

How did elves become a part of Christmas?

Unlike Santa Claus—or Saint Nicholas—elves didn't have a similar original image in Christianity. So how did these industrious elves become associated with Christmas?

Elves are traditionally considered supporting characters in the Christmas story, but in the 21st century, they've stolen all the spotlight. Santa's helpers now appear in hit movies, are part of iconic Christmas decorations, and watch over us from our bookshelves. Unlike Santa Claus—or Saint Nicholas—elves didn't have a similar original Christian image. **So how did these hardworking elves become associated with Christmas?**



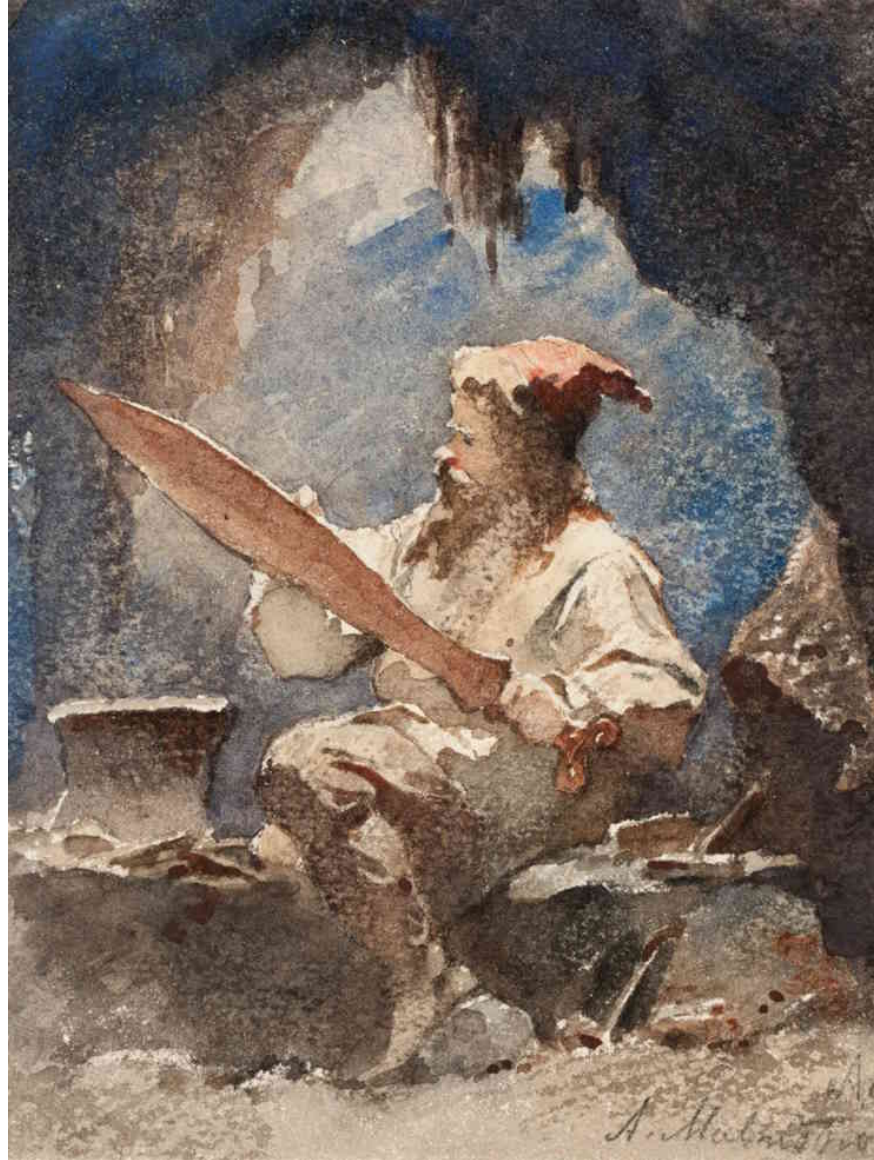
Playful and gentle

If you don't picture tiny toy makers in the Arctic when you think of elves, you might think of the jungle creatures from European fairy tales. The English word "elf" comes from *álfar* in ancient Norse mythology. These folk characters predate Christmas figures by hundreds of years.

Although *álfar* are often considered the earliest elves in history, they differed significantly from the fantastical creatures we know today. They didn't make shoes or toys while wearing pointed hats. Norse elves weren't even short. Another name for *álfar* is *huldufólk*, or "*hermit people*," and they are believed to live in an invisible realm between worlds. Furthermore, there isn't a single set of specific characteristics to define this creature in mythology. Ancient Norse peoples likely envisioned them as resembling humans.

Legends of humanoid creatures living in the shadows of our world quickly spread throughout pre-Christian Europe. In Scotland, there were tiny creatures that could help with housework or make a mess, depending on their mood. Similarly, the German Kobold was sometimes helpful, sometimes mischievous, much like the

Swedish Tomte.



A literary legend

In "*The Skeletons and the Shoemaker*," the Brothers Grimm portray these mischievous, often stereotypical creatures from a more positive perspective. The 1812 fairy tale tells of a poor shoemaker trying to finish his work before Christmas. His business is saved by selfless elves who visit his shop at night and make shoes for him while he sleeps. Although Santa Claus doesn't appear, this story may be the first popular culture depiction of elves in a workshop during the holiday season.

Not long after the story was published, one of the most influential poems about the modern Christmas legend emerged. The 1823 work, "*A Visit from St. Nicholas*"—more widely known as "*Christmas Eve*"—helped shape the image of Santa Claus and the tradition of giving gifts at Christmas. The story also refers to St. Nicholas as "*a cheerful gnome*"—a phrase that associates magical creatures with the holiday.

Over 30 years later, the author of *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott, wrote a collection of short stories titled *Christmas Elves*. Although some claim she was the creator of the "*Santa's Servants*" legend, this claim is unproven: *Christmas Elves* was never published and the manuscript has been lost over time, meaning that scholars know very little about it beyond its title.

An 1857 poem published in *Harper's Weekly* likely contributed to solidifying the image of Christmas elves in popular culture. Titled "*The Wonders of Santa Claus*," the poem tells of a team of elves "*all working hard/To create millions of beautiful things/Cake, plums and toys/To fill the stockings of little boys and girls*." By the early 20th century, the concept of hardworking Christmas elves had become popular enough to be reimagined by Norman Rockwell and Walt Disney.

Famous elves in Christmas

For many children today, Christmas elves are as recognizable as Santa Claus himself. They are often dressed in furry costumes with pointed hats and gold-buckle belts—a style popularized by Rankin/Bass's 1964 cartoon *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* and reimagined in *Elf* (2003). Buddy the Elf's costume is so similar to the cartoon's that the production team had to obtain legal permission to use it.

Movies aren't the only place these characters appear. From commercials to store decorations from December onwards, you'll easily spot them. These goblins are more harmless than their original counterparts in ancient folklore, but they haven't lost their mischievous nature.

You finished reading the article "**How did elves become a part of Christmas?**" edited by the [TipsMake](#) team. We hope this article has provided you with many useful tech tips and tricks. You can search for similar articles on tips and guides. Thank you for reading and for following us regularly.