

Father Christmas or Santa Claus

The figure of Father Christmas (Santa Claus) is based on the patron saint of children, **Saint Nicholas** (270-310AD), who became one of the youngest bishops ever at age 17. At age 30 he became the Bishop of Myra, a port town on the Mediterranean Sea, that is part of modern-day Turkey. He hailed from a rich home and became well known for supporting the needy. He would often be seen, clad in red and white bishop's robes and riding on a donkey, handing out gifts to children.



During the Middle Ages, many churches were built in honor of Saint Nicholas. In the 11th century, his remains were enshrined in a church in the Italian city of Bari. It is told that the first Crusaders visited Bari and carried stories about Nicholas to their homelands. The anniversary of his death, 6 December, became a day to exchange gifts.

During the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, Martin Luther tried to stop the venerating of saints and the feast of Saint Nicholas was abolished in some European countries. The gift giver took on other names: in Germany, he became Der Weihnachtsmann ("Christmas Man"), Pre Nol in France, Father Christmas in Britain and the colonies, and **many other names**.

Santa Claus in New York

The Dutch, under Peter Stuyvesant, founded New York – named New Amsterdam under the Dutch and renamed when the British took over the colony – and brought with them the celebrations of **Sinterklaas**, the Dutch name for Saint Nicholas. **Santa Claus** is the American pronunciation of Sinterklaas.

As early as 1773 "St. A. Claus" was mentioned in the American press. In 1809, Washington Irving (the author of "Tales from Sleepy Hollow") wrote about Sinterklaas in his "A History of New York." Irving described Sinterklaas as a rotund little man in a typical Dutch costume, with knee breeches and a broad-brimmed hat, who traveled on horseback on the Eve of Saint Nicholas. In 1822, Clement Clark Moore, a poet and professor of theology, published the poem "A Visit From St. Nicholas" (also known as "The Night Before Christmas"). Moore's Santa is a jolly old elf who flies around in a miniature sleigh with eight tiny reindeer. Moore even **named the**