

The Origin of Santa Claus



A Postcard depicting St. Nicholas from Austria Centre Collection

We all know that only God is eternal.

So, how did this wonderful Christmas character who is so giving begin? We did not make him up. Saint Nicholas, whose name was changed over the years to Santa Claus, was a real person, he was a bishop in the church in the fourth century.

Saint Nicholas was born in Patara (Asia Minor) and later moved to Myra (Demre which is in modern day Turkey), where he was elected Bishop. He died on December 6th. sometime between A D 326 and 341. Many stories have been told of his generosity.

In Saint Nicholas' time, a young woman had to have a dowry (money or material things which she brought to her husband) before she could be married. It was a custom we still have in some of our cultures. Saint Nicholas wanted to help a poor nobleman with three daughters, but he wanted to do it anonymously (without anyone knowing who did it). He did not want to be praised for his generosity. **He gave for the joy of giving.** So, three bags of gold were thrown through the nobleman's window. However, the nobleman found out who had given the gold for his daughters' dowries. After that, most anonymous gifts of charity were attributed to Saint Nicholas.

This good man also spent several years in prison because of his strong belief in Jesus. Many prisoners were converted to the Christian faith by his witness.

The stories of Saint Nicholas came to America through the Dutch settlers in the state of New York. Since then he has changed through the years.

Originally, he was dressed in his traditional Bishop's robes. It was not until the 20th century that he began to be dressed in the red and white outfit in which he appears to us now in the persons of his many "helpers." In fact, in 1874, the American cartoonist Thomas Nast drew him in a brown suit with brown fur trim.

Dr. Clement C. Moore, a professor of Greek and Biblical Studies at The General Theological Seminary of New York, wrote "A Visit from St. Nicholas" (more commonly known as "Twas the Night Before Christmas") in 1822. Only eight reindeer pulled Santa's sleigh until the song "Rudolph, the Red-Nosed Reindeer" was written and made popular.

Jesus, the Christ (the Messiah) is the most important person in the Advent/Christmas season. However, **since Saint Nicholas conveys a spirit of generosity and love, we remember him and we too give gifts.** Because Saint Nicholas gave us such a good example of helping the poor and the needy, Santa Claus may well be a healthy part of our celebrations. As Revd. Dr. Allan Hauck wrote in his book Calendar of Christianity, **"If Santa Claus has become too commercial, too secularized, perhaps it is because we have forgotten his historical origin in the beloved Bishop of Myra, St. Nicholas, who obeyed Jesus Christ's command that we help all those who are in need."**



Santa Clause as depicted today

May each day in your life be a Christmas Day... for Christmas is the giving of Love everyday...

Cecil K. Dewars

Memorial Church Anglican – Whitefield