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Saint Nicholas

The Real Story of the Man behind the Beard

by the Rev. Alvin J. Horton

Over 1,700 years ago, in the year 280 AD, a baby was born in a far-off village called Patara of Lycia, in a land we now call Turkey. The child was named Nicholas, which means "people's victor." He was certainly a victor for his parents because they had long wanted a baby but were unable to bring one into the world. They were wealthy but poor in spirit because they did not have a child to love. They vowed that if God would grant them a child then they would dedicate his life to God's purpose.

time his mother placed him there. Others say he was so religious that even as an infant he refused his mother's milk on days set aside for fasting.

He would later become Bishop of Myra, not far from the town where he was born. He was present at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 AD when the Church adopted the Nicene Creed.

When Nicholas was a young child, his parents became sick and they died, leaving him to be raised by his uncle, a bishop in the early Church. There he was surrounded by the love of priests and sisters

**The child of wealthy parents,
Nicholas learned at an early age to be
generous with what he was given.
He wanted to be like Jesus.**

From the beginning people said Nicholas seemed to be special, a child destined for greatness. Some say he stood up in his bathwater all by himself the very first

who reminded him how much his parents loved him, and he learned about Jesus who taught him to become generous and loving. He began to give away the wealth he had inherited from



his parents, doing so in secret. He wanted to be like Jesus.

A story is told of how he went to the home of a man who had three daughters and who was in great need of money. The father was poor and his daughters were fast approaching a time when they would no longer be able to marry, lacking the funds for a proper dowry. Hearing of their sadness, Nicholas went to their home in the darkness of night and threw a bag of gold through their open window.

Some say he threw the bag down their chimney, and the bag landed in a stocking hanging on the mantle to dry (a possible explanation for our Christmas stockings today).

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*“Saint Nicholas Providing Dowries”
by Bicci di Lorenzo (1433-35).*

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The next morning, the father found the bag of gold and was thrilled. He wondered who would be so generous with their wealth. Each time another daughter reached the age of marriage, Nicholas, as it is told, was there in the night, to toss into their home another bag of gold. Eventually, the three bags of gold would be transformed by story-tellers and become bags of toys, and he soon became the Patron Saint of Children.

Over the centuries, the three golden balls, representing the three bags of gold, have become a symbol of Saint Nicholas and his kindness; and you will often find in paintings of him those three golden spheres.

Another story that was often told of Nicholas was that of him watching another man hide in his cane the money he owed another man who had lent it to him. When it came time to repay the debt,

the man who borrowed the money placed the cane in the hand of the man he owed. “I’m sorry, that’s all I have,” the debtor said. When he was taken to court for not paying his debt, he told the judge, “I have paid the debt. I put into his hand the money I owed.” As he left the courthouse, the man was struck by a cart and died. The cane was broken in the accident and the money inside spilled all over the street. Some say Nicholas appeared, brought the man back to life, and restored the money to its rightful owner.



Right: St. Nicholas enters Amsterdam on Dec. 6.

From then on Saint Nicholas became the Patron Saint of Bankers and Pawnbrokers, because he had become a symbol of honest and trustworthy business.

That’s why to this day you can find his three golden balls on the signs of pawnbrokers everywhere.

People all over the world came to love Nicholas. However, everyone did not appreciate the kindly bishop. During the Reformation in 1531, any mention of his name was banned. And the Puritans banned the singing of Christmas carols and the use of candles. So, people changed his name. People in England called him Father Christmas; in France they called him Pere Noel; in Germany he was known as Kris Kringle (German for “Christ Child”); and in Russia people called him Father Frost.

To this day, the people of Amsterdam in the Netherlands celebrate Saint Nicholas Day on December 6 (the anniversary of his death),

and the saint arrives on a ship in the harbor and parades into town on a white horse.

Eventually, Dutch settlers brought his stories to the New World, specifically to New York (which was originally called New Amsterdam). One of the earliest churches built in New York was the Saint Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church that was destroyed when the World Trade Center fell on 9-11.

