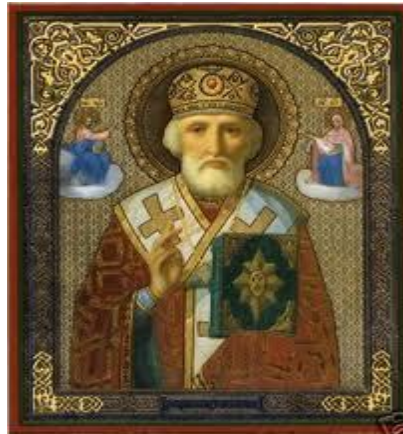


Hiram Abiff and....Santa Claus ?

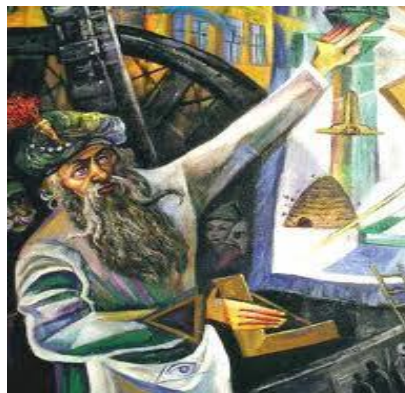
Hiram Abiff and Santa Claus - two legendary figures that Masons around the world are familiar with. As whimsical as this educational topic might seem, there really are a lot of parallels in the lives of these two men. As adults, Santa usually evokes in us a smile, fond memories, lighthearted feelings, and serene mental pictures. As Masons, Hiram Abiff congers up somewhat darker and more serious thoughts relating to our own mortality and our personal relationship with the Supreme Architect of the Universe. Nevertheless, both of these legends have quite a bit in common that may not be immediately obvious.



Saint Nicholas

Of course, we all know that 'Santa Claus' really did exist. Actually he was Bishop Nicholas of Myra, also known as Saint Nicholas, who was born during the third century in a village in what is now Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young, and he was raised by his uncle, also a Bishop in the church. Obeying the words of Jesus to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his entire inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. The tradition of Saint Nicholas Day, usually December 6th in European Orthodox countries, is a festival for children related to legends about the saint, particularly his reputation as a bringer of gifts. The American Santa Claus, as well as the Anglo-Canadian and British Father Christmas, are derived from these legends. "Santa Claus" is itself derived in part from the Dutch Sinterklass.

But today, Santa Claus, his modern representation, has evolved into a mythological figure that serves as a symbol for charity, and love for our fellowmen. So, in Santa Claus we find a progression of the stages of life. As children we come to understand Santa as a gift-giving kindly and jolly old man. As we grow older and began to realize the physical impossibility of Santa Claus' nocturnal journey, we learn the history and mythology behind that figure. Then eventually in time and with the coming of age and experience we understand the true meaning of the symbol.



Grand Master Hiram Abiff

Hiram Abiff parallels those same progressive stages. When we are first introduced to the Masonic character of Hiram Abiff, he is presented as a real person and Master Architect. Hiram, was in fact a skilled artisan who helped beautify and adorn King Solomon's Temple as recorded in the Book of First Kings. Like Saint Nicholas, Hiram, through the fertile minds of Masonic writers, evolves into our mythological figure Hiram Abiff and the details of his story are related to us in our ritualistic degree work.

At first we only see what's on the surface, but as we grow, and 'come of age in Masonry', we realize that a lot of the story has been very creatively 'invented' and is presented to teach us great and important moral and Masonic lessons. Eventually, through a virtuous Masonic education, our own endeavors and the help of the Supreme Architect, we come to understand the true meaning of the legend of Hiram Abiff and how it relates to our growth as Masons and men. Understanding both Santa Claus and Hiram Abiff is a growing process by which we arrive at the true meaning of each legend.

Another parallel to Santa can be seen in how Hiram Abiff was killed and how Santa Claus "dies" in our minds. We are told that Hiram was struck in the throat, the place of our voice. Is it not by word of mouth from our school classmates or older siblings that Santa Claus is also first struck?

Hiram was also struck in the chest or heart, the place of our affections. Once our suspicions about Santa are confirmed by our parents or our own sensibility, it usually ends up breaking the child's heart. We are growing up, but who among us doesn't wish that Santa really exists, as we first perceived him?

Finally, Hiram received a blow to the head, the place of our intellect. Similarly, children who are aware of the true nature of Santa kill the jolly old elf in the minds of those who still believe in him by ridiculing, with blistering logic, until finally there is no belief left. After that, it is only with personal growth and acquired wisdom that a person can arrive at a full realization of the true symbolism of Santa Claus. This understanding takes time, thought, and guidance from others. But this eventual understanding is what actually inspires us to perpetuate the Santa Claus myth with our own children. And so, the cycle continues. Santa Claus, like Hiram Abiff, has life after death, albeit a different life. Is it any wonder that the Christmas tree, like the acacia, is evergreen, and lives on from year to year?

Finally, how did you first hear about Santa Claus, and Hiram Abiff? You heard it from a person who cared about you and wanted to share a wonderful tradition with you. They probably enjoyed sharing it as much as you enjoyed receiving it. Both legends are perpetuated and passed along from generation to generation by word of mouth from parents to children, and likewise from a brother Mason to a candidate.

Yes, while St. Nichols and Hiram were two actual historic figures, their lives inspired two legends that have lived for centuries and enriched the lives of those who sought to learn from them. They were indeed two very different men, but their legends contain what I think are some amazing parallels. I believe that we can become better men and Masons by following their examples. After all, isn't that why we are here...isn't that why we became Masons?

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Another nugget from the Quarry...