

# Yes Virginia, There is no Santa Claus!

The myth of Santa Claus supposedly begins with a fourth century Catholic bishop named Saint Nicholas. According to historian, Charles W. Jones, ". . . the cult of St. Nicholas was, before the Reformation, **the most intensive of any non-biblical saint in Christendom** . . . there were 2,137 ecclesiastical dedications [churches] to Nicholas in France, Germany, and the Low Countries alone before the year 1500." (Jones, Charles. W. "Knickerbocker Santa Claus." *The New-York Historical Society Quarterly*, October 1954, Volume XXXVIII Number Four, p.357)The book, *The Christmas Almanack*, states, "By the height of the Middle Ages, **St. Nicholas was probably invoked in prayer more than any other figure** except the Virgin Mary and Christ Himself" (Del Re, Gerard and Patricia. *The Christmas Almanack*. New York: Random House, 2004, p. 131).

According to legend, Santa appears in the Netherlands around the seventeenth century. During this time, Sinter Klaas was officially born. Dutch children began the tradition of placing their shoes by the fireplace on December 5, for the mystic fourth century Bishop, Saint Nicholas. The next morning, the gleeful Dutch children quickly awoke to gifts and goodies in their shoes, left by Sinter Klaas. Like Santa, Sinter Klaas traveled from housetop to housetop, and entered through the chimney. In the year 1626 in the New World called America, Dutch settlers sailed from the Netherlands and established the Dutch colony called New Amsterdam. The Dutch colonists quickly settled into America, bringing their customs, and of course, their beloved Sinter Klaas.

In December 1809, American essayist Washington Irving published a popular satire of the Dutch founding of New York titled *A Knickerbocker History of New York*. It was Irving's *Knickerbocker History* that is credited for creating our modern day Santa Claus. The following history-making words from *The Knickerbocker History* became the public inauguration of Santa Claus.

- *And the sage Oloffte dreamed a dream,—and lo, the good St. Nicholas came riding over the tops of the trees, in that self-same wagon wherein he brings his yearly presents to the children. . . And when St. Nicholas had smoked his pipe, he twisted it in his hatband, and laying his finger beside his nose, gave the astonished Van Kortlandt a very significant look; then, mounting his wagon, he returned over the treetops and disappeared. (Irving, Washington. *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1928, p. 50)*

At this early period was instituted the hanging up a stocking in the chimney on St. Nicholas Eve; which stocking is always found in the morning miraculously filled; for the good St. Nicholas has ever been a great giver of gifts to children. (Irving, Washington. *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1928, p. 68)

In 1822 Dr. Clement Clarke Moore wrote a trivial poem titled, "A Visit from St. Nicholas" for his own children as a Xmas present. Dr. Moore had no intention of publishing his poem, but in 1823 it was published anonymously, by a friend, in the *Troy Sentinel*. Dr. Moore's poem later became the famous, "Twas' The Night Before Christmas."

Around 1863 cartoonist Thomas Nast illustrated scores of Santa pictures in *Harper's Weekly* and the world was officially introduced to the face of Santa Claus. Nast's early Santa was burly, stern, gnome-like, and covered with drab fur, not like the colorfully dressed fat man of today.

The truth is, there exists no *factual* connection from St. Nicholas to Santa Claus. None. Every serious researcher into the origin of Santa Claus verifies this fact. A serious obstacle in the "St. Nicholas is Santa Claus" legend involves the date of December 25. The Feast and Visit of St. Nicholas is celebrated on December 6, not December 25. Even today, St. Nicholas Day and Sinter Klaas are still celebrated on December 6. The date of St. Nicholas Day **has never been December 25.**

Nearly all Santa researchers agree that some traits of Santa was borrowed from Norse [Scandinavian] mythology.

