

Belznickel and Christkindl

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We know that in the Schwabian dialect prominent among the Germans in South Russia, the name for Belznickel was earlier "Pelzemaerde." (This is what Alfred Opp and his family called Belznickel). The figure later became amalgamated with St. Nicholas, but originally, they were two separate characters. St. Nicolas' day was Dec 6 (Nicolaus Tag).

The Catholic Encyclopedia has a write-up on Christmas traditions that shed some light on Belznickel and Christkindl.

The term "Pelzmartel" was the old Germanic name for the god Woden. Woden's wife was called Berchta.

Woden was a terrible, vindictive, evil god, but his wife was sweet and nice. They would descend, together, to the earth for 12 nights beginning December 25, until January 6.

The frightened Germanic peoples would build bonfires of evergreen trees on the hilltops to "welcome" Woden and his wife Berchta, so that they would bless and not curse the earth (in other words, Berchta's "niceness" would prevail over Woden's evil nature).

Anything to do with a goat, especially goats horns, and black faces in old mythology represents the devil. In fact, in the Old Testament, the word used for demons and the devil is the word for "goat." Demons were considered to have goat-like faces. (Remember the old picture of the devil with a goat-face, a pitchfork and a long tail?)

Surely Christkindl, though the name translates as "Christ Child," is none other than Woden's wife, Berchta. This figure was always played by an adult female. Jesus Christ was never an adult female. "Christ Kindl" is the "Christianized" name given to this figure after the Germanic peoples were "converted."