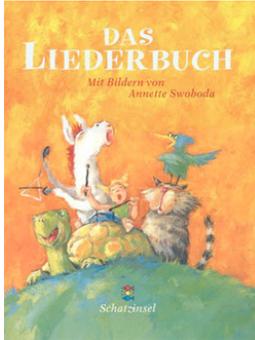
<http://www.alphabet-garten.com/store/index.php?app=ccp0&ns=prodshow&ref=B295911>



Sankt Martin und Laternenfest CD

By: Jürgen Treyz

<http://www.alphabet-garten.com/store/index.php?app=ccp0&ns=prodshow&ref=M887978>



Das Liederbuch (songbook and CD)

By: Catrin Fischer

<http://www.alphabet-garten.com/store/index.php?app=ccp0&ns=prodshow&ref=B850428>

### Websites in German

- Martin von Tours ([www.martin-von-tours.de](http://www.martin-von-tours.de)) – Comprehensive background information including history, Lantern building directions (Laternenbasteln), coloring pages (Bildvorlagen), songs including the music and sound clips, and recipes (Roast goose, baked apples, Weckmanner, etc.)
- Zzebra ([www.zzebra.de](http://www.zzebra.de)) – look for “Laternen-Werkstatt”
- KidsWeb ([www.kidsweb.de](http://www.kidsweb.de))

### Websites in English

- German Foods ([www.GermanFoods.org](http://www.GermanFoods.org)) – explanation of Martinstag, plus recipes.
- My German Foods ([www.MyGermanFoods.org](http://www.MyGermanFoods.org)) – specifically for students and teachers of German.
- Martin of Tours – [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org) – the history of St. Martin, his life, and the folklore that arose after his death.

### Vocabulary (English-German)

Cloak	der Mantel
Goose, Geese	die Gans, die Gänse
Lantern	die Laterne
Light	das Licht
Moon	der Mond



November	der November
poor	arm
Snow	der Schnee
Soldier	der Soldat
Beggar	der Bettler
Star, Stars	der Stern, die Sterne
Sun	die Sonne
Wind	der Wind