

CHRISTMAS COUNTDOWN



By Gretchen Picklesimer Kinney

(Based on a true story)

This story took place in Germany.

Mathis! Emilian!" Mama called. "It's time to light the candles on the wreath."

Mathis put down his book and ran to the living room. His little brother, Emilian, followed him.

There were lots of things Mathis liked about Christmas. He liked to make lebkuchen cookies. He

liked to decorate the tree. But his favorite part was lighting candles to get ready for Christmas.

They called this the Advent wreath. The wreath had four red candles that sat on green branches. In Germany, people lit the candles each Sunday in the month before Christmas Eve. The first week, they lit one candle. The next week, they lit two. The third,

Mathis's favorite tradition was lighting the candles for Christmas.



ILLUSTRATIONS BY VIOLET LEMAY

they lit three. And the Sunday before Christmas Eve, they lit all four.

Mathis watched Papa help Emilian light two candles. The bright flames looked cheerful.

"Mama, what does *advent* mean?" Mathis asked.

"Advent is the time before Christmas," Mama said.

"The candles help us count down the days. And so do our Advent calendars!"

Mama reached for the beautiful wooden house on top of the bookshelf. She put it on the table. Mathis got excited just seeing it.

They had two Advent calendars this year. They weren't regular kinds of calendars. They were special kinds, just for Christmas! The first one was the little wooden house with 24 doors—one for each day before Christmas.

"It's your turn to open a door!" Mama said.

Mathis grinned and opened the door for today. There were two small candies inside! He gave one to Emilian.

"You know," Papa said, "*advent* also means the coming of someone or something important. Do you remember whose coming we celebrate on Christmas?"

"Jesus!" Mathis and Emilian said together.

Mama nodded. "People waited thousands of years for Jesus Christ to come. We celebrate His birth at Christmas. And someday, He will come to earth again."

Mathis imagined what it would be like when Jesus came again. It made him feel warm inside.

"Open the other calendar, Mathis!" Emilian said.

"OK!" Mathis reached for the second calendar.

Oma (Grandma) made it just for them. It was a hanger with 24 long ribbons hanging from it. Each ribbon had a folded piece of paper with a scripture about Jesus Christ tied to it. Every day before Christmas they read a new scripture about Jesus.

Mathis pulled the next paper off the ribbon. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people," he read. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."*

Mathis felt peaceful as he and his family watched the candles glow. In two weeks, they would light all four candles, and the wait for Christmas would be over! But Mathis knew that Christmas wasn't the only thing they were waiting for. They were waiting for Jesus Christ to come. ●

* Luke 2:10-11