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HELVETIA



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HIGHLIGHTS:

- Focus on the festive season
- More Helvetia survey results
- Swiss Society website
- Val Müstair and the convent of St John's

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"Swiss-mas" in New Zealand

Swiss-mas in New Zealand: While it is a humorous play on the word, it symbolises for many of us a yearly quandary of how to marry up all the different Swiss and New Zealand traditions around Christmas time.

Of course, these traditions are mere "accompaniments" of Christmas and do not take away from the central reason: the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago.

Nonetheless, they play a central role in bringing together family and friends around Christmas, and shining the light on our children and their joy at this time of year.

The differences in Christmas traditions are probably most pronounced between the European and Anglo-Saxon worlds and centre around the Christ Child and Santa Claus.

In Switzerland, Santa Claus makes an earlier appearance on 6 December, bringing in his sack many goodies, and checking on children to see how well they have done and what they could do better.

However, it is the Christ Child who brings presents on Christmas Eve. Many of us remember waiting behind closed doors on Christmas Eve with baited breaths, until a bell tinkled. This was the sign that Christ Child had come: we ran into the living room, hoping to catch a glimpse of Christ Child as it slipped through the window – only to find a beautifully decorated and a Christmas tree lit with real candles, with a few presents underneath it. Dark winter nights meant that lights were off and the candles and decorations seemed all that more magical. Christmas generally was a small, family-based affair. (cont. p2)



Pohutukawa - New Zealand Christmas tree



Celebrating advent



Swiss Bakery Christmas bread



Winter landscape, Val Müstair, Switzerland
www.graubuenden.com