

Is Father Christmas a Freemason?

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I have a very serious question to ask you tonight.

I would like to raise this question and then do some detective work, examining the evidence that might lead us to an answer.

You ask, what is this serious question?

Here it is: *Is Father Christmas a Freemason?*

Let's consider the facts of this case.

Of whom does this remind you?

- A worthy gentleman, who is (we must admit) getting on a bit in years and is perhaps a little overweight,
- He wears a very distinctive costume as the badge of his activities,
- He provides the opportunity for friends and visitors to meet in fellowship
- He is surrounded by secrecy and mystery - dispenses goodwill and the gifts, charity as it were, all over the world
- And, he does so year and after year.

Well, my fellow Masonic detectives, you must admit that this description could fit either Santa or a Freemason. But this is

merely circumstantial evidence. We need some proof.

Let us start with his movements on the evening in question.

All the reports have him coming from the North Pole.

As the sun rises in the east to open and rule the day, and with him needing to finish the world before dawn, then he would have to begin in the East and move towards the West.

Therefore, Father Christmas must begin his journey at the north-east corner of the world. This, of course, is exactly what we've all done as Entered Apprentices. Similarly, you would assume he would finish his work, he gives his salute then heads for home.

But, think too, he undertakes this great journey to provide the gifts but once a year, and I am sure that any Brother Treasurer will agree that this is exactly the frequency with which most Brethren provide the gift of their charity to the lodge...

And, the secrecy, the mystery? Those of you who are parents, remember. What was the worst crime that an older child could commit at this time of the year? To

tell the younger ones the secret of Santa, to break the faith that they should have kept. And I am sure your punishment of them pointed out that they were void of all moral worth and totally unfit to be received into the dinner table but be sent to their room for destroying something that was so good, so worthwhile and so innocent.

Surely all this evidence shows us Father Christmas is a Freemason.

He practices Brotherly Love and Relief; we are happy to meet him - and sorry to part.

All the details, his wearing of a uniform, the rituals that happen year in year out, the fact he is a male ...

On a more serious note, Brethren, the way the whole Christmas season has developed and is practiced does have many things in common with Freemasonry, and we can learn much about each from the other.

For instance, where did the figure we call Father Christmas come from originally?

What is his background?

Well, Father Christmas, or Santa Claus, or St Nicholas has elements of pre-Christian myths and legends, which developed through the Middle Ages by being built into the remarkable story of the Great Architect's wonderful gift to the world.

By the eighteenth and nineteenth century, these details were formalized into the character that we still have

today: his stylized uniform, his way of working, his ritual activities, and sayings.

This does all sound very Masonic. St Nicholas was a 4th-century Turkish bishop who had originally been a wealthy nobleman. One of the stories about him was that he had helped a poor man who could not afford to pay for weddings for his 3 daughters.

St Nicholas climbed onto the roof and threw a handful of gold coins down the chimney, and these coins fell into the girls' stockings that had been hung up by the fire to dry. The girls were then able to marry well and lived happily ever after.

He has been considered the patron saint of poor children ever since. The legend became very popular in Europe, especially the Netherlands where it was mixed with elements from the pagan Yule or mid-winter festivals. St Nick became Santa Claus, who would arrive on December 6th (St Nicholas' Day) mounted on a white horse and visit children to inquire about their behavior the previous year.

Good children would be rewarded, and bad ones punished. The night before, children would leave a pair of shoes or clogs out, filled with hay and carrots for the horse. In the morning these would be found, filled with sweets or small presents.

These traditions were taken to America by Dutch settlers, but it was the famous 1823 poem by Professor Clement Clark Moore (American Professor of Oriental and Greek Literature, as well as Divinity and Biblical Learning) which begins

"'Twas the night before Christmas, and all through the house..." which settled most of the details into the Santa figure we know today.

Many of these details (such as the reindeer, and their names, the flying sled, coming down the chimney) were first brought together in this poem, but Professor Moore took them from old traditions from as far afield as Finland and Siberia, and they have stuck and become a single story. You can see how similar this is to the creation of our ritual and ceremonies.

