



Who Is Santa Claus? A History of St. Nicholas, the Christmas Tree, and the Three Wise Men

William Walsh

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Who is Santa Claus?

Take a delightful journey back to the days of Bishop Nicholas of Myra. And, hear the story of the many miracles he performed during his life and after. Also, *learn how the simple Bishop was transformed into Santa Claus and Father Christmas over time.*

Did you know?

St. Nicholas once discovered a restaurant owner who was serving plump young children for supper during a time of great starvation. He brought the children back to life from the soup cauldron, and the cook was eventually stoned to death by the villagers.

After his death, Nicholas's body was claimed to have been taken to Venice, and also to Bari, where it was said to have been enshrined in great Cathedrals in both, performing many miracles.

Presents were originally distributed on the 12th day of Christmas, January 6th. Not on Christmas Day.

Christmas gifts themselves remind us of the presents that were exchanged in Rome during the Saturnalia.

******* Read an excerpt from the book *******

And now you may be tempted to ask, "What bearing has all this stuff about the pagan festivals upon the question of the identity of our old friend Santa Klaus?"

I am coming to that. In every one of these festivals the leading figure was an old man, with a lot of white beard and white hair rimming his face.

In the Bacchanalia the representative god was not the young Bacchus, but the aged, cheery and decidedly disreputable Silenus, the chief of the Satyrs and the god of drunkards.

In the Saturnalia it was Saturn, a dignified and venerable old gentleman—the god of Time.

In the Germanic feasts it was Thor, a person of patriarchal aspect, and a warrior to boot.

Now, although the central figure of the Christian festival was the child-god—the Christ-Kindlein - none the less the influence of long pagan antecedents was too strong within the breast of the newly Christianized

world to be readily dismissed. The tradition of hoary age as the true representative of the holiday period, a tradition, it will be seen, in which all pagan nations agreed, still remained smoldering under the ashes of the past. It burst into flame again when the past was too far back to be looked upon with dislike or disquietude by the Church. No longer did there seem to be any danger of a relapse into the religious errors of that past.

At first the more dignified representative was chosen as more in keeping with a solemn season. Saturn was preferred to Silenus, and was almost unconsciously re-baptized as Saint Nicholas, the latter being the greatest saint whose festival was celebrated in December and the one who in other respects was most nearly in accord with the dim traditions of Saturn as the hero of the Saturnalia.

If you look at the pictures printed in this book *you will see that in face and figure the Saint Nicholas of the early painters was not unlike the ancient idea of Saturn.*

And it was many, many years before Saint Nicholas had ousted the Christ-child from the first place in the Christmas festivities. Indeed, as we shall see, he often accompanied his Master on His Christmas rounds. It may be added that he still does so in certain country places in Europe where the modern spirit has been least felt.

In course of time, as the idea of worldly merriment at the Christmas season prevailed over that of prayer and Thanksgiving, the name Saint Nicholas gradually merged into the affectionate diminutive of Santa Klaus. Under the new name the old saint lost all his austerity. He became ruddier, jollier, more rubicund in aspect, while the Christ-Kindlein faded more and more into the background, until at last the very name of the latter, under the slightly different form of Kris-Krinkle, was transferred to his successor.

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