When the Dutch told their stories of their saint, Americans misunderstood their pronunciation of “Saint Nicholas” and thought they were calling him “Sant-Nick-Clahs.”

Soon people everywhere in America were calling him Santa Claus, simply a mispronunciation of the bishop’s name, Saint Nicholas. I suppose you might say Saint Nicholas is the grandfather of that jolly ol’ elf, Santa.

In 1809 Washington Irving wrote a tongue-in-cheek history of New York in which he good-naturedly mocked the Dutch saint. In Irving’s satirical history, Nicholas is depicted as a little elf, riding a wagon pulled by a goat. He flies over rooftops presenting presents to children, smokes a long pipe, and is otherwise patterned after Thor, the pagan god of peasants and commoners.

(continued on page 3)



(continued from page 2)

In 1822, with Irving's popular satire still in circulation, Dr. Clement Moore wrote a poem for his children called "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" in which Nicholas is described as a tiny elf who could slide down chimneys. But now he is no longer in a wagon; he is in a sleigh pulled by eight tiny reindeer. When Moore's poem was officially published in 1848, it was illustrated with the pen and ink drawings of T.C. Boyd.

In the 1860's, *Harper's Weekly* published a series of drawings by Thomas Nast that showed Nicholas with a bit more weight. He was now larger, but he still smoked a pipe, climbed down chimneys, and had no color except that of black ink on white paper.



Above ad for Coca-Cola painted by Haddon Sundblom (1920).

It was not until the 1920's that Saint Nicholas, now widely known in America as Santa Claus, finally got his red color. In a series of ads for the Coca-Cola company, Haddon Sundblom

painted the full-blown, life-sized Santa we know today. His red color was so synonymous with the product he advertised, the Coca-Cola Company tried to patent the color but eventually failed.

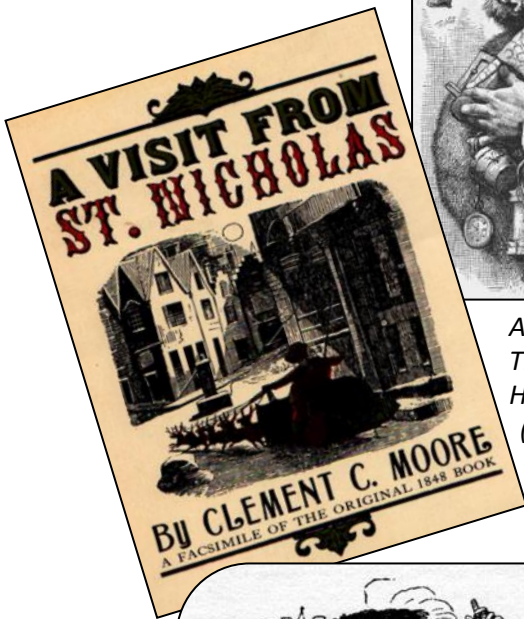
So, now you know "the rest of the story." Saint Nicholas of Patara, Bishop of Myra, is the man behind the beard. He learned to give to others by learning how God gives to us.

He never forgot his beginnings in a little village a lot closer to Bethlehem than we are today. Saint Nicholas would never want us to think he is more important than the gift that God gave to the world on that first Christmas Day. For Saint Nicholas, and his grandson Santa Claus,

Christ will always be at the heart of Christmas. □



Above illustration by Thomas Nast in *Harper's Weekly* (1860).



Above illustration by T.C. Boyd in "A Visit from Saint Nicholas" by Clement Moore (1848).



"Every Knee Shall Bow" by Gaye Frances Willard.

The painting is based on Philippians 2:11.

“Klaus” the Animated Movie

A Santa Origin Story that Will Make You Cry

A Review by Kirsten Acuna
(Insider, November 10, 2019)



I went into "Klaus" wondering why we needed an animated holiday movie about the origin of Santa Claus. By the time the 98-minute movie concluded, I found myself sobbing and couldn't stop.

