

Christmas gifts

Gifts were exchanged in the Roman ceremonies of Saturnalia, the festivities of solstice, the origin of our Christmas celebrations. We know the exchanging of gifts best from the three magi mentioned in the Bible. But as mentioned in the History of Christmas, during the previous centuries Christmas was a solemn affair. Religious puritans reminded Christians that **the Magi** gave gifts only to Jesus, not to His family or to each other. But since the celebration of Christ's birth was incorporated with the solstice festivities outside the official church, and since Christmas really became widely popular during the last century, it has become a commercial phenomenon.



The figure of **Father Christmas** (Santa Claus or Sinterklaas) is based on **Saint Nicholas** (270 – 310), the bishop of Myra who, clad in red and white bishop's robes and riding on a donkey, bestowed gifts on children. Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of children. During the Middle Ages, many churches were built in his honor throughout Europe. The anniversary of his death, 6 December, became the day to give gifts, especially to children.



The first mention **Christmas stockings** being hung from or near a chimney were made only earlier this century by the illustrator, Thomas Nast, through his pictures and the writer, George Webster, in a story about a visit from Santa Claus. The story quickly caught on.

During World War II it was necessary to mail Christmas gifts early for the troops far way. Merchants joined in the effort to remind the public to shop early and the protracted shopping season was born.

Today, **Christmas** shopping is a rush. 86% of consumers do their Christmas shopping during December, 70% do not save for the Christmas period, and up to 87% decide at the point of purchase what they will buy. About 30% use their credit card as their