

# The Story of Christmas and Santa

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Ask any child about what happens at Christmas and they will tell you about "Santa", this "Santa" is very symbolic of Christmas.

Santa Claus alias Father Christmas and Saint Nicholas appears at "Yuletide" along with Christmas Trees and presents.

## Who was Santa

School Children are told Santa "lives" at the North Pole in Greenland. ½ Million tourists travel to Finland believing he originates from Lapland in Finland. They come in search of the Finnish Santa who they believe set up home in the little town of Rovaniemi.

The city of Bari in southern Italy also claims to be the spiritual home of Santa Claus.

Nicholas is lived in southern Turkey, then Asia Minor, during the first half of the fourth century, but nothing was recorded about his life until more than two hundred and fifty years after his death. Less than a hundred years after his death, he was worshipped as a saint for his legendary deeds, such as :

A neighbour lost all his money becoming destitute with his three daughters and, to prevent them having to earn their living by prostitution, he threw them three bags of gold through the window.

Nicholas became a model of, generosity and protection to the oppressed People, children without any money, he was Particularly good at looking after children. St. Nicholas, legend has it, resurrected three boys cut up by an innkeeper and pickled in brine, to be sold off to unsuspecting customers.

## Santa meets Christianity

The city of Bari in southern Italy claims to be the spiritual home of Santa Claus, the City boasts, the final resting place of St. Nicholas, the man the Church believes is both the essence and the inspiration for our modern-day Santa. While the cathedral boasts of having the holy relics of this miracle-worker, St. Nicholas never put a foot in Italy while alive. His remains were actually seized seven hundred years after he'd been buried. The city of Bari, and the Catholic Church, keen to increase their power and wealth, conspired to steal the bones to make the city a magnet for pilgrims. At the end of the eleventh century, forty seven armed men from Bari set sail for Asia Minor. They overpowered four monks and seized the valued relics of St. Nicholas.

The Church agreed to pay the thieves, and then their heirs, a percentage of the offerings, but later the Church reneged on this deal, keeping all the money for itself. Ever since, the Catholic Church has helped to promote an annual festival to celebrate this profitable act of piracy.

In the northern European countries, modern Scandinavia, St. Nicholas was not at first given the same warm reception. The people here had their own pagan gods to protect them during the long, cold winter nights. One of these gods who was a sky god and at mid-winter, the sky god came down to earth, kissed the horizon and started off the process for the birth of Spring, the rebirth of the new year and the animals would be born, the fruit would start to grow, the little crops from beginning agriculture would start to come up several months later. So this was a really crucial moment, a pivotal moment in the turning of the year, when the sky god coming down to the earth.

Later came the northern god Odin, who had a character for every month of the year. His kindly December character, Yulekatid, left money for the poor. People used to say that when the winter clouds scudded across the sky, it was Odin flying across the sky on his white horse, and he used to come to earth dressed in a long, hooded cloak, with a bag of coins, bread, to give to people who were poor, in his winter guise. Around the same time, we had the Saxons who gave everyone and everything, personifications. So the weather, the elements, they all had personifications: Father Ice, King Frost, King Winter. They were all welcomed into the halls of the Saxon thanes because they believed that by welcoming them, they would be less harsh. The Saxons' tradition of mid-winter gods and festivals to honour them became widely accepted in Britain, but a clash between this pagan religion and emerging Christianity produced new mid-winter figure: Father Christmas, character part pagan, part Christian.

Father Christmas came from the old northern traditions of Odin and the personification of winter, which in the Middle Ages had come into a melting-pot together with St. Nicholas, and the parishes in the Middle Ages used to send out a man, either an actor or someone from outside the parish who wasn't known in the parish, and he would be dressed in a long cloak and he would go around the houses to each family in the parish saying 'is all well?' and leaving something for the children.

The Church, believed it needed to replace the misguided ways of the indigenous peoples and they went about it in a very organised manner. Pope Julius set the official date of Jesus's birth at the height of the pagan mid-winter festivals, and that just shows us how important it was to the Christian missionaries, to try to replace the Odin figure. They also came up with Bishop Nicholas, who was put forward as the figure who would represent the Christian Christmas and would replace this figure of Odin. And in fact they asked people, to dress up as St. Nicholas.

In the Russian Orthodox Church, St. Nicholas was seen as a demi-god, a symbol of eternal goodness and righteousness, a figure almost as popular as Christ. Where some East European saints were seen as stern, even forbidding, St. Nicholas was recalled as a kind and generous saint, a protector of young people.

