

The Origins of Santa Claus

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wS1Uck8P-_A

Every year he travels the globe leaving presents for nice girls and boys but Santa Claus wasn't always the jolly old man we now know him as.

The story of Santa starts with this man, Saint Nicholas.

Nicholas was an early Christian Bishop born in - 70 AD in the town of Myra in what is now Southern Turkey.

After his death, Nicholas has ascribed to him a number of magical powers, including flight and bilocation, which means he can be in two places at once.

He's become known as the patron saint of children because of his most famous miracle.

It is said that he resurrected three murdered schoolboys at the end of the 12th century.

French nuns began stuffing the boots of children in their care with presents in the name of Saint Nick so from that point on, for the next few hundred years, Saint Nicholas became the first of the magical gift bringers at Christmas.

And this notion of Saint Nicholas coming during the Christmas season secretly to bring gifts to children spread throughout most of Europe.

Nicholas falls out of favor in the 1500s with the Protestant Reformation.

Reformers like Martin Luther believed instead of praying to Saints, devotees should pray directly to God.

In some areas Saint Nicholas disappears altogether.

In others, he's replaced by the Christ child, portrayed by a young adolescent as kind of an angelic figure and accompanied by a scary helper.

Only in the Netherlands did people refuse to leave st. Nicholas behind.

And when the Dutch settled North America, they bring Saint Nicholas or Sinterklaas with them.

But he's not adopted by non-Dutch settlers until the 1800s.

In the early 1800s, a number of New York theologians, artists, writers and poets took the memory of Saint Nicholas, whom the Dutch had called Sinterklaas and they changed him into the man who we know today as Santa Claus.

In 1809, Washington Irving helps revive St. Nicholas in the book A History of New York.

He describes Nicholas as flying a horse powered wagon over Dutch homes.

Then in 1821 St. Nicholas appears in the publication, *The Children's Friend*, dressed for the first time in fur rather than the robes of a saint and transported by a reindeer powered sleigh.

'Twas the night before Christmas when all through the house not a creature was stirring not even a mouse.

Two years later, Santa Claus explodes in popularity thanks to this poem.

It infects the United States over a couple decades and it travels to Europe where it influences the kind of gift bringer, the kind of magical gift bringer that Europeans had been using.

I knew in a moment it must be Saint Nick.

Still there's no agreement on what Santa should look like.

In some drawings he appears as a jolly old elf.

In others, he could be the size of a thumb or a full-grown man.

But then Thomas Nast releases this drawing cementing Santa's image as a kindly, bearded old man.

By the 1900s, two versions of Santa exist, one in North America and one in Europe.

In North America Santa Claus looks like this.

In Europe he looks only slightly different.

Santa Claus has remained pretty impervious to cultural change though as I say now he is he's under attack.

There have been anti-Christmas protests in St. Nicholas's homeland of Turkey and China even banned Christmas in 2018.

Despite all this, the image of Santa as a kindly but hefty old man dressed in a red suit with white fur trim and driving a sleigh pulled by reindeer has persisted.

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Twas the night before Christmas

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WlJ0vMeiPgE>

Read by Santa Claus

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 hopes that St Nicholas soon would be there.

The children were nestled all snug in their beds, while visions of sugar-plums danced in their heads.
And mamma in her kerchief, and I in my cap, had just settled our brains for a long winter nap.
When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter, I sprang from the bed to see what was the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash, tore open the shutters and threw up the sash.
The moon on the breast of the new-fallen snow gave the lustre of mid-day to objects below.
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear, but a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny reindeer.
With a little old driver, so lively and quick, I knew in a moment it must be St Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they came, And he whistled, and shouted, and called them
by name!
"Now Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! On, Cupid! on, on Donner and Blitzen!
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! Dash away! Dash away all!"
As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly, when they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky.
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew, with the sleigh full of Toys, and St Nicholas too.
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof the prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around, 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.
(ambulante)
His eyes-how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow, and the beard of his chin was as white as the snow.
The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth, and the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath.
He had a broad face and a little round belly, that shook when he laughed, like a bowlful of jelly!
He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf, and I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself!
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head, soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work, and filled all the stockings, then turned with a jerk.

And laying his finger aside of his nose, and giving a nod, up the chimney he rose!

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle, and away they all flew like the down of a thistle.

But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight, "merry Christmas to all, and to all a good-night!"

'Twas the Night Before Christmas 2020

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YQTcHjb5hQ>