

# Origins of the Santa Claus legend

Saint Nicholas was a wealthy Greek bishop in fourth-century Asia Minor – modern Turkey – who gave secret gifts of gold to the poor. Known in Dutch as **Sinterklaas**, a corruption of **Sint-Nicolaas**, he merged with the English Father Christmas character to create the modern Santa Claus

1939

**Rudolf, the Red-Nosed Reindeer** created in poem by **Robert L. May**. In 1949, May's brother-in-law **Johnny Marks** turns poem into song, made famous by **Gene Autry**



**Donner**

**Comet**

**Prancer**

**Blitzen**

**Dasher**

**Cupid**

**Vixen**

**Dancer**

AD 280 – AD 343

**Nicholas of Myra** – later **Saint Nicholas** – revered as patron saint of children, sailors and ships

17th Century

Dutch immigrants bring stories of **Sinterklaas** (**Santa Claus**) to New Amsterdam, now New York

1823

New York's **Troy Sentinel** newspaper publishes Clement Clarke Moore's poem, **A Visit From St. Nicholas (The Night Before Christmas)**, featuring old man on reindeer-drawn sleigh who brings gifts to children

1863-86

**Thomas Nast**, political cartoonist of **Harper's Weekly**, is first artist to define Santa's modern image, as bearded, plump, jolly man. His 1881 illustration (above) attains status akin to official portrait

1931-64

**Haddon Sundblom's** illustrations of red-coated Santa Claus for **Coca-Cola's** Christmas adverts remain most popular image



Flying reindeer pull Santa's sleigh to help him deliver Christmas gifts