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BlackButteRanch.com/Holidays

So who is Santa Claus, anyway?

By Jim Cornelius, Editor

He comes to Sisters each year on the Saturday after Thanksgiving to ride in the annual Christmas Parade. Then he heads over to the Sisters Area Chamber of Commerce office for a sit-down with hordes of youngsters who have all their Christmas wishes lined out.

Who is that guy?

Well, it's Santa Claus, of course. Y' know, the guy who is featured in countless songs, timeless poems and about four thousand TV commercials? He's a major celebrity.

And he's got a surveillance program that must turn the NSA holly-green with envy: "He sees you when you're sleeping/ He knows when you're awake/He knows if you've been bad or good/So you'd better be good for goodness sake..."

That beats sweeping up metadata by a North Pole mile.

He had humbler roots, of course.

The folkloric figure we know as Santa Claus started out as a third-century Roman bishop in Anatolia (modern Turkey). The St. Nicholas Center reports that, obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships.

Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who ruthlessly persecuted Christians, Bishop Nicholas suffered for his faith, was exiled and imprisoned. The prisons were so full of bishops, priests, and deacons, there was no room for the real criminals — murderers, thieves, and robbers. After his release, Nicholas attended the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. He died December 6, AD 343 in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church, where a unique relic, called manna, formed in his grave. This liquid substance, said to have healing powers, fostered the growth of devotion to Nicholas. The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration, St. Nicholas Day, December 6th (December 19 on the Julian Calendar).

The historical St. Nicholas became a figure of folklore as Christianity spread across

Western Europe, picking up characteristics of pagan figures like Odin (long white beard, travel across the night sky, etc.).

A few hundred years ago, somebody in Holland ran the name St. Nicholas through Google Translator into Dutch and ended up with Sinterklass. Predictably, when anybody used Siri on their iPhone, "she" heard Sinterklass as "Santa Claus" and there you go.

That's the story, anyway.

Santa Claus has a close cousin in England called Father Christmas. Flamboyant dresser, that guy. Drinks a bit.

Santa Claus as we know him in America dates from 1822, when Clement Clarke Moore, a professor at an Episcopal seminary in New York, wrote "A Visit From St. Nicholas," which we know better as "Twas the Night Before Christmas."

The poem gave Santa his sleigh and reindeer and that elfish twinkle in the eye. He was, however a little fellow, with a miniature sleigh and eight tiny reindeer. But, hey, this is America — bigger is better. Now he's, well, let's just say, "generously proportioned." Must be all the cookies...

Civil War-era cartoonist Thomas Nast put Santa at the North Pole in a workshop, building toys for nice children who were listed in a big book.

Santa's red and white uniform wasn't a fixed feature till the turn of the 20th century — before that he wore all kinds of different colors.

Today, we know a great deal about Santa Claus, yet there are still many unexplained aspects to the phenomenon. The exact location of his workshop has not been determined, nor are the physics of how he manages to deliver all those gifts internationally in one night (even using time zones and the International Date Line to stretch his hours) well understood by scientists.

Not to mention how he is able to appear in different places in Sisters Country *at the same time*.

Some things are best left mysterious.

For more information on the origins of the iconic elf, visit www.unmuseum.org/santa.htm and www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/who-is-st-nicholas.

Black Butte Ranch

Each winter, Black Butte Ranch transforms itself into a holiday wonderland. The spectacular setting and heart-warming activities make the Ranch a wonderful place to create lasting family memories. Take in a magical horse-drawn carriage ride, December 23, 24, 26-31. Tickets are \$12 (free for kids under 5), and can be reserved by calling 541-595-1252.

Bring the little ones to breakfast with Santa at the Lodge on Saturday, December 16 and Sunday, December 17, featuring a special buffet for young guests. Call 541-595-1260 for reservations.

Additional holiday activities include live music at the Aspen Lounge December 15, 22 & 29, a Christmas Day Celebration Dinner at the Lodge, and a special New Year's Eve dining experience to complete the season.

For details on all holiday events at Black Butte Ranch, visit BlackButteRanch.com/holidays.

