

Your Name

Mr. Larson

Intermediate Computers

July 4, 1776

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### Christmas: History Around the World

On the night before Christmas, all across the world, millions of children will be tucked in their beds while "visions of sugarplums dance in their heads." When they awake they will check their stockings to see if Santa Claus has come.

Santa Claus has become the most beloved of Christmas symbols and traditions. The image of the jolly old elf flying in a sleigh pulled by reindeers and leaving toys and gifts for every child is known worldwide.

#### History of Santa

The history of Santa Claus begins with a man called Saint Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra in Asia Minor, in what is now Turkey. Saint Nicholas was known for his charity and wisdom. Legends tell of him coming from a wealthy family and giving all his money to the poor. He also was said to possess magical powers. He died in 340 AD and was buried in Myra.

Late in the 11th century religious soldiers from Italy took the remains of the saint back with them to Italy. They built a church in honor of him in the town of Bari, a port town in southern Italy. Soon Christian pilgrims from all over the world came to visit the church of Saint Nicholas. These pilgrims took the legend of Saint Nicholas back to their native lands. As the legend of Saint Nicholas spread it would take on the characteristics of each country.

Europe. In Europe during the 12th century Saint Nicholas Day became a day of gift giving and charity. Germany, France, and Holland celebrated December 6th as a religious holiday and gave gifts to their children and the poor.

### Sinterklaas

When the Dutch colonists traveled to America, they brought with them their Sinterklaas, an austere bishop who wore a red bishop's costume and rode on a white horse.

The American image of Sinterklaas would gradually evolve into that of a jolly old elf. He was first described as a plump and jolly old Dutchman by Washington Irving in his comic History of New York. In 1823 Sinterklaas/Saint Nicholas' metamorphosis continued with the publication of Clement Moore's poem, A Visit from St. Nicholas (Twas the night before Christmas). In the 1860s cartoonist Thomas Nast drew pictures of a plump and kindly Santa Claus for the illustrated Harper's Weekly. This image of Santa Claus was becoming ingrained in the minds of the American people. As time went on this image of Santa Claus traveled across the globe, back to Europe, to South America, and elsewhere.

Many countries have kept their own customs and traditions of Saint Nicholas. In some cultures Saint Nicholas travels with an assistant to help him. In Holland, Sinterklaas sails in on a ship arriving on December 6th. He carries a big book which tells him how the Dutch children have behaved during the past year. Good children are rewarded with gifts and the bad ones are taken away by his assistant, Black Peter.

In Germany Saint Nicholas also travels with an assistant, known as Knecht Ruprecht, Krampus, or Pelzebock, and comes with a sack on his back and a rod in his

hand. Good children receive a gift, but naughty children are punished by the assistant with a few hits of the rod.

Italy. In Italy La Befana is good witch who dresses all in black and brings gifts to children on the Epiphany, January 6th. In many Spanish countries; Spain, Puerto Rico, Mexico, and South America, the children wait for the Three Kings to bring their Christmas gifts.

France. In France Father Christmas or Pere Noel bring gifts for the children. Switzerland has the Christkindl or Christ Child who bears gifts. In some towns children await the Holy Child and in others Christkindl is a girl-angel who comes down from heaven bearing gifts.

The Scandinavian countries celebrate with an elf, called the julenisse or the juletomte who bears gifts. And in England Father Christmas, a more austere and thinner version of Santa Claus, brings gifts.

In North American it is the round and plump "Ho Ho Ho'ing" Santa Claus who flies in a sleigh pulled by eight reindeers delivering toys to the children of the world.

"The Many Faces of Santa." July 4, 1776.  
<http://www.holidays.net/christmas/santa.htm>