That probably won't be everyone's reaction to Netflix's first foray into full-length animated features, but it goes without saying that "Klaus" is something special and a testament to director Sergio Pablos' storytelling ability.

The film follows Jesper, a spoiled postman (Jason Schwartzman) who's given an ultimatum: start a post office in the Arctic Circle or

be cut off from the family's fortune. As he's about to throw in the towel, Jesper befriends a reclusive toy man Klaus (J.K. Simmons). The unexpected friendship inadvertently helps transform a broken village ravaged by years of internal fighting while starting to thaw Jesper's own selfish outlook on life.

You may not recognize director Pablos by name, but you know the projects he has worked on: "The Hunchback of Notre

Dame," and "Tarzan," for example.

The former Disney animator, who created the "Despicable Me" franchise, tried getting 2D animated "Klaus" made on and off for about 10 years. After getting passed over by big studios, Netflix acquired the global rights to the film in 2017.

What's really special about "Klaus" is how cleverly Pablos grounds the

origins of Santa's mythology in reality without ever saying his name. Kids and adults alike will smile as they see how rituals such as leaving cookies out for Santa and writing letters to the man in the red suit are effortlessly inserted into the movie.

Pablos gives another layer to Kris Kringle by giving him a somber back story that will have you fighting back tears.

Funny, sweet, and beautiful to watch, "Klaus" has the makings of a holiday classic. It's a story about finding your place in the world, while reminding us to embrace our differences and be a bit nicer to those around us.

Make sure to have a few tissues nearby.

Available to watch on Netflix

In Memoriam



Remembering those who have died since our last report in August 2023

Retired Clergy

Eugene F. Thomas (5/19/45) RE	August 14, 2023
Hugh E. Nichols (9/8/29) RE	August 18, 2023
Bruce C. Pfeiffer (6/5/32) RE	August 20, 2023
William T. Greer Jr. (7/28/42) RE	August 30, 2023
Albert L. Crockett (8/8/32) RA	September 20, 2023
James W. Martin (10/14/38) RL	September 28, 2023
Pamela C. Egan (12/31/53) RE	October 2, 2023
James W. Thornton Sr. (1/7/45) RE	October 2, 2023
Vinson H. Sutlive (10/29/32) RE	October 4, 2023
Hugh T. Harris (3/20/37) RE	November 11, 2023

Active Clergy

Richard C. Franklin (11/24/50) PLP*	June 15, 2022
Dale E. Gillis (3/3/59) FE*	July 28, 2022
Douglas D. Gestwick (1/2/1958) FE*	May 24, 2023
Donald W. Baldwin (6/30/1961) FL*	July 26, 2023

Widows/Widowers of Deceased Clergy

Louise C. Randall (Rev. Harry B. Randall)	July 26, 2023
Blanche Scott (Rev. C. Richard Scott)	August 13, 2023
Maxine E. Rollins (Rev. Milford C. Rollins)	August 27, 2023

*Not reported earlier

A Collection of Saints

by Margaret Hamilton

It was in the early to mid-1980's that friends and family began painting Santas and gifting them to me. By the time our daughters had their own homes, I had over two dozen figurines and ornaments of various Santas from a farmer with a pig to a festive Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra. They now reside in three homes and are loved by granddaughters and friends alike.

Although a strong believer in the real meaning of Christmas, I also believe a child has never been "scarred for life" by believing in Santa. It is part of the secular magic of Christmas. As "theological offspring," our daughters learned well why we celebrate Christmas, and yet they still went to see Santa. One Santa we visited in Northern Virginia sat in a sleigh with a nativity beside him, and he explained to each child why we

celebrate Christmas. He managed to tie it all together in a very beautiful way.

In the middle 1980's, the Horton Family became part of our church family at Mt. Pisgah UMC in Midlothian. Al shared with my husband, who was the pastor then, how he was able to explain the evolution of Saint Nicholas to Santa Claus by portraying in costume the bishop himself. If you have not seen this portrayal, it is amazing.

