

Saint Nicholas, Bishop

Early in the Advent season celebrate a feast that has been popular for centuries in Christian countries, especially in Northern Europe. In our over-commercialized society, this holiday gives us a good "teaching moment" to remind children that Jolly Santa Claus, is, in fact, Saint Nicholas, a fourth century bishop of the city of Myra in what is now Turkey.

Saint Nicholas was renowned for his great kindness and his generous aid to those in distress. Among the kind and miraculous acts attributed to him are saving three young girls from prostitution by secretly providing them with dowries, raising three murdered boys from the dead, and saving sailors caught in stormy seas. For these reasons, he is considered the patron saint of children, unmarried girls, and sailors, among others.



Traditional celebrations of Saint Nicholas Day in Northern Europe included gifts left in children's shoes (the origin of our American Christmas stockings). Good children receive treats - candies, cookies, apples and nuts, while naughty children receive switches or lumps of coal. Sometimes coins were left in the shoes, reminiscent of the the life-saving doweries the saint provided. Today - especially in families of German extraction - children still put a shoe outside their bedroom doors on the eve of Saint Nicholas Day, and expect to find candy and coins or small gifts in their shoe on December 19th.

In some households the father of the family may dress up as Saint Nicholas on the eve of his feast. He comes in, sometimes with his sidekick, Krampus or Black Peter, and helps each child examine his conscience. He admonishes the bad and rewards the good. If your family enjoys theatrics, this is a wonderful opportunity early in Advent to inspire children to amend their ways in preparation for the coming King. (Your family might get together with other families with young children and celebrate together.)

Prayers and Scripture Readings for Saint Nicholas Day

Collect for the Feast of Saint Nicholas
O God, Who didst adorn blessed Nicholas,
the bishop, with miracles unnumbered,
grant, we beseech Thee, that by his merits
and prayer we may be delivered from the
fire of hell. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

First reading: Isaiah 6:1-8

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and His train filled the temple. Above Him stood the seraphim; each had six wings: with two He covered His face, and with two He covered His feet, and with two He flew. And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory." And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of Him who called, and the house was filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

Then flew one of the Seraphim to me; having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven." And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me."

Gospel reading: Luke 10:1-9

After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of Him, two by two, into every town and place where He Himself was about to come. And He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and salute no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house!' And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you. And remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages; do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you; heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.'