

CONNECT

The Three Faces of Santa

2475 NB

Santa Claus isn't on everyone's Christmas card list – and why IS that?

- 1 In a previous article, I asked whether it's right for parents to deceive their children about Santa Claus. I also wrote about the traumatic revelation that has to follow the lie, asking who is more traumatised – parents or children.

Leaving aside the deception, trauma and questions about whether adults can be trusted, though - who IS the red-cheeked, white-bearded man who turns up on Christmas Eve, laden with gifts? Is he Father Christmas? Santa Claus? Or Kris Kringle? For, like Eve, Santa has three faces – over time, he's had three different identities. So, who IS the real Santa?



- 2 Pagan traditions have, over time, become merged with Christian ones. Legends, traditions and religion have all been dropped into a blender and given a good blasting, as described in History Collection's fascinating article [16 Pagan Christmas Traditions that People Mistakenly Credit to Christianity](#).

Holly, ivy, mistletoe and the Yule log have ended up in the soup along with reindeer, chocolate and tinsel [I do hope I'm not giving **Heston Blumenthal** any ideas!].

The same thing has happened with the identity of the old gent in red and white, who some know as **Father Christmas**, some as **Santa Claus** and some as **Kris Kringle**. A scoot through his history makes it clear that these three separate identities have been merged. Much like in [The Three Faces of Eve](#), the success of the blending is questionable and fiction has become woven almost inextricably with fact.

Although Santa Claus [SC] is German for Saint Nicholas [SN], today's SC is nothing like the real SN, who lived in the fourth century. Both, indeed, had white beards and a penchant for wearing red and white - but even so, none of the remaining images of SN looks like today's SC.

The REAL SN was a Greek bishop who inspired the European legend "Sinterklaas." SN performed miracles including resurrecting the dead and he was also a dab hand at throwing bags of gold down chimneys. This story, no doubt, is why bags of chocolate coins, wrapped in gold foil, are given at Christmas.

The bags of gold SN dropped down the chimney landed in three sisters' stockings, which were drying by the fire. I have to mention, I've seen three different versions of this tale. The main ingredients are the same in each version. There were three daughters of a sole parent, a man who was poor and SN saved the girls with the gold he dropped down the chimney.

Now, what did Saint Nicholas save the three girls FROM? This turned out to be an interesting little diversion.

In one version of the story, their father was concerned for his daughters' ability to marry well - because, without a sizable dowry, they couldn't. With no inheritance, they would end up destitute - and single!

In another version, the father was going to sell his three daughters into slavery.

In a third, the girls were going to become prostitutes. On the decision of their father?

Asking for a friend...

[Who is St. Nicholas?](#), published by the Catholic Education Resource Centre, claims even more incredible miracles for the saint. This article describes how his life was founded on compassion - and in particular, how he is believed to have protected and rescued children.

The gold-giving by the real SN may have started the tradition of the legendary SN leaving gifts for children. In the Netherlands, markets sold toys and treats with 'Sinterklaas' impersonators wearing red bishops' costumes. Tradition had it that SN would enter houses by passing through locked doors [*an interesting skill!*] or descending chimneys to leave gifts in shoes and stockings.

- 3 National Geographic's article [From St. Nicholas to Santa Claus: the surprising origins of Kris Kringle](#) explains that for several hundred years, circa 1200 to 1500, every year SN's feast day, December 6 was celebrated, especially in Europe, as - St Nicholas' Day. In the legend, SN was a bringer of gifts and he had a white beard and the magical power of flight - like Santa. SN also made sure that children behaved well - like Santa.

But after the Protestant Reformation, SN became unpopular - even to the point of the markets in his honour being banned - when saints fell out of favour across much of northern Europe. Somebody still had to bring children

presents, however. That job fell to the baby Jesus, with the date moved to Christmas.

SC eventually emerged as a fusion of SN – with all his religious significance as a bishop removed – and the shaggy Germanic gift bringers of European legend, who wore furs.

