



ClausNet

The Santa Claus Network

CLAUSNET GAZETTE

In this special St. Nicholas issue...

December 24, 2011

A very special interview with
writer, producer, and director
Gerald Hartke of "Nicholas of Myra"

The St. Nicholas Institute

Fun Facts

1st Christmas

Short Story Winner

"From Nicholas to Santa"

3rd Annual Christmas Eve Edition

Merry Christmas

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.



And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. —The Book of Luke



ClausNet

ClausNet is the world's premier Santa Claus Network and the largest Santa, Mrs. Claus, and helpers social group anywhere! Here you will find members from every Santa organization in the world, coming together to build a community of friendship, trust, and fellowship. Together we build unity and common bond for men and women dedicated to the faithful portrayal of Santa Claus (Father Christmas, Père Noël, Kris Kringle, Sinterklas, Baba Noel, Grandfather Frost, Joulupukki...), Mrs. Claus, and all others who devote their time to bringing the magic of Christmas to children and adults throughout the world!

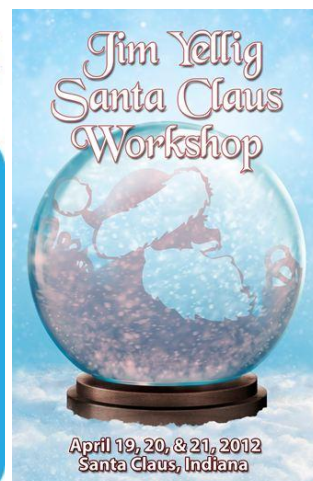
ClausNet.com is the largest resource and social network for Santa Claus, Mrs. Claus, Elves, Reindeer Handlers, and Santa helpers for the purposes of sharing stories, advice, news, and information. Most importantly, ClausNet is bringing people together to build friendships that help spread happiness to the true believers of Santa Claus -- the child inside all of us.

To all the members of ClausNet!

Thank you for being a part of this unique and special forum. ClausNet has grown from a dream into the largest on-line community for Santas, Mrs. Clauses, Reindeer Handlers, Elves, and Helpers in the world! The special magic and feeling you get when you are on-line with ClausNet is the result of all the great members! Without each and every one of you, ClausNet would not be possible.

Thank you to all our moderators and contributors. A forum this large needs a lot of people to lend a hand to ensure that the quality and integrity of our community is upheld. Your constant and continued support is truly appreciated! We wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a great New Year!

Sincerely,
Michael Rielly & Phillip L. Wenz



NICHOLAS OF MYRA

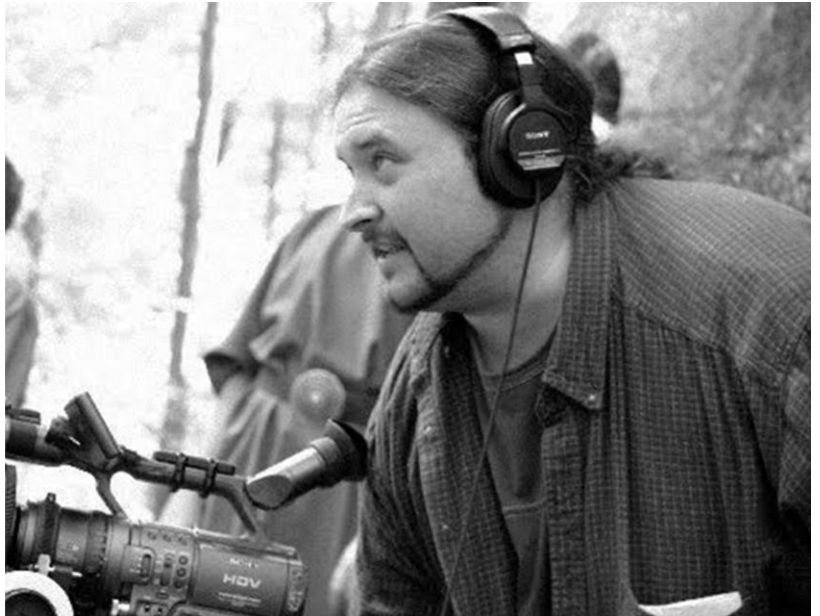
THE STORY OF SAINT NICHOLAS

An Interview with Gerald Hartke!