*Encyclopedia Britannica* describes the role of Nordic mythology in the life of Santa:

- *Sinterklaas was adopted by the country's English-speaking majority under the name Santa Claus, and his legend of a kindly old man was united with old Nordic folktales of a magician who punished naughty children and rewarded good children with presents. ("Santa Claus" Encyclopaedia Britannica 99)*

Some Santa researchers associate Santa with the Norse "god" of Odin or Woden. Crichton describes Odin as riding through the sky on an eight-legged, white horse name Sleipnir. Odin lived in Valhalla (the North) and had a long white beard. Odin would fly through the sky during the winter solstice (December 21-25) rewarding the good children and punishing the naughty. (Crichton, Robin. *Who is Santa Claus? The Truth Behind a Living Legend*. Bath: The Bath Press, 1987, pp. 55-56)

Mythologist Helene Adeline Guerber presents a very convincing case tracing Santa to the Norse god Thor in *Myths of Northern Lands*:

- *Thor was the god of the peasants and the common people. He was represented as an elderly man, jovial and friendly, of heavy build, with a long white beard. His element was the fire, his color red. The rumble and roar of thunder were said to be caused by the rolling of his chariot, for he alone among the gods never rode on horseback but drove in a chariot drawn by two white goats (called Cracker and Gnasher). He was fighting the giants of ice and snow, and thus became the Yule-god. He was said to live in the "Northland" where he had his palace among icebergs. By our pagan forefathers he was considered as the cheerful and friendly god, never harming the humans but rather helping and protecting them. The fireplace in every home was especially sacred to him, and he was said to come down through the chimney into his element, the fire. (Guerber, H.A. *Myths of Northern Lands*. New York: American Book Company, 1895, p. 61)*

The *unusual* and *common* characteristics of Santa and Thor are too close to ignore.

- An elderly man, jovial and friendly and of heavy build.
- With a long white beard.
- His element was the fire and his color red.
- Drove a chariot drawn by two white goats, named called Cracker and Gnasher.
- He was the Yule-god. (Yule is Christmas time).
- He lived in the Northland (North Pole).
- He was considered the cheerful and friendly god.
- He was benevolent to humans.
- The fireplace was especially sacred to him.
- He came down through the chimney into his element, the fire.

Even today in Sweden, Thor represents Santa Claus. The book, *The Story of the Christmas Symbols*, records:

- *Swedish children wait eagerly for Jultomten, a gnome whose sleigh is drawn by the Julbocker, the goats of the thunder god Thor. With his red suit and cap, and a bulging sack on his back, he looks much like the American Santa Claus. (Barth, Edna. Holly, Reindeer, and Colored Lights, The Story of the Christmas Symbols. New York: Clarion Books, 1971, p. 49)*

Thor was probably history's most celebrated and worshipped pagan god. His widespread influence is particularly obvious in the fifth day of the week, which is named after him – Thursday (a.k.a. Thor's Day).

It is ironic that Thor's symbol was a hammer. A hammer is also the symbolic tool of the carpenter – Santa Claus. It is also worth mentioning that Thor's helpers were elves and like Santa's elves, Thor's elves were skilled craftsman. It was the elves who created Thor's magic hammer.

In the *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs*, author Francis Weiser traces the origin of Santa to Thor:

- **"Behind the name Santa Claus actually stands the figure of the pagan Germanic god Thor. Here, [Thor] then, is the true origin of our "Santa Claus." . . . With the Christian saint whose name he still bears, however, this Santa Claus has really nothing to do.** (Weiser, Francis X. *Handbook of Christian Feasts and Customs*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1952, p. 114)

Another interesting trait of Thor is recorded by H.R. Ellis Davidson in *Scandinavian Mythology*:

- *"It was Thor who in the last days of heathenism was regarded as the chief antagonist of Christ." (Davidson, H.R. Ellis. Scandinavian Mythology. New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1982, p. 133) In case you are not aware, an "antagonist" is an enemy, adversary or replacement.*

There is a little-known piece in the life of Santa that time and tradition has silently erased. Few people are aware that for most of his life, St. Nicholas had an unusual companion. He was known as Knecht Rupprecht; Pelznickle; Ru-Klas; Swarthy; Dark One; Dark Helper; Black Peter; Hans Trapp; Krampus; Grampus; Zwarte Piets; Furry Nicholas; Rough Nicholas; Schimmelreiter; Klapperbock; Julebuk; et. al. Some other well known titles given to St. Nick's bizarre companion is *a demon, evil one, the devil and Satan*. One of his dark duties was to punish children and "gleefully drag them to hell." The following references are provided to demonstrate the "devil" who accompanies St. Nicholas is a well documented fact.