Before SC there was Father Christmas [FC], an allegorical figure. FC was a fiction, not a living man - a symbol of the Christmas season – until he was re-invented into a new identity - SC.

FC's role was to preside over festive entertainment for adults, because drinking, feasting and making merry was originally central to Christmas, with children and giving presents being peripheral

But people wanted to clean up Christmas and separate it from the pagan traditions it had partly sprung from. So a new poster boy was needed – enter Santa Claus.

The first iteration of SC only brought gifts to good girls and boys, naturally. He originally carried a birch rod, for bad children [*ouch!*] The first iteration of his sleigh was pulled by just a single reindeer, but the team soon grew to eight.

According to English Heritage's article [The History of Father Christmas](#) - by the **1880s**, Santa Claus was widely believed to come down chimneys and leave toys and sweets in stockings. New traditions such as this were invented to transform Christmas into a family occasion and help to stop the unpleasant drunken mob violence that broke out around that time of year.

This rebranding of Christmas and Father Christmas was achieved with the help of artistic and literary contributions – and as ever, the assistance of the media, with "Punch" magazine helping to nudge perception in the "right" direction. Punch labelled the old, food-focused figure 'Father Christmas not-up-to-date', while the much more modern figure, dashing through the snow on a car carrying a box full of toys, was called 'Father Christmas up-to-date.' *Some things don't change.*

- 4 But who is Kris Kringle? For, as the National Geographic article explains, Santa also has a third alias.

Kris Kringle [KK] is an Americanised version of [Christkind](#), the German word for *Christ child*. Many countries still keep their own legend of a traditional gift-bringer – the Christkind. This legend is of a child, but not the baby Jesus, who brings gifts to children. Often, this child is a girl.

This is one of the reasons that Santa isn't on everyone's Christmas card list. When making the list and checking it twice, some would question – despite all his ho-ho-hos – whether Santa is all that nice, although I'm not aware of any specific allegations that he is naughty, either.

The issue is that people in many nations, where the old traditions are still

valued, see Santa as not only representing the materialistic and secular side of Christmas at the expense of the meaningful, which for some means religious and others means spiritual.

Then there's the issue of deception – telling children that an idea is a real person – which I've written about previously for CONNECT in [The Santa Claus Red Pill](#).

- 5 There's a cultural issue, too. Santa is perceived in some nations as an American import. Many nations wish to preserve their own Christmas gift-bringer traditions and customs.
Quite right, I say!

Certainly, the image of Santa Claus is a complete distortion of the original image of his namesake – Saint Nicholas. Many ideas and objects that were for a long time associated with the saint are also associated with Santa, but without their original meanings – without ANY meaning, in fact.

The same is true of the older traditions and celebrations that took place before the modern version of Christmas came into being.

Something to think about, perhaps, when we're tucking into our traditional Christmas Day dinner.

Because - *whatever you're told to the contrary* - the traditional Christmas dinner in the UK hasn't ALWAYS been [Spicy Beef Pizza](#).

CONNECT'S Maxim and Oath

Connect is only interested in finding and sharing the TRUTH.
In search of that TRUTH, we only pose questions – we have no answers.

By: Helen King

Source: CONNECT: [Magazine](#)

- 2 [LINK](#) History Collection: 16 Pagan Christmas Traditions that People Mistakenly Credit to Christianity
- 2 [LINK](#) IMDB: The Three Faces of Eve
- 2 [LINK](#) Catholic Education Resource Centre: Who is St. Nicholas?
- 3 [LINK](#) National Geographic: From St. Nicholas to Santa Claus: the surprising origins of Kris Kringle
- 3 [LINK](#) English Heritage: The History of Father Christmas
- 4 [LINK](#) Wikipedia: Christkind
- 4 [LINK](#) CONNECT: The Santa Claus Red Pill
- 5 [LINK](#) CONNECT: Spicy Beef Pizza [recipe.]

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