Our special guest for this Christmas Eve edition of the ClausNet Gazette is none other than the writer, producer, and director of the movie "Nicholas of Myra" Gerald Hartke.

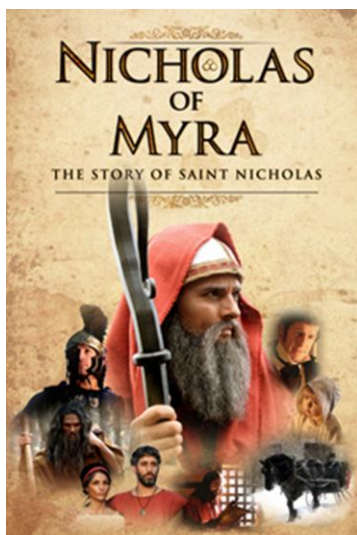
About Gerald Hartke...

Early success with a national award winning video put Gerald on the path to a career in filmmaking -- judges were impressed with his use of sound design, editing, and other visual effects as well as his "true understanding of action sequences." All these talents and more would be needed in the future for an artistic endeavor far greater in importance!



Since conceiving and developing the idea for an epic feature film on the life and legacy of the man known as Saint Nicholas, writer/director Gerald Hartke has shouldered the many responsibilities inherent in creating an independent film of the scope and quality of Nicholas of Myra. His authorship of the screenplay and directorial duties are most obvious among his credits. However, ably assisted by cast and crew members fully committed to the project, "Jerry" has been directly involved in nearly all phases of the process, creative and technical, as well as the business aspect of moviemaking.

We had the opportunity to speak with Gerald and here is what he had to say...



ClausNet: How long have you been in the film industry and how did you get started?

Hartke: I've spent the last ten years developing Nicholas of Myra into a motion picture. For ten years prior to that, I worked as a commercial and wedding videographer, honing my skills in the audio-visual arena. Along the way, I produced a few short films, one of which was a national award winner in the Panasonic/Videomaker magazine competition.

ClausNet: What is your favorite part of the movie?

Hartke: The final shot. The whole movie builds to that moment. I hope we've made a profound statement with the way the film ends. The message conveyed is meant to make believers out of everyone in the audience and leave no doubt that his spirit has lived on and will continue to live on.

ClausNet: What do you enjoy most about producing the movie?

Hartke: The idea that we're telling Saint Nicholas' story in a way that it's never been told before.

ClausNet: What is your dream for the movie when it is completed and distributed?

Hartke: That it will bring renewed faith, inspiration and good will to audiences, not just at Christmastime, but year round.

ClausNet: What is your favorite color?

Hartke: No joke, it's always been red! Now, more so than ever!

ClausNet: What are your favorite foods?

Hartke: I enjoy a good breakfast, but if not breakfast, then I'll take Italian.

ClausNet: Coke or Pepsi?

Hartke: Obviously, I have a nostalgic fondness for Coke, but I actually drink Pepsi most of the time.

ClausNet: What is your favorite cookie?

Hartke: Fresh baked chocolate chip

ClausNet: What keeps you busy when you are not working?

Hartke: Right now, "Nicholas of Myra" keeps me busy most of the time. I'm always working on some aspect of the movie.

ClausNet: What profession other than your own would you like to attempt?

Hartke: Teaching... I've done some speaking engagements at schools and it definitely gave me the bug to continue passing on what I've learned. I like sharing my experiences with the next generation.



ClausNet: What profession would you not like to attempt?

Hartke: Politics

ClausNet: What were some of your favorite toys when you were a child?

Hartke: I was part of the original "Star Wars" generation. No other toys mattered!

ClausNet: What was the last book that you read?

Hartke: "St. Nicholas: A Closer Look at Christmas" by Joe Wheeler & Jim Rosenthal.

ClausNet: What is your favorite movie?

Hartke: Besides "Nicholas of Myra"... "Dances with Wolves"



ClausNet: Do you have a favorite Christmas movie?

Hartke: Besides "Nicholas of Myra"..."It's A Wonderful Life"

ClausNet: What is your favorite Christmas song?