- *It is the Christkind who brings the presents, accompanied by one of its many devilish companions, Knecht Rupprecht, Pelznickle, Ru-Klas. . . (Del Re, Gerard and Patricia. The Christmas Almanack. New York: Random House, 2004, p. 70)*
- *In many areas of Germany, Hans Trapp is the demon who accompanies Christkind on its gift-giving round. . . (Del Re, Gerard and Patricia. The Christmas Almanack. New York: Random House, 2004, p. 75)*
- *Another Christmas demon from lower Austria, Krampus or Grampus, accompanies St. Nicholas on December 6. (Del Re, Gerard and Patricia. The Christmas Almanack. New York: Random House, 2004, p. 94)*
- *Like Santa, Sinterklaas and the Dark Helper were also supposed to have the peculiar habit of entering homes through the chimney. . . (Renterghem, Tony van. When Santa Was a Shaman. St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1995, p. 102)*

- *In Sarajevo in Bosnia, Saint Nickolas appears with gifts for the children in spite of the war and shelling. **He is assisted by a small black devil** who scares the children. (Renterghem, Tony van. *When Santa Was a Shaman*. St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1995, p. 102)*
- *Ruprecht here plays the part of bogeyman, a black, hairy, horned, cannibalistic, stick-carrying nightmare. **His role and character are of unmitigated evil**, the ultimate horror that could befall children who had been remiss in learning their prayers and doing their lessons. **He was hell on earth**. (Siefker, Phyllis. *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men: The Origins and Evolution of Saint Nicholas*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997, p. 155)*
- *In Holland, Sinterklaas (Santa Claus) wore a red robe while riding a white horse and carried a bag of gifts to fill the children's stockings. **A sinister assistant called Black Pete** proceeded Sinterklaas in the Holland tradition to seek out the naughty boys and girls who would not receive gifts. ("History of Santa Claus," <[www.christmas-decorations-gifts-store.com/history\\_of\\_santa.htm?>](http://www.christmas-decorations-gifts-store.com/history_of_santa.htm?>))*
- *The Christian figure of Saint Nicholas replaced or incorporated various pagan gift-giving figures such as the Roman Befana and the Germanic Berchta and Knecht Ruprecht. . . He was depicted wearing a bishop's robes and **was said to be accompanied at times by Black Peter**, an elf whose job was to whip the naughty children. ("Santa Claus" Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 99)*
- *It can hardly be said that any satisfactory account has yet been given of the origins of this personage, or of his relation to St. Nicholas, Pelzmarte, and monstrous creatures like the Klapperbock. (Miles, Clement A. *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition Christian and Pagan*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1912, p. 232)*

The startling fact is, Santa Claus is not the Bishop St. Nicholas – *but his Dark Helper!*

- *In certain German children's games, **the Saint Nicholas figure itself is the Dark Helper, a devil who wants to punish children**, but is stopped from doing so by Christ. (Renterghem, Tony van. *When Santa Was a Shaman*. St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1995, p. 105)*
- ***Black Pete, the 'grandfather' of our modern Santa Claus**. Known in Holland as Zwarte Piet, this eighteenth-century German version, is—like his ancient shamanic ancestor—still horned, fur-clad, scary, and less than kind to children. **Although portrayed as the slave helper of Saint Nicholas, the two are, in many villages, blended into one character. This figure often has the name Nikolass or Klaus, but has the swarthy appearance of the Dark Helper**. (Renterghem, Tony van. *When Santa Was a Shaman*. St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1995, p. 98)*

Artist Thomas Nast is rightfully credited for conceiving the image of our modern day Santa, but Nast's model for Santa was not the Bishop St. Nicholas but the evil Pelznickle.