While these also certainly include many elements that are ancient folklore, they were put together quite deliberately by identifiable people, with a specific aim: to create an impression in the minds of the Brethren taking part. Like the Santa legend, the details may be fictional, they may come from many various sources, and they may even be inconsistent with each other. That does not matter. It is the impression that all of them create as an entirety that is important.

Would you deny all the good that the Santa story achieves and all the happiness it creates is just because it is a story? Of course not. And this is the real linking of Father Christmas and Freemasonry.

Why *do we* have Christmas and why do we have Father Christmas?
We celebrate religious beliefs about the birth of goodness and hope for the future; we reaffirm the belief that people are basically good and can develop into loving, caring, helpful, supporting friends to each other.

We look to a New Year where things can be better. We do this at this season whether we are celebrating the Christian Nativity, or the Jewish Hanukkah with its lights and gifts and story of peace, or the Hindu Diwali with its festival of lights and gifts of sweets and toys, or even if we hold no formal religion except the pleasure of seeing a child's face transfixed with wonder and delight. And why are we Freemasons? Because we believe that there are important things like goodness and hope for the future and that men can develop into loving, caring, helpful, supporting Brethren to their families and each other.

We not only look to a future where things can be better, but we see it as our role, as Free and Accepted, or Symbolic, Masons, to help to build that future.

So, I feel I can safely say that Father Christmas is more likely than not, a Freemason.

Not only does he show so many of the signs and tokens of being one, but he brings us a message that we, as Freemasons, can heed for the entire year: *May there be peace on earth and good will towards men.*

Merry Christmas to you, Brethren.

The Story Behind *'Twas The Night Before Christmas*

According to legend, Clement Clarke Moore wrote his immortal poem, *A Visit from St. Nicholas*, also known as *The Night Before Christmas*, for his family on Christmas Eve 1822.

He never intended that it be published, but a family friend, Miss Harriet Butler, learned of the poem sometime later from Moore's children. She copied it into her album and submitted it to the editor of the Troy (New York) Sentinel where it made its first appearance in print on December 23, 1823. Soon, the poem began to be reprinted in other newspapers, almanacs, and magazines, with the first appearance in a book in *The New York Book of Poetry*, edited by Charles Fenno Hoffman, in 1837.

It was not until 1844, however, that Moore acknowledged authorship in a volume of his poetry entitled *Poems*. The book was published at the request of his children.

One hundred and eighty years later it is the most-published, most-read, most-memorized and most-collected book in all of Christmas literature.

'Twas The Night Before Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas, when
all through the house
Not a creature was stirring, not even a
mouse;

The stockings were hung by the chimney
with care,
In hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be
there;

The children were nestled all snug in
their beds,
While visions of sugar-plums danced in
their heads;
And mamma in her 'kerchief, and I in my
cap,
Had just settled down for a long winter's
nap,

When out on the lawn there arose such a
clatter,
I sprang from the bed to see what was
the matter.
Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the shutters and threw up the
sash.

The moon on the breast of the new-fallen
snow
Gave the lustre of mid-day to objects
below,
When, what to my wondering eyes
should appear,
But a miniature sleigh, and eight tiny
reindeer,

With a little old driver, so lively and
quick,
I knew in a moment it must be St. Nick.
More rapid than eagles his coursers they
came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called
them by name;

"Now, Dasher! now, Dancer! now,
Prancer and Vixen!
On, Comet! on Cupid! on, Donner and
Blitzen!

To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!
Now dash away! dash away! dash away all!"

As dry leaves that before the wild hurricane fly,
When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the coursers they flew,
With the sleigh full of toys, and St. Nicholas too.

And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.
As I drew in my head, and was turning around,
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;
A bundle of toys he had flung on his back,
And he looked like a peddler just opening his pack.

His eyes — how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!
His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow,
And the beard of his chin was as white as the snow;

The stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth,

And the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath;
He had a broad face and a little round belly,
That shook, when he laughed like a bowlful of jelly.

He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf,
And I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself;
A wink of his eye and a twist of his head,
Soon gave me to know I had nothing to dread;

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work,
And filled all the stockings; then turned with a jerk,
And laying his finger aside of his nose,
And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose;

He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle,
And away they all flew like the down of a thistle.
But I heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight -

"Happy Christmas to all, and to all a good-night."