Hartke: "The Christmas Song"

ClausNet: What are your hobbies / interests?

Hartke: Other than movie-making, I enjoy movie-going, digital arts, creative writing, camping and watching professional football and hockey.

ClausNet: What is your most memorable experience of Santa while growing up?

Hartke: Peering out the window into the night sky on Christmas Eve, hoping to catch a glimpse of his sleigh and reindeer flying over the rooftops of the surrounding homes in the neighborhood.

ClausNet: Why the subject of Nicholas for a movie?

Hartke: When I first learned the real story behind him, I was frustrated that after all of these years no one in Hollywood thought it would be a story worthy of being made into a film. I was a regular moviegoer that would have loved to see this movie when I was growing up, and now I'd love to see it as an adult. So, after a few years of toiling with the idea, I figured if I wanted to see it, then I'd just have to go and make it. I believe there are a lot of people outside the movie industry that have wanted to see this film made as well.

ClausNet: What do you think the impact of the movie will have on children, their parents, and others?

Hartke: To inspire people of all ages to follow in Saint Nicholas' footsteps, devoting themselves to a greater calling and divine purpose, as he did.

ClausNet: What impact do you see this movie having on the Santa Claus community?

Hartke: "The stockings were hung by the chimney with care, in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there," wrote Clement Moore. Santa is a descendant of Nicholas too. Whether you're St. Nicholas, Sinterklaas, or Santa Claus, having this historic story told on screen will bring long overdue credence to the significance of the Christmas icon. It will certainly have a positive impact on the "cause of Claus".

ClausNet: What were some of the biggest obstacles that you have had to overcome with your project?

Hartke: Mainly, the scope. It's a huge tale to tell. The glimpses of the movie that we've been showing on the internet only scratch the surface of the depth of the story. The period sets, costuming and production logistics are beyond a typical independent film. We actually had to build a full-size Greco-Roman sailing ship for a sequence in which young Nicholas, a passenger on the vessel, encounters a deadly storm at sea. Historically, that story is an important part of his legend and needed to be told. And that brings me to another big obstacle -- mother nature. We had to rebuild a couple of our exterior sets -- one, on more than one occasion.



ClausNet: How did you do your research for the film?

Hartke: It started ten years ago with a curious search in my old, trusty World Book Encyclopedia in December of 2001. The basis of the story was right there under "St. Nicholas". From there, I began searching the internet to find out more. You have to weed through the misinformation of course, but the wealth of information around the world was extraordinary. I spent three more years with my head in several books, from mythological to historical. Even the historical information had its contradictions, so I had to weigh some of my creative decisions based on what was most popularly believed to be true. Writing the screenplay for Nicholas of Myra was an eye-opening and life-changing experience.

ClausNet: What do you think Nicholas of Myra himself would say about today's Christmas and Santa?

Hartke: I think he would feel that we've lost sight of why it was important to choose a day to celebrate the birth of Christ, even though the actual date was never written, and that Nicholas, as the Bishop and gift-giver of Myra, was only acting as a servant of Christ. I believe he would want his descendants to always remember where they came from... and for all who celebrate the true meaning of Christmas, to continue paying his generosity forward in the name of Christ.

ClausNet: Thank you for taking the time to inform our readers in the Santa Claus Community about the film! We all look forward to seeing the movie soon!



For more information on the upcoming release of the movie "Nicholas of Myra – The Story of Saint Nicholas"

please visit the movie's official website at
<http://www.nicholasofmyra-movie.com/>

and please join the movie's Facebook page at
<http://www.facebook.com/NicholasOfMyraMovie>



Who is St. Nicholas?

St. Nicholas is remembered and revered among Catholic and Orthodox Christians. He is also honored by various Anglican and Lutheran churches.

Nicholas was born in Patara of Lycia during the third century, of devout and wealthy parents who provided him with a Christian upbringing and education. He was orphaned at an early age. Later he was ordained a priest, and when the bishop of his district died, he was made Bishop of Myra of Lycia.

Nicholas is distinguished for his faith, especially for his charity. His faith was so great, that with his prayer he calmed a stormy sea while on a trip to the Holy Lands. He fought for the predominance of Orthodoxy and took part in the First Ecumenical Synod of Nicea. He is especially well-known for his charity and love for children. St. Nicholas' life is the basis for the Santa Claus Legend.