- ***The Christmas demon Knecht Rupprecht** first appeared in a play in 1668 and was condemned by the Roman Catholic as **being a devil in 1680**. . . To the Pennsylvania Dutch, he is known as Belsnickel. Other names for the same character **are Pelznickle**, "Furry Nicholas," and Ru-Klas, "Rough Nicholas." From these names, **it is easy to see that he is looked upon as not merely a companion to St. Nicholas, but almost another version of him**. (Del Re, Gerard and Patricia. *The Christmas Almanack*. New York: Random House, 2004, pp. 93,94)*
- *But on Christmas Eve, to Protestant and Catholic alike, came the German Santa Claus, Pelze-Nicol, leading a child dressed as the Christkind, and distributing toys and cakes, or switches, according as the parents made report. **It was this Pelze-Nicol – a fat, fur-clad, bearded old fellow, at whose hands he doubtless received many benefits – that the boy in later years was to present to us as his conception of the true Santa Claus – a pictorial type which shall lone endure**. (Paine, Albert Bigelow. *Thomas Nast: His Period and His Pictures*. New York: Chelsea House, 1980, p. 6)*

- *Thomas Nast was assigned to draw this Santa Claus, but having no idea what he looked like, drew him as the fur-clad, small, troll-like figure he had known in Bavaria when he was a child. This figure was quite unlike the tall Dutch Sinterklaas, who was traditionally depicted as a Catholic bishop. **Who he drew was Saint Nicholas' dark helper, Swarthy, or Black Pete (a slang name for the devil in medieval Dutch).** . . (Renterghem, Tony van. *When Santa Was a Shaman*. St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1995, pp. 95-9)*
- *It seems obvious, therefore, that Santa Claus can be neither the alter ego of Saint Nicholas nor the brainchild of Washington Irving. . . If we peek behind the imposing Saint Nicholas, **we see, glowering in the shadows, the saint's reprobate companion, Black Pete.** He, like Santa, has a coat of hair, a disheveled beard, a bag, and ashes on his face. . . **In fact, it is this creature, rather than Irving's creation or an Asian saint, who fathered Santa Claus.** (Siefker, Phyllis. *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men: The Origins and Evolution of Saint Nicholas*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997, p. 15)*

St. Nicholas did not come down the chimney. It was his fur-clad, dark companion that came down the chimney. One of the reasons his sidekick was called the "Dark One" or "Black Peter" was because he was normally covered in soot and ashes from his chimney travels. The "dark companion" also carried the bag, distributed the goodies and punished the bad boys and girls.

- *Children [in Holland] are told that **Black Peter enters the house through the chimney**, which also explained his black face and hands, and would leave a bundle of sticks or a small bag with salt in the shoe instead of candy when the child had been bad. ("Saint Nicholas," Wikipedia Encyclopedia. <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint\_Nicholas>)*
- *To the medieval Dutch, **Black Peter was another name for the devil.** Somewhere along the way, he was subdued by St. Nicholas and forced to be his servant. (Del Re, Gerard and Patricia. *The Christmas Almanack*. New York: Random House, 2004, p. 44)*
- *In Denmark, Sweden, and Norway creatures resembling both the Schimmelreiter and the Klapperbock are or were to be met with at Christmas. . . People seem to have had a bad conscience about these things, for there are stories **connecting them with the Devil.** A girl, for instance, who danced at midnight with a straw Julebuk, found that her partner was no puppet but **the Evil One himself.** (Miles, Clement A. *Christmas in Ritual and Tradition Christian and Pagan*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1912, p. 202)*
- *Thus, in parts of Europe, the Church turned Herne into Saint Nicholas' captive, **chained Dark Helper, none other than Satan, the Dark One, symbolic of all evil.** (Renterghem, Tony van. *When Santa Was a Shaman*. St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1995, p. 97)*
- *On the eve of December 6, the myth told that this bearded, white-haired old 'saint,' clad in a wide mantel, rode through the skies on a white horse, together with his slave, **the swarthy Dark Helper.** This reluctant helper had to disperse gifts to good people, but much preferred to threaten them with his broom-like scourge, and, at a sign of his master, **would gleefully drag sinners away to a place of eternal suffering.** (Renterghem, Tony van. *When Santa Was a Shaman*. St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1995, p. 111)*
- ***Old Nick: A well-known British name of the Devil.** It seems probable that this name is derived from the Dutch **Nikken, the devil...**" (Shepard, Leslie A. *Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology*. New York: Gale Research Inc. 1991, p. 650)*
- ***Nick, the devil.** (Skeat, Walter W. *Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1993, p. 304)*
- ***Devil:** Besides the name Satan, he is also called Beelzebub, Lucifer . . . and in popular or rustic speech by many familiar terms as **Old Nick** . . . (Oxford English Dictionary)*

- *Nicholas is one of the most common devil's names in German, a name that remains today when Satan is referred as Old Nick.* (Siefker, Phyllis. *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men: The Origins and Evolution of Saint Nicholas*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997, p. 69).

