



Is Santa Claus real?

The modern Santa Claus is really a hodge-podge of several earlier Christmas- or gift-giving figures, hence the reason there are so many names for him used interchangeably today (at least

in the U.S.). But even in the 1800s, Saint Nicholas, Father Christmas, and Kris Kringle were all separate figures.

Saint Nicholas is a real person. He was a 4th century, very wealthy Christian who was famed for giving away all of his money secretly in gifts to the poor. Nicholas later became a bishop from the town of Myra in what is now modern-day Turkey. After his death he was made a saint by the church. This quote is attributed to him:

"The giver of every good and perfect gift has called upon us to mimic Gods giving, by grace, through faith, and this is not of ourselves."

St. Nicholas' feast day is on December 6, and part of that celebration is the giving gifts.

Father Christmas is a folklore image of the Christmas holiday dating back to the 15th century in England. He was a large, jolly, festive figure, often wearing red and white, who encouraged everyone to eat, drink, and be merry.

Kris Kringle is an Americanized spelling (mis-spelling) of the German Christkindl, (literally: "Christ Child"). another gift-giving

Christmas figure. This time with the celebration on Christmas Eve instead of December 6th.

Over the course of the 19th century, these three figures kind of blended together. Take Saint Nicholas's name and run it through a couple translations and you get "Santa Claus." Add Father Christmas's appearance, and "eat, drink and be merry" emphasis. Then add Christkindl's celebration date, and you come up with our modern-day Santa who comes giving gifts on Christmas Eve.

The poem "The Night Before Christmas" and Thomas Nast's illustrations of Santa over a period of 30 years are some of the most significant factors that helped the transition to a single, unified Santa Claus figure.

There is a famous story about St. Nicholas which tells how the custom of hanging up stockings first started. It goes like this:

There was a poor man who had three daughters. The man was so poor that he did not have enough money for a dowry, so his daughters couldn't get married. One night, Nicholas secretly dropped a bag of gold down the chimney and into the house. 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.

The short answer: St. Nicholas is a real historical figure. The Christ Child is - obviously - a real historical figure. Santa Claus? Not so much!

Thanks for asking!

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Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net