St. Nicholas Institute

With **40 years of professional Santa Claus and St. Nicholas** experience, **Emmy Award** winning Santa (and 2011 member of the **Santa Claus Hall of Fame**, Santa Claus, Indiana), **Fr. Joseph Marquis** is the founder and executive director of the newly established **St. Nicholas Institute**.

Created to harmonize with the beginning of the **“Year of Faith”** (Oct. 11, 2012 – Nov. 24, 2013), the **“St. Nicholas Institute is a multi-day seminar designed to empower candidates with the tools needed to convincingly portray both St. Nicholas and the “elfin” Santa Claus in a wide variety of venues; whether religious or secular.”**

The institute will be inaugurated from **Monday, October 1st, thru Thursday, October 4th, 2012** at **St. Paul’s Retreat Center**, Detroit, MI.

As a **non-profit organization**, all profits realized from the institute benefit the ministry of **Sacred Heart Byzantine Catholic Church**, Livonia, MI. www.stnicholasinstitute.com



ClausNet’s 2011 Short Story Contest Winner “From Nicholas to Santa” by Santa Craig Imboden

I am sure you all take great pride in knowing the legend of my works. Year in and year out you recite poems and tell tales of Christmas’ past. You are carrying on a tradition that has been passed down to you and countless others, for years, decades, and centuries. But do you know what really transpired ages ago? Do you know what brought me to my present day calling? Or have you hardened with disbelief? Sit back and let me weave a tale and maybe you will gather new perspective of this wonderful tradition that we share with the world.

Centuries ago as a young man, it was bestowed to me that I would do charitable work for those less fortunate. Being blessed beyond most at that time, I found it unnecessary to keep those worldly treasures all for myself. Whenever I could do something for someone in need, it occurred to me that it in doing so not only brought happiness to the recipient, but immense satisfaction to the bearer of the gifts. The more given the more received and it was apparent that my calling was to give. Beyond the worldly gifts of golden coins and trinkets, my spirit was the true gift bestowed to me. The title of Bishop was granted to my name and again the giving of time and spirit flourished. The title not only gave me a chance to spread the word but it also gave me my color. For as a man of the cloth who represented The Christ Child, Red symbolized the ultimate gift to mankind...his blood.



Word continued to spread of the good deeds and the gift giving never ceased. Just as the Christ child (for whom we even celebrate Christmas) gave his life for all of us. He received a miraculous gift of his resurrection. It was in that mysterious resurrection that added to the mystic of what I would do. It came to my mind that I would influence the world by not what I gave but how I would give it. So donning the red clothes to symbolize God's gift to us, I would again journey to the far corners of the world spreading the message. Each generation learned of my actions and the legend grew. Symbols of the job intertwined with not only Church followers but non-religious people alike. The message was being put forth along with some goodies for the children as well, just like I had done so many years before back in Myra.

Now masked as a gift giver to the young, my legend has grown by leaps and bounds. My tasks became more complicated and the time frame to perform was less and less. Reindeer and sleighs overtook carts pulled by camels. Toys held higher rank over coins and fruits and nuts. The need for me to be in the physical presence of followers is far more important to them now than ever before. Stories evolved and mystical properties have been added to my repertoire, all of which add to the mystique and awe of my message.

So you may be asking yourself the age old question "Is there really a Santa Claus?" The answer to that is a very simple one in my opinion. For some, seeing is believingIt is as true now as it was when they rolled the rock from Jesus' tomb. Others have the faith of a child and determined no matter what common sense says, they stay dead fast to their belief. As long as there are true believers that continues to spread the word. Be it young children whose innocence is far wider than the black belt encompasses my waist. Or, an adult who carries on the tradition of giving that was put in place thousands of years ago, to those souls who are seeking comfort for whatever their reasons. To those believers who hold the sacred stories from years past and continue to spread the good word to all who seek it. Then I will be and the tradition from Nicholas to Santa continues.

Fun Facts about Christmas!

Did You Know?

The Germans made the first artificial Christmas trees out of dyed goose feathers.

All the gifts in the Twelve Days of Christmas would equal 364 gifts.

