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### ***Is Father Christmas a Freemason?***

It is an interesting question that you may or may not have asked yourself, relating our Craft to the wider society in which we live and concerns several major issues of this season. Let us consider the facts of this case:

Of whom does this description remind you?

*A worthy gentleman, who is (we must admit) getting on a bit in years and is perhaps a little overweight, who wears a very distinctive costume as the badge of his activities, who provides the opportunity for friends and visitors to meet in fellowship, who is surrounded by secrecy and mystery, dispenses goodwill and the charity of gifts all over the world (avoiding ostentatious public display while doing so) and is there doing it year after year!*

Well, fellow 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 enliven 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 do with an entered apprentice. Similarly, you would assume he would finish heading for home, which would place him in the north-west corner at the end of his work, to give his salute to the world and leave.

Convincing proof, you might start to agree! 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 (to say nothing of their subscriptions!!) And the secrecy, the mystery? Those of you who are parents may pause to 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 the story Santa, to break the faith that they should have kept. And I am sure your admonishment of them pointed out that they were void of all moral worth and totally unfit to be received into the dinner table but were to be sent to their room for destroying something that was so good, so worthwhile and so innocent.

Surely all this evidence shows us beyond doubt that Father Christmas is a Freemason! He practices Brotherly Love and Relief; we are happy to meet him and the Christmas season, sorry to part, but happy that it will come round again in 12 months' time.

Other details, such as his wearing of a recognisable uniform, the invariable 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? 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 great Christian story of God's wonderful gift to the world.

By the eighteenth and nineteenth century these details were formalized into the character that we still have today, though many secular attributes was added, to the decrease in religious undertones: his stylized uniform, his way of working, his ritual activities and sayings. This all resonates with our own Masonic history and legends.

The pre-Christian legends of Solomon's Temple, the pyramids, Pythagoras, the Working Guilds, their rites and rituals and so on were developed through the Middle Ages by the great Christian cathedral builders, then formalized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries into the recognised uniform, the workings, the rituals that we use today.

St Nicholas was actually a 4th century Turkish bishop who had originally been a rich 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 enquire about their behaviour during the previous year. Good children would be rewarded, and bad ones punished. The night before, children would leave a pair of the 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 poem by Professor Clement Clark Moore which begins

" 'T'was 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 sledge, 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 different 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, all the happiness it creates, 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 a freemason in my opinion. 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 whole year.

Peace on earth, good will towards all mankind! Merry Christmas.

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