

Heritage - Santa Claus Is Coming To Town

Christmas, like many other festivals, is riddled with legends stories and half-truths; the greatest legend being one of Santa Claus, variously known as Father Christmas, Kris Kringle or St Nicholas. However, in this case, there is more than a grain of truth in the story. There really was a man, a fourth-century humble Greek monk, later a bishop, who was famous for his generosity towards the needy orphans of his parish, particularly at Christmas. When he was beatified by the Christian church, he became Saint Nicholas.



It is from these early beginnings that the children of the Christian world look forward to getting gifts from a mysterious Santa Claus; a man who arrives in a sleigh, drawn by reindeer, who enters their home via the chimney every Christmas Eve. Depicted as a rather portly, jolly, white-bearded old man – generally, with spectacles – he wears a bright red suit with white fur collar and cuffs, a black leather belt and matching boots. He is never without a sack full of gifts for children.

Despite the incongruity of the story, young children believe in him and religiously write letters to him and hang up their stockings for him to fill with the gifts they desire. Then, one day they find out the truth and their world is shattered. Nonetheless, the stockings continue to be hung by the fireplace, waiting for him, in the hope that he will come – and he does!

Shirley Temple, the famous child actress from the age of three found out the truth fairly early. She remembered: *“I stopped believing in Santa Claus when I was six. Mother took me to see him in a department store and he asked for my autograph.”*

The Christian children of Malaysia, a truly multi-racial country, also enjoy the idea of Santa Claus and not surprisingly he has often appeared here, even though we have no chimneys! Perhaps he does not arrive quite so often these days as he once did, but ipohworld.org has several examples to share with us.



Kampar c 1945

Along the road in Kampar, not long after the Japanese surrender, the red-coated gentleman with a long white beard arrived in the town. It seems that the invaders had commandeered his sleigh for military use because he had to arrive in a bullock cart! Nonetheless, the children were enthralled.

In 1958, 700 children eagerly lined up to meet Santa at a Christmas party. Hosted by Company B, 3rd Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment (RAR), at Sungai Siput, the party had all the festive trimmings, with tables groaning under the weight of food, Christmas carols and countless sacks of toys. The delighted children were from the local new villages and rubber estates. Many of them have never had a better Christmas before or since.

Then, back in Ipoh in 1963, Father Christmas visited the children at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. In the photograph, Ruth Iversen is standing with her son Donald in the middle, her mother is on the extreme left. There were gifts a-plenty that day and everybody got one.



I remember my childhood Christmases with fondness. Santa was very basic in those days. nothing digital or plastic. Just simple gifts; an apple, a second-hand Dinky car, some sweets and a pair of socks. Nothing expensive, but very special, as in those far-off days of war, as they came from St Nicholas. The good news is that he will always be here. He is part of our Christian children's heritage.