In A.D. 320, Pope Julius I, bishop of Rome, proclaimed December 25 the official celebration date for the birthday of Christ.

Alabama was the first state in the United States to officially recognize Christmas in 1836.

Christmas wasn't declared an official holiday in the United States until June 26, 1870.

In 1962, the first Christmas postage stamp was issued in the United States.

Christmas purchases account for 1/6 of all retail sales in the U.S.

The first person to decorate a Christmas tree was reportedly the Protestant reformer Martin Luther (1483-1546). According to legend, he was so moved by the beauty of the stars shining between the branches of a fir tree, he brought home an evergreen tree and decorated it with candles to share the image with his children.

It is estimated that the single "White Christmas" by Irving Berlin is the best-selling single of all time, with over 100 million sales worldwide.

Because they viewed Christmas as a decadent Catholic holiday, the Puritans in America banned all Christmas celebrations from 1659-1681 with a penalty of five shillings for each offense. Some Puritan leaders condemned those who favored Christmas as enemies of the Christian religion.



Goody Santa Claus by Katherine Lee Bates, 1889

The story below is considered Mrs. Santa Claus' first starring role. Mrs. Santa Claus' first public introduction is generally considered to be in 1841 by Philadelphian James Rees in his short story "A Christmas Legend."

Santa, must I tease in vain, Deer? Let me go and hold the reindeer, While you clamber down the chimneys. Don't look savage as a Turk! Why should you have all the glory of the joyous Christmas story, And poor little Goody Santa Claus have nothing but the work?

It would be so very cozy, you and I, all round and rosy, Looking like two loving snowballs in our fuzzy Arctic furs, Tucked in warm and snug together, whisking through the winter weather Where the tinkle of the sleigh-bells is the only sound that stirs.

You just sit here and grow chubby off the goodies in my cubby From December to December, till your white beard sweeps your knees; For you must allow, my Goodman that you're but a lazy woodman And rely on me to foster all our fruitful Christmas trees.

While your Saintship waxes holy, year by year, and roly-poly, Blessed by all the lads and lassies in the limits of the land, While your toes at home you're toasting, then poor Goody must go posting Out to plant and prune and garner, where our fir-tree forests stand.

Oh! but when the toil is sorest how I love our fir-tree forest, Heart of light and heart of beauty in the Northland cold and dim, All with gifts and candles laden to delight a boy or maiden, And its dark-green branches ever murmuring the Christmas hymn!

Yet ask young Jack Frost, our neighbor, who but Goody has the labor, Feeding roots with milk and honey that the bonbons may be sweet! Who but Goody knows the reason why the playthings bloom in season And the ripened toys and trinkets rattle gaily to her feet!

From the time the dollies budded, wiry-boned and saw-dust blooded, With their waxen eyelids winking when the wind the tree-tops plied, Have I rested for a minute, until now your pack has in it All the bright, abundant harvest of the merry Christmastide?

Santa, wouldn't it be pleasant to surprise me with a present? And this ride behind the reindeer is the boon your Goody bags; Think how hard my extra work is, tending the Thanksgiving turkeys And our flocks of rainbow chickens — those that lay the Easter eggs.

Home to womankind is suited? Nonsense, Goodman! Let our fruited Orchards answer for the value of a woman out-of-doors. Why then bid me chase the thunder, while the roof you're safely under, All to fashion fire-crackers with the lighting in their cores?

See! I've fetched my snow-flake bonnet, with the sunrise ribbons on it; I've not worn it since we fled from Fairyland our wedding day; How we sped through iceberg porches with the Northern Lights for torches! You were young and slender, Santa, and we had this very sleigh.

Jump in quick then? That's my bonny. Hey down derry! Nonny nonny! While I tie your fur cap closer, I will kiss your ruddy chin. I'm so pleased I fall to singing, just as sleigh-bells take to ringing! Are the cloud-spun lap-robies ready? Tirra-lirra! Tuck me in.

Off across the starlight Norland, where no plant adorns the moorland
Save the ruby-berried holly and the frolic mistletoe! Oh, but this is Christmas revel!
Off across the frosted level Where the reindeers' hoofs strike sparkles from
the crispy, crackling snow!

