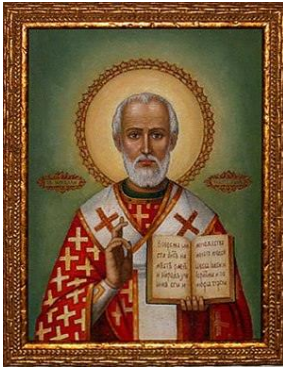


St. Nicholas, Santa Claus, Father Christmas & **Saint Basil**



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The Man Behind the Story of Father Christmas/Santa Claus

St. Nicholas was a Bishop who lived in the fourth century AD in a place called Myra in Asia Minor (now called Turkey). He was a very rich man because his parents died when he was young and left him a lot of money. He was also a very kind man and had a reputation for helping the poor and giving secret gifts to people who needed it. There are several legends about St. Nicholas, although we don't know if any of them are true!

The most famous story about St. Nicholas tells how the custom of hanging up stockings to get presents in first started! It goes like this:

There was a poor man who had three daughters. He was so poor, he did not have enough money for a dowry, so his daughters couldn't get married. (A dowry is a sum of money paid to the bridegroom by the brides parents on the wedding day. This still happens in some countries, even today.) One night, Nicholas secretly dropped a bag of gold down the chimney and into the house (This meant that the oldest daughter was then able to be married.). The bag fell into a stocking that had been hung by the fire to dry! This was repeated later with the second daughter. Finally, determined to discover the person who had given him the money, the father secretly hid by the fire every evening until he caught Nicholas dropping in a bag of gold. Nicholas begged the man to not tell anyone what he had done, because he did not want to bring attention to himself. But soon the news got out and when anyone received a secret gift, it was thought that maybe it was from Nicholas.

Because of his kindness Nicholas was made a Saint. St. Nicholas is not only the saint of children but also of sailors! One story tells of him helping some sailors that were caught in a dreadful storm off the coast of Turkey. The storm was raging around them and all the men were terrified that their ship would sink beneath the giant waves. They prayed to St. Nicholas to help them. Suddenly, he was standing on the deck before them. He ordered the sea to be calm, the storm died away, and they were able to sail their ship safely to port.

St. Nicholas was exiled from Myra and later put in prison during the persecution by the Emperor Diocletian. No one is really knows when he died, but it was on 6th December in either 345 or 352 AD. In 1087, his bones were stolen from Turkey by some [Italian](#) merchant sailors. The bones are now kept in the Church named after him in the Italian port of Bari. On St. Nicholas feast day (6th December), the sailors of Bari still carry his statue from the Cathedral out to sea, so that he can bless the waters and so give them safe voyages throughout the year.

How St. Nicholas Became Santa Claus

In the 16th Century in Europe, the stories and traditions about St. Nicholas had become very unpopular.

But someone had to deliver presents to children at Christmas, so in the [UK](#), he became 'Father Christmas', a character from old children's stories; in [France](#), he was then known as 'Père Noël'; in [Germany](#), the 'Christ Kind'. In the early [USA](#) his name was 'Kris Kringle'. Later, Dutch settlers in the USA took the old stories of St. Nicholas with them and Kris Kringle became 'Sinterklaas' or as we now say 'Santa Claus'!

Santa Claus and Coca-Cola

There's a Christmas Urban Legend that says that Santa's red suit was designed by Coca-Cola and that they might even 'own' Santa!

This is definitely NOT TRUE!

Long before coke had been invented, St Nicholas had worn his Bishop's red robes. During Victorian times, he wore a range of colours (red, green, blue and brown fur) but red was always his favourite!

In January 1863, the magazine Harper's Weekly published the first illustration of St Nicholas/St Nick by Thomas Nast. In this he was wearing a 'Stars and Stripes' outfit! Over the next 20 years Thomas Nast continued to draw Santa every Christmas and his works were very popular indeed (he must have been very good friends with Santa to get such good access!).



This is when Santa really started to develop his big tummy and the style of red and white outfit he wears today. Nast designed Santa's look on some historical information about Santa and the poem 'A Visit from St. Nicholas'.

St. Nicholas in Harper's Weekly: January 1881

On January 1st 1881, Harper's Weekly published Nast's most famous image of Santa, complete with a big red belly, an arm full of toys and smoking a pipe!

This image of Santa became very popular, with more artists drawing Santa in his red and white costume from 1900 to 1930.

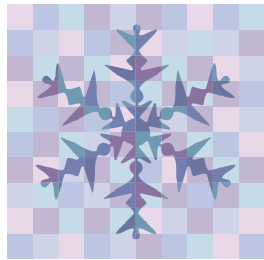
By 1931, when Coke first used Santa in their advertising, his image was well established. The first 'Coke Santa' was drawn by artist Haddon Sundblom. He took the idea of Nast's Santa but made him even more larger than life and jolly, replaced the pipe with a bottle of Coke and created the famous Coke holding Santa!

Coca-Cola also agree that the red suit was made popular by Thomas Nast not them!

Saint Basil & Santa Claus



In Western European countries and later in America and throughout the world, the modern concept of Santa Claus is based on the Orthodox Christian Saint Nicholas whereas in Greece, he was identified with Saint Basil. Saint Basil was one of the three Great Hierarchs. He was a great theologian and was well-educated and in fact was a champion of education. He was born in Caesarea of Asia Minor in 330 B.C. and later on became a Bishop. In Greek carols, children chant “Saint Basil is coming from Caesarea and accepts us all” and they continue chanting “he bears paper and pen” because Saint Basil championed education near and far and left many writings. His charity work was immense and so were his donations; to the devout, his gifts symbolize divine blessing, good luck and the ever-important joy of knowledge. His representation is far more different than the image of the modern Santa Claus as established in Greece by foreign influence. Saint Basil, based on evidence, was thin, dark haired and a black beard and was always smiling. According to tradition, after Christmas he wandered on foot carrying only a stick in his hands and he miraculously revived nature. He was always kind and welcoming, willing to help and people expected his blessing, luck and knowledge as a gift. The tradition of the New Year’s pie, known in Greece as Saint Basil’s pie, has its origins in a miracle that he performed.



Merry Christmas