He was a benefactor of children and on his commemoration, on the sixth of December, parents and other friends liked to give presents to children and because it was rather close to December the twenty fifth, where they also, gave presents, and that's a pre-Christian custom at that time of the year, because it was near to Christmas, therefore the two things became fused and Nicholas became a kind of mix-up with the Christmas festival of presents for children.

Despite the cult of St. Nicholas, which led to over four hundred churches in Britain being dedicated to him, pagan customs still had their undeniable attractions. The vast majority of people still lived in the countryside and worked in farming, and so in country, houses in villages and, little hamlets around the country, then the festivities would have been very much as they'd been in the very old times, the sorts of things that we associate with Christmas feasting, drinking, parties, present-giving, holly, ivy, mistletoe, Christmas sorts of activities that, that have sustained through the centuries.

### **Santa is Banned in Britain**

But in 1642, the Puritans seized power and outlawed many act's that had no Christian or divine basis. The Puritans realised that the sort of things that we associate with our popular Christmas today, which were still current then had nothing to do with Christianity and they, tried to dissuade people from partying, from drinking, from dressing up and giving gifts, they introduced an Act of Parliament which officially abolished the popular Christmas customs and it was, decreed that stores should stay open on Christmas day and that anyone found partying would be arrested. From Canterbury to London, there were bloody riots when shops were forced to stay open on Christmas day.

In Holland, St. Nicholas was untouched by political uncertainties or by pagan mid-winter characters. Even today, they celebrate the arrival of their saint in Holland and the anniversary of his death during a month of religious festivities before Christmas. Yet it was the Dutch who unwittingly helped to turn St. Nicholas, who they called Sinterklaas, into an icon of commercialism, when they set out for the New World in 1626. After St. Nicholas was transformed from Sinterklaas to Santa Claus.

### **Americanisation of Santa**

The "Santa" Character was further developed in 1809 when an amusing but inaccurate history of Dutch traditions was written. Washington Irving, influenced by north European Christmas customs, pictured St. Nicholas riding in a wagon merrily over rooftops, dropping presents down chimneys, the first time this had been sighted.

In 1821, Clement Moore, a theology professor and an expert in European folklore, developed this character in a poem he wrote for his children, which went like this.

"CLEMENT MOORE":

'Twas the night before Christmas

When all through the house

Not a creature was stirring

Not even a mouse.

The stockings were hung by the chimney with care  
In hope that St. Nicholas soon would be there.  
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came With a bound  
He was dressed all in fur from his head to his foot  
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot.  
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back  
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack  
His eyes how they twinkled His dimples, how merry  
His cheeks were like roses  
His nose like a cherry!  
He had a broad face and a little round belly  
That shook when he laughed like a bowl of jelly !  
He was chubby and plump, oh a jolly old elf  
And I laughed when I saw him in spite of myself!

Moore saw St. Nick as an Elf dressed in fur riding across rooftops on a sleigh with eight tiny reindeer, rather than a wagon, a vision not witnessed in Britain by writers struggling to popularise Christmas. Charles Dickens was one of the writers trying to revive ancient Christmas traditions which had survived in the country but not in the growing cities. His creation of Scrooge in 1844 captivated the new middle class. Dickens used Scrooge to pillory misers who despised traditional Christmas festivities.

What Dickens did was make Christmas middle-class and personal and, it wasn't merely, a repetition Christmas for Dickens was an occasion for summing up. An occasion for remembering. An occasion for calling to mind everything, the good times, the bad times. He made Christmas an occasion for memory. Scrooge goes wrong because he fails to remember.

Scrooge is encouraged to recall the benefits of middle-class family life by the Ghost of Christmas Present - that was Father Christmas for Dickens. The first illustrated version of A Christmas Carol shows a Father Christmas from the Middle Ages, partly pagan and partly Christian. About this time, the Americans were seeing an elf called St. Nick, partly descended from tiny Nordic house-gods. Thomas Nast, one of America's most talented cartoonists, turned the elf into a Santa. Nast had made his name as a political cartoonist with a gift for populist imagery. He used these characters to make political statements.

Strongly supporting President Abraham Lincoln during the American Civil War, he looked for an image which embodied goodness and righteousness. His first Santa Claus, for instance, was in 1863 and it was a Santa Claus in cap, and it was a little gnome-like figure in a starred jacket and striped trousers handing out gifts to the soldiers. He was created to give softer and "romantic" view of war and President Lincoln at the time was supposedly quoted as saying that Nast was his best recruiting agent, because Nast in a way glorified the Northern cause. Twenty years later, Nast's Santa was again Intervening politically. Now elderly, Santa had put on weight, his elf-life appearance had long gone.