There's the Man i' the Moon before us, bound to lead the Christmas chorus
With the music of the sky-waves rippling round his silver shell —
Glimmering boat that leans and tarries with the weight of dreams she carries
To the cots of happy children. Gentle sailor, steer her well!

Now we pass through dusky portals to the drowsy land of mortals;
Snow-enfolded, silent cities stretch about us dim and far. Oh! how sound
the world is sleeping, midnight watch no shepherd keeping, Though an angel-face
shines gladly down from every golden star.

Here's a roof. I'll hold the reindeer. I suppose this weather-vane, Dear,
Someone set here just on purpose for our teams to fasten to. There's its
gilded cock, — the gaby! — wants to crow and tell the baby We are come.
Be careful, Santa! Don't get smothered in the flue.

Back so soon? No chimney-swallow dives but where his mate can follow.
Bend your cold ear, Sweetheart Santa, down to catch my whisper faint:
Would it be so very shocking if you're Goody filled a stocking Just for once?
Oh, dear! Forgive me. Frowns do not become a Saint.

I will peep in at the skylights, where the moon sheds tender twilights
Equally down silken chambers and down attics bare and bleak. Let me show
with hailstone candies these two dreaming boys — the dandies In their frilled
and fluted nighties, rosy cheek to rosy cheek!

What! No gift for this poor garret? Take a sunset sash and wear it O'er the rags,
my pale-faced lassie, till thy father smiles again. He's a poet, but — oh, cruel!
he has neither light nor fuel. Here's a fallen star to write by, and a music-box
of rain.

So our sprightly reindeer clamber, with their fairy sleigh of amber,
On from roof to roof, the woven shades of night about us drawn. On from roof
to roof we twinkle, all the silver bells a-tinkle, Till blooms in yonder blessed
East the rose of Christmas dawn.

Now the pack is fairly rifled, and poor Santa's well-nigh stifled; Yet you would
not let your Goody fill a single baby-sock; Yes, I know the task takes brain,
Dear. I can only hold the reindeer, And so see me climb down chimney — it
would give your nerves a shock.

Wait! There's yet a tiny fellow, smiling lips and curls so yellow
You would think a truant sunbeam played in them all night. He spins
Giant tops, a flies kites higher than the gold cathedral spire In his
creams — the orphan bairnie, trustful little Tatterkins.

Santa, don't pass by the urchin! Shake the pack, and deeply search in
All your pockets. There is always one toy more. I told you so. Up again?
Why, what's the trouble? On your eyelash winks the bubble Mortals call a
tear, I fancy. *Holes in stocking, heel and toe?*

Goodman, though your speech is crusty now and then there's nothing rusty
In your heart. A child's least sorrow makes your wet eyes glisten, too;
But I'll mend that sock so nearly it shall hold your gifts completely. Take
the reins and let me show you what a woman's wit can do.

Puff! I'm up again, my Deary, flushed a bit and somewhat weary, With my wedding snow-flake bonnet worse for many a sooty knock; But be glad you let me wheedle, since, an icicle for needle, Threaded with the last pale moonbeam, I have darned the laddie's sock.

Then I tucked a paint-box in it ('twas no easy task to win it From the Artist of the Autumn Leaves) and frost-fruits white and sweet, With the toys your pocket misses — oh! and kisses upon kisses To cherish safe from evil paths the motherless small feet.

Chirrup! chirrup! There's a patter of soft footsteps and a clatter Of child voices. Speed it, reindeer, up the sparkling Arctic Hill! Merry Christmas, little people! Joy-bells ring in every steeple, And Goody's gladdest of the glad. I've had my own sweet will.

Mrs. Santa's Oatmeal Chocolate Chip Nut Cookies

Christmas Cookie Recipe

Beat together until smooth:

- 3/4 cup cooking oil (or seal-skin oil, if you can)
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar (or glacier sand, if possible)
- 1/2 cup brown sugar (or toasted snowflakes)
- 2 eggs (nerd eggs, if you can find any)

Mix in the following:

- 2 cups flour (or petals from honey flowers)
- 1/2 teaspoon nutmeg (or dried dandelion Juice)
- 1/2 teaspoon salt (or North Pole ice crystals)
- 1 teaspoon soda (or juju plant powder)
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon (or Cimarron sneezes)
- 1 teaspoon baking powder (or petrified tree sap)
- 2 cups oatmeal (or uncooked elf mush, if you can buy it)

Mix well, then add 12 ounces of chocolate chips and 1 1/2 cups of chopped walnuts. Bake at 375 degrees for 13 minutes. Will give you about three dozen.