Our family knew of St. Nicholas Day but not in the depth Al brought to our church. It was a magical day for our congregation, so it was repeated at our next three appointments. After each portrayal members of our churches gave us ornaments and figurines of some type of Santa. On our tree is an ornament of "Santa and the Christ Child." I read that book to many children over the years.

Every year we look forward to displaying them as we did each time Al portrayed the bishop. I can tell you the name of the giver or creator of each, and they bring us pleasant memories of years past. They are scattered about our homes, separated from the nativity which has its own special place.

I hope you will share the story of the birth of our Savior as the real meaning of Christmas. But make sure you find room in your heart and life to tie it all together with a big bow of love and giving to others, especially the less fortunate. A side note of humor, each year our granddaughters (now 12, 16, and 18) take great delight in placing some form of coal or "naughty" candy in the toe of granddaddy's stocking! Now, that always makes for a very Merry Christmas!



2024 ARMS Leadership Team Elected

At the October 11-12 ARMS Retreat, the following people were elected to serve as the Leadership Team for the coming year. If you have questions, or would like to offer suggestions, please contact Keith Mottley at keith.mottley@comcast.net or (540) 760-4376:

Co-Presidents:

Keith & Linda Mottley

Co-Vice Presidents:

Kathy Talley & Bob Blinn

Secretary:

Judy Mann

Treasurer:

Betty Jo Sims

Co-Past Presidents:

Steve & Susan Hassmer

Pinnacle Living Rep.:

Charles Wickham

At-Large Members:

Larry & Nancy Tingle ('24)

Bobbie Kay Wash ('24)

Doug Paysour ('24)

Jim & Molly Sprouse ('24)

Ed & Marian Garrett ('25)

Nancy Cunningham Harris ('25)

Laurice Jones-Wilks ('25)

Sunshine Correspondent:

Susan Hassmer

Newsletter Editor:

Al Horton

Retreat Registrar:

Keary Kincannon

Retreat Coordinators:

Bob Blinn & Kathy Talley



Pictured at left are just a few of Margaret Hamilton's collection of St. Nicholas figurines.



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Historically, Advent was preparation for baptism

Advent was developed as a season of the church year in the late 4th century and widely practiced across Christian churches worldwide by the 6th century. The season was primarily to provide an alternative time for the final preparation of candidates for baptism.

A second season was needed after the Roman Emperor Theodosius made Christianity the legal religion of the Roman Empire in 380 AD and the vast majority of citizens sought to become Christian. A single season could not accommodate all of those preparing for baptism.

Advent means "coming" or "arrival." The focus of Advent is on Christian life now in light of the culmination of all things at Christ's second coming.

By focusing on last things, baptismal candidates were reminded of the need for Christ to come again to make all things new as they prepared to begin their new lives in Christ.

Baptism would typically occur at Epiphany, the end of the Christmas Season when Christians remember the coming of the Magi and celebrate the baptism of Jesus. This is why many older baptismal fonts include depictions of the Magi bringing gifts.

Advent was part of the practice of John Wesley's Church of England. When he revised the liturgical calendar for use by American Methodists in 1784, he kept Advent and its four Sundays.

However, the cultural practices of Christmas since then have impacted Advent in our

congregations. Christmas was no longer the 12 days beginning with Christmas Eve. Instead, it had become the nearly 30 days from American Thanksgiving to Christmas Eve, and the focus shifted to the birth of Jesus.

By 1992, United Methodist liturgy and Advent-specific hymns helped United Methodists understand and reclaim the original focus of Advent on the second coming of Christ. We can help others prepare for baptism as we contemplate the destiny of the universe when Christ comes in glory and then, during the Christmas Season, celebrate the gift of new birth as we remember the birth of God with us.

Excerpted from "Ask The UMC" on the website, www.umc.org.