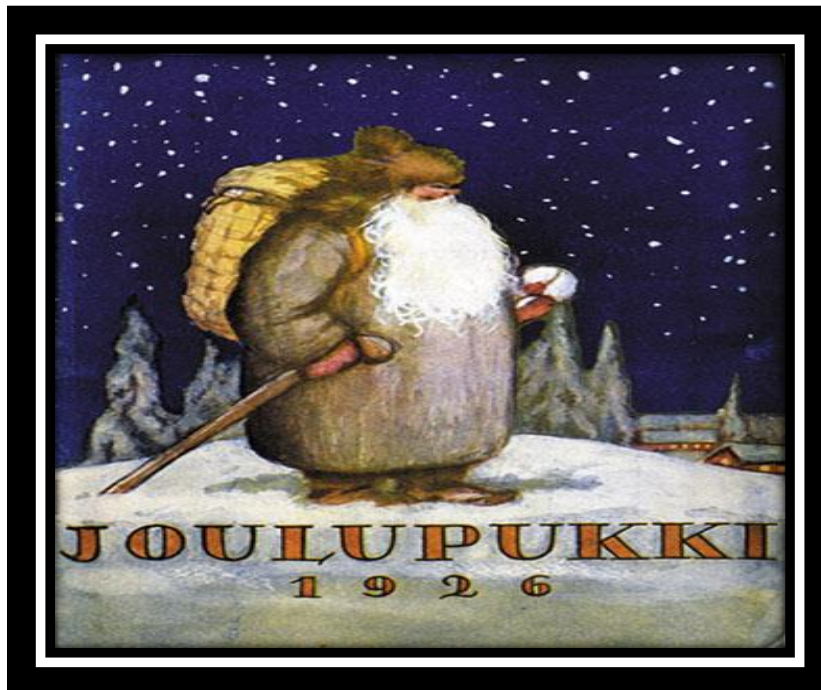


December 2011

Joulupukki and the Tonttu

Saint Nicolas, a bishop born some hundreds of years ago from Asia Minor, is the patron Saint of children and seafarers. In previous times and until today, his birthday on December 6th is celebrated by giving small presents to children. When Martin Luther had moved the day of the "Holy Christ" or the "Christ Child" during the reformation times to December 24th, this tradition began spreading all over Europe and the world. In the following centuries, the



"Christmas Man", "Nicola" or „Nicolò" was developed. One could then see this character in manifold clothes or different forms and looks in Europe, depending on the regions. In England he was called "Father Christmas", "Pere Noel or Papa Noel" in France and "Sinterklaas" in Belgium or the Netherlands. In Russia they call him "Grandfather Frost".

But in Finland it is Joulupukki, derived from the word Julbock. The Julbock is a billy-goat made out of straw, originating from the Nordic Midwinter mythology. Supposedly, it is keeping away bad spirits or ghosts at Christmas. Based on a nice invented novel, Santa Claus lives somewhere at the North Pole, travelling at the sky around the world with a reindeer sleigh and bringing presents to mankind. But since the North Pole is far away and too cold, the Finns though may very well claim that this good man lives in Finnish Lapland, in the Korvatunturi Mountain. The original red Bishop costume has probably become famous again through an advertising campaign by a world renowned soda factory. But, now without a Bishops hat or Bishops crozier. He was then drawn with somewhat more of a round face, a white beard and red cheeks. Little by little in America he was not called Saint Nicolas or St. Nick anymore, but now Santa Claus, or sometimes just Santa.

In general all stores close at noon in Finland on Christmas Eve and everybody goes home to their family or their friends; there is no public transportation and while the festive dinner is being prepared, one eats rice porridge for lunch or also, cake and coffee in the afternoon. Sometimes, a white almond is hidden in the porridge and whoever finds this in their bowl will be lucky all next year. Following a tradition of hundreds of years, via the media the yearly "Christmas Peace" is being announced for 12 days from the city of Turku, the former Finnish capital. Whoever disturbed this peace in the earlier times by aggressive or criminal actions was severely punished.

In December it is dark already very early in Finland and the children cannot wait to receive their presents. But while the dinner is slowly baking in the oven, many people visit the cemeteries in order to commemorate their deceased relatives or fallen soldiers. When the people go or drive home again, you can see an impressive, huge sea of lights of many candles shimmering in the snow on the graves. Then, in Finland at first one visits the



traditional Sauna and gets dressed up for Christmas Eve. Meanwhile, somebody of the family has hidden the presents outside or somewhere else. The children learn that the Tonttu, the little Christmas Elves and helpers of Joulupukki and his wife, had found out before already where the good children live and what their wishes are. Some child may look out the window from the warm house inside into the snow outside, hoping to maybe see one of the Tonttu just one time. Some Finns also

decorate their Joulukuusi (Christmas tree) with many different flags in order to promote friendship between the nations.

And then he comes. Joulupukki, with his always invisible and busy Tonttu. He will ask if any good children live in this house, and everybody is happy with their presents. Sometimes they may dance a little bit for Joulupukki, and then much food and drinks will be served of the different best specialties. Also "Glögi" a type of Finnish punch. And, while the children are playing now the parents and grandparents are relaxing a bit. You wish each other "Hyvää Joulua" or "Rauhallista Joulua" (Merry Christmas). The following two holidays are then used to have a relaxing time with relatives or friends, enjoying Delicatessen while many candles are glowing; and mostly in this time of the season snow is covering the grounds outside...