Nast created the image of Santa Claus as we now know it and if you follow the Nast Santa Claus drawings from 1863 until the Christmas Drawings for the Human Race were published in 1889, you will see that Nast evolved his figure from the gnome-like figure that other artists had used before into a self-portrait of himself. He always portrayed himself as fat and jolly and his was his own self-portrait.

Nast's popular portraits of himself as the Santa in *Twas The Night Before Christmas* sold well in Europe and his image was taken up by other artists. By the 1870s, Christmas cards started to appear with versions of Nast's image. At this time European Christmas traditions had barely changed. With gift-giving, which dates back to early times. With a Christmas tree, which first appeared in Britain about 1790. And with a slim Santa, more in keeping with the early Father

Christmas, who was still in Europe the most popular visitor at Christmas.

### **Globalisation of the American Santa**

The Globalisation of red and white American Santa was performed by Coca-Cola, a company struggling to sell cold drinks in the cold season, the company wanted to figure out a way to associate the product with the holiday season, and so they turned to, an illustrator named Haddon Sunblum. Sunblum concluded the spirit of the holiday was really Santa Claus, and Santa Claus had this enormous task facing him every Christmas Eve and that was to go around the world, in an evening, distributing, toys to children everywhere and obviously he would, you know, get tired and he would get thirsty and he would need some refreshment, so what better idea than to have Santa pausing in his rounds in various scenes enjoying a Coca Cola?

Sunblum's Santa Claus really became American Santa Claus and in real terms the global Santa Claus, because his characterisation of Santa Claus was the one that people saw over thirty years. He came into their homes, he became a part of their lives and so, in a very real sense, here is imagery created for a commercial product that has now become a part of popular culture. In Britain, the post-war years saw Santa's final assault on the throne occupied by Father Christmas. The department stores started getting visits from Santa Claus who was very much the American image of Santa Claus with the curly white whiskers, dressed in red and white and the fat jolly appearance, and was thought to be less frightening than Father Christmas.

Santa's story shows commercialisation has never been far from Santa's grotto. The relics of St. Nicholas have brought wealth to everyone who has possessed them. And St. Nicholas's papal protector is perfectly happy about the revered saint being reincarnated as Santa Claus.

# Christianity The facts

## THE ORIGINS OF CHRISTIANITY

Historical facts reveal that Jesus did not use the word Christianity. He and his followers used to worship in the temple which other Israelites used. The message of Jesus was to call people back to the religion of Abraham and Moses from which they had gone astray. After the disappearance of Jesus, Paul declared that belief in Jesus sufficed for salvation. The Jewish scholars of that time called the followers of prophet Jesus the misguided sect of Nazarene or Galilaens. In 43 C.E., when Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch to preach, they were ridiculed and were called Christians by the masses. The ones who were called Christians felt that if they are being given a name in reference to Jesus, there is nothing wrong in accepting it. A present day analogy may be the case of Muslims being called Mohammedans in the West and Muslims giving in to the name. (note: Muslims follow the revelation of the Quran and the Sunnah of the prophet Muhammad(saaw). Firstly it is completely wrong to label Muslims, secondly Muslims reject the term Mohammedans since it is offensive and incorrect).

## PAUL ALTERED THE MESSAGE

At the beginning, Paul was a staunch opponent of prophet Jesus and remained so for many years after his ascension. When he did join the followers of Jesus later on, he initiated many alterations in the teachings of Jesus in hopes of winning over the Gentiles (non-Jewish people). He championed the following concepts into Christianity:

1. the concept of Jesus as son of God;
2. Jesus died on the cross to wash eternal sins of Adam's children through his blood; and
3. the Law of Torah was renounced. He eliminated all regulations concerning food and abrogated the injunctions of circumcision.

The real followers of Jesus opposed these blatant misrepresentations of the message of Jesus. Their struggle to reject the notion of Divinity of Jesus continued for about two hundred years. Since these alterations were very appealing to the Gentiles, the true believers were unable to stop the misguidance.

In 325 C.E., a council of Christian leaders met at Nicaea and officiated Paul's beliefs as their religion. Roman Empire declared Paul's religion as the religion of the State and all those books which denied these beliefs were banned. In 367 C.E., the State announced a list of books acceptable to it and fifteen years later, a council held under the presidency of Pope Damasius gave its approval to these books. At the end of the fifth century, Pope Galasius published a list of unauthorized books (Apocryphal) to further conform with Paul's religion of Christianity.