



Little Door to the Ninth of December

In Germany there's a seasonal biscuit called 'Spekulatius' – seasonal because it is only available from autumn onwards until the end of Winter.

This biscuit originates from the Lower Countries like Belgium and the Netherlands where you can buy and eat it all year round, though. Even in the former Dutch colony Indonesia these are still popular. In German, it is called 'Gewürz Spekulatius' (Spekulatius with seasoning), since the recipe includes spices such as clove, cardamom, cinnamon and nutmeg.

Consequently, it was an expensive luxury due to the exotic spices and most people couldn't afford it until the end of the Second World War. It is widespread in Germany and I personally can tell you that they quite delicious! But they mostly come from Westphalia and the Rhineland. Lastly, if you put them in the correct order the images on the Spekulatius tell the story of **St. Nicholas** who lived between ca. 301-400 (or rather is said to have lived around this time as not much is known about him due to the lack of historical documents attesting it). He was probably born in the ancient Lycian seaport city of Patara.

When he was young, he traveled to Palestine and Egypt. After his return, he became the bishop of Myra. During the persecution of the Christians through Roman emperor **Diocletian** (245 CE to 316 CE) he was likely imprisoned and tortured. Under the rule of **Constantine the Great** (after 280 CE to 337 CE) he was released. His reputation for generosity and kindness gave rise to legends of miracles he performed: *"He was reputed to have given marriage dowries of gold to three girls whom poverty would otherwise have forced into lives of prostitution and to have restored to life three children who had been chopped up by a butcher and put in a tub of brine."* (Encyclopedia Britannica)

In case you want to make these treats yourself, here's a recipe:

"Baking Spekulatius is not especially difficult: butter, sugar and spices are stirred together to make a creamy mix. Almond extract, milk and flour mixed with baking powder are added. After three hours in the refrigerator, various motifs are cut out of the flat, rolled-out dough. Because the dough hardly rises during baking, it is well suited for making cookies using pastry cutters or moulds with special motifs. The motifs are clearly recognizable after baking."
(Christmas classic: Spekulatius from deutschland.de)