The Physics of Santa's Christmas Eve Journey

Santa has 31 hours of Christmas to work with, thanks to the different times zones and the rotation of the earth, assuming he travels east to west (which seems logical). This works out to 822.6 visits per second. This is to say that for each Christian household with good children, Santa has 1/1000th of a second to park, hop out of the sleigh, jump down the chimney, fill the stocking, distribute the remaining presents under the tree, eat whatever snacks have been left, get back up the chimney, get back into the sleigh and move on to the next house. Assuming that each of these 91.8 million stops are evenly distributed around the earth (which, of course, we know to be false, but for the purposes of our calculations we will accept), we are now talking about .78 miles per household, a total trip of 75.5 million miles, not counting stops to do what most of us do at least once every 31 hours, plus feeding, etc. That means that Santa's sleigh is moving at 650 miles per second, 3,000 times the speed of sound. For purposes of comparison, the fastest man-made vehicle on earth, the Ulysses space probe, and moves at a poky 27.4 miles per second - a conventional reindeer can run, at tops, 15 miles per hour.



Candy Canes

During the 17th century, craftsmen created white sticks of candy in the shape of shepherds' crooks at the suggestion of the choirmaster at the Cologne Cathedral in Germany. The candy treats were given to children to keep them quiet during ceremonies at the living crèche, or Nativity scene, and the custom of passing out the candy crooks at such ceremonies soon spread throughout Europe.

According to the National Confectioner's Association, in 1847 German immigrant August Imgard used the candy cane to decorate a Christmas tree in Wooster, Ohio. More than 50 years later, Bob McCormack of Albany, Georgia supposedly made candy canes as treats for family, friends and local shopkeepers. McCormack's brother-in-law, Catholic priest Gregory Keller, invented a machine in the 1950s that automated the production of candy canes, thus eliminating the usual laborious process of creating the treats and the popularity of the candy cane grew.



More recent explanations of the candy cane's symbolism hold that the color white represents Christ's purity, the red the blood he shed, and the presence of three red stripes the Holy Trinity. While factual evidence for these notions does not exist, they have become increasingly common and at times are even represented as fact. Regardless, the candy cane remains a favorite holiday treat and decoration.

Recipe for Christmas All Year Long

By Joanna Fuchs

Take a heap of child-like wonder
That opens up our eyes
To the unexpected gifts in life—
Each day a sweet surprise.
Mix in fond appreciation
For the people whom we know;
Like festive Christmas candles,
Each one has a special glow.
Add some giggles and some laughter,
A dash of Christmas food,
(Amazing how a piece of pie
Improves our attitude!)

Stir it all with human kindness;
Wrap it up in love and peace,
Decorate with optimism, and
Our joy will never cease.
If we use this healthy recipe,
we know we will remember
to be in the Christmas spirit,
even when it's not December.



Santa's Prayer by Warren D. Jennings

The sleigh was all packed, the reindeer were fed,
But Santa still knelt by the side of the bed.

"Dear Father," he prayed "Be with me tonight.
There's much work to do and my schedule is tight.

I must jump in my sleigh and streak through the sky,
Knowing full well that a reindeer can't fly.

I will visit each household before the first light,
I'll cover the world and all in one night.

With sleigh bells a-ringing, I'll land on each roof,
Amid the soft clatter of each little hoof.

To get in the house is the difficult part,
So I'll slide down the chimney of each child's heart.

My sack will hold toys to grant all their wishes.
The supply will be endless like the loaves and the fishes.

I will fill all the stockings and not leave a track.
I'll eat every cookie that is left for my snack.

I can do all these things Lord, only through You,
I just need your blessing, then it's easy to do.

All this is to honor the birth of the One,
That was sent to redeem us, Your most Holy Son.

So to all of my friends, least Your glory I rob,
Please Lord, remind them who gave me this job."



Merry Christmas