In *The Drama Before Shakespeare - A Sketch*, author Frank Ireson, describes the popular Miracle Play. The description of the devil as "shaggy, hairy," etc. (as Santa), and notice the devil's exclamation upon entering was **ho, ho, ho!**"

- *Besides allegorical personages, there were two standing characters very prominent in Moral Plays—the Devil and Vice. The Devil was, no doubt, introduced from the Miracle Plays, where he had figured so amusingly; he was made as hideous as possible by his mask and dress, the latter being generally of a shaggy and hairy character, and he was duly provided with a tail: **his ordinary exclamation on entering was, "Ho, ho, ho! what a felowe [sic] am I."*** (Ireson, Frank. "The Drama Before Shakespeare - A Sketch." 1920 )
- *In these plays, the devil's common entry line, known as the "devil's bluster," was "Ho! Ho! Hoh!"* (Siefker, Phyllis. *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men: The Origins and Evolution of Saint Nicholas*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997, p. 69)
- *What, and a' come? I conjure thee, foul spirit, down to hell! **Ho, ho, ho! the devil, the devil!** A-comes, a-comes, a-comes upon me . . .* (Dodsley, Robert. *A Select Collection of Old English Plays, Vol. VI. The Project Gutenberg Ebook*. <[www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext06/7oep610.txt](http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext06/7oep610.txt)>)
- *One of the most popular characters in English folklore of the last thousand years has been the faerie, goblin, **devil** or imp known by the name of Puck or Robin Goodfellow. The Welsh called him Pwca, which is pronounced the same as his Irish incarnation Phouka, Pooka or Puca. Parallel words exist in many ancient languages - puca in Old English, puki in Old Norse, puke in Swedish, puge in Danish, puks in Low German, pukis in Latvia and Lithuania – **mostly with the original meaning of a demon, devil or evil and malignant spirit.** . . .* (Edwards, Gillian Mary. *Hobgoblin and Sweet Puck*. London: Bles Publishers, 1974, p. 143)
- *Robin Goodfellow appeared in more plays around 1600. And there were many 17th century broadside ballads about him. . . **Robin's trademark laugh is "Ho Ho Ho!" . . . Robin itself was a medieval nickname for the devil.*** (Wright, Allen W. "The History of a Hobgoblin." <[www.boldoutlaw.com/puckrobin/puckages.html](http://www.boldoutlaw.com/puckrobin/puckages.html)>)
- *I can only conclude that the original ancestor of our modern Santa Claus is none other than the mythological Dark Helper—a faint memory of Herne/Pan, the ancient shamanic nature spirit of the Olde Religion.* (Renterghem, Tony van. *When Santa Was a Shaman*. St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1995, p. 93) Note: Herne or Pan is the horned god. It is common knowledge that Pan and Herne are popular names for Satan. The Satanic Bible lists Pan as one of the Infernal Names of Satan. (LaVey, Anton Szandor. *The Satanic Bible*. New York: Avon Books, Inc., 1969 p. 144)

The best book on this subject is *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men: The Origins and Evolution of Saint Nicholas*, authored by the late University of Kansas associate, Phyllis Siefker. This is a scholarly exploration into the origin of Santa Claus. It is published by the prestigious McFarland Publishers.

- *The fact is that Santa and Satan are alter egos, brothers; they have the same origin. . . On the surface, the two figures are polar opposites, but underneath they share the same parent, and both retain many of the old symbols associated with their "father" . . . From these two paths, he arrived at **both the warmth of our fireplace and in the flames of hell.*** (Siefker, Phyllis. *Santa Claus, Last of the Wild Men: The Origins and Evolution of Saint Nicholas*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1997, p. 6)

