



*Jolly Old St. Nicholas:
Meet the REAL Santa Claus!*
“St. Nicholas: A Contender for Christ”
John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:15-19



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First Place: Enola First Church of God

Introduction

How many of you remember the “Praying Santa” that I introduced to you 3 weeks ago? I’d like to introduce him to you again to refresh your memory and to let you in on something else about this particular Santa.

[View Video: “Cliff Snider Part2”]

It’s encouraging to meet a Santa Claus and find out that he truly and sincerely believes in Jesus Christ! Did you know that the real Santa Claus, St. Nicholas of Myra had a very strong faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? He stood strong for Christ in the face of tremendous adversity. He was a Contender for Christ! My question for us today is this: “Are we willing to be contenders for Christ? When we come up against false doctrines about Christ, should others try to get us to renounce Christ or tempt us in a way to weaken our faith in Him, will we stand strong?”

-And, as you can imagine, there is a Christmas connection to all of this. Let’s start with that first.

1) No Christ No Christmas

There are a lot of people out there that want to celebrate Christmas without celebrating Christmas. What? They are very content to take every shred of the message of Christ out of Christmas.

-That’s as ridiculous an idea as saying:

-“I’m going to become a mechanic and open a garage

but I'm not going to work on cars—or trucks—or tractors or anything.

-Or, "Let's get a bunch of us together to go out for supper but we're not going to eat anything!"

-So, to make it clear as a bell, even though many of us have heard this hundreds or even thousands of times before, here's what Christmas is all about:

-Luke 2:1-14

-That's why I say, "No Christ, No Christmas."

-You can get together this Friday and in the tradition of Jerry Stiller from the old Seinfeld episodes celebrate "Festivus for the Rest of Us" replete with an unadorned aluminum pole and an "Airing of the Grievances" family dinner but don't call it "Christmas" because there's no connection to Christ.

2) **Know Christmas Know Christ**

Now speaking of that wonderful story in Luke 2 that we just read, do you know what really happened there? Is it merely an every-day story about a mom having a baby?

-It's not! This story is special because the baby born was special. He was a fully human baby, to be sure, but He was also fully God.

-Let's look what really happened in the Christmas story and by so doing, come to know better who this Jesus Christ really is.

-John 1:1-4

The Word is JESUS CHRIST – Thin of it this way: "In the beginning was Jesus and Jesus was with God and Jesus was God.

-Genesis 1:1, 26 tell us something else about the beginning: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...And God said "Let us make man in our image."

"Let us" Who was God talking to?

-God the Father was talking to the "Word" - the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

-You may think, "Now why didn't He just say Jesus?" Probably because the word, "WORD" is a good

description: The word, "Word" to the ancient people literally meant, "Agent of Creation" (Psalm 33:6), "God's message" (Ezekiel 34:1-2), "God's law" (Psalm 119:11), and other things

-In Him was LIFE. - **1 Corinthians 15:22** - For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.

-So do you see Who exactly this was who came into the world on Christmas Day? It was God Himself, coming in the Person of Jesus Christ.

Another Scripture for some more insight:

-Colossians 1:15-19

-v. 15 – "The image of the invisible God" - If you want to know about God, look to Jesus, because Jesus is God - He is the absolutely accurate image of God.

-"firstborn" – Now many have looked at this phrase and argued that Jesus was "firstborn" as a created being and therefore could not be God. The term "firstborn" can refer to being born first chronologically, but it primarily refers to position and rank. In the Greek and Jewish cultures, the first-born was the son who had the right of inheritance. He was not necessarily the first one born. Even though Esau was born before Jacob, it was Jacob who was the "firstborn" and received the inheritance. Jesus is the one with the right of inheritance of all creation.

-v. 16 - Jesus was co-creator with God the Father. Sounds like God to me!

-v. 17 - Jesus is described not only as the creator of the Universe, but also the sustainer of the Universe; He holds it together. Gee, if Jesus isn't God, I wonder how He sustains the Universe?

-v. 18 - As the head of the church, Jesus is the "firstborn" from among the dead. He is the conqueror of death. Who else could do this but God? Also, after He conquered death, He was raised to the loftiest point - He has the supremacy. Doesn't that sound like God?

-v. 19 - As a human being, Jesus was also fully Divine, because all of the fullness of the Deity dwelt in Him.

-So you see, when we know—that is REALLY know the

details of the Christmas story—that is, what really happened on Christmas Day, when we realize that this baby born to Mary in that wonderful story is both fully human and fully God, it helps us appreciate just exactly who this Jesus is!

3) Know Nicholas Who Contended for Christ with No Compromises

-Everything we just talked about – Nicholas believed it. He stood strong for Christ in the face of opposition and he stood up for the truth when someone was teaching false doctrines about Christ.

- Nicholas was born into a wealthy Christian home in what is now Turkey.

-When he was 18 years old, both of his parents died. But that didn't stop him from being a passionate follower of Jesus. Rather, he went on to serve God and became a Bishop in the Church at Myra when he was about 35 years old. That would have been around the year 305 A.D.

-At that time, the Emperor of the Roman Empire was a wicked man named Diocletian. Under his rule, the Empire was constantly in trouble. Diocletian wanted to know what or who was the root cause of this trouble. A pagan priest revealed to Emperor Diocletian that it was the Christians. They were the cause of all of the troubles.

-So in February of 303 A.D., Diocletian ordered that all copies of Scriptures be burned, churches be torn down brick by brick and that Christians cease and desist from gathering for worship.

-Now again, that was in 303 A.D. Nicholas became a bishop around 305 A.D., so guess what: Trouble was looming for him.

-Quickly after Nicholas settled into his ministry routine, he was arrested on religious charges and taken to prison. When he refused to renounce his faith in Jesus Christ, he was subjected to torments of various kinds.

-Through it all, Nicholas counted himself to be blessed because he was “only” tortured; he wasn't put to death

like the Bishop in his home town of Patara was.

-That's being a contender for Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself said, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." – Matthew 5:11

-After the reign of Diocletian, another Emperor came to power named Constantine. Unlike his predecessor, Constantine declared toleration for Christians. In fact, he announced himself to be a disciple of Christ and legalized Christianity throughout the empire. To this day, scholars debate whether or not this was a good thing for the Christian church.

-The Church itself was struggling with doctrinal disputes at that time; one of which was, "Who is Jesus Christ?"

-A clergyman named Arius argued that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, but that He was not equal to God. Jesus Christ did not share the same divine nature as God the Father. He taught that Jesus was a created being and as such He was inferior to God the Father.

-So a big council was called together at a place called Nicaea, also in modern-day Turkey. 200-300 bishops were gathered together for a great debate regarding this matter. Arius passionately argued that Jesus was not Divine in the same way that God the Father was.

Another theologian, Alexander, argued that yes, Jesus Christ is Divine in the same way God the Father is.

-Through much prayer, wrestling of thoughts and the working of the Holy Spirit, those men of God came to consensus and that consensus they reached was the God-given Biblical truth, a truth that we proclaim to this day: Jesus Christ is fully man and fully God. They crafted a statement which is actually in our hymnal called "The Nicene Creed."

-From the beginning, before the consensus was reached, that's what Nicholas believed and continued to believe.

-Not Arius. He continued to believe that Jesus Christ was inferior to God.

-How did Nicholas respond? One legend says he was

so angry at Arius that he walked up in front of all the other clergy and smacked Arius in the face.

-The truth of the matter was that he contended for Christ.

-Here's how: Another clergyman there named Theognis who agreed with the Council that Jesus was fully man and fully God, but he felt that Arius should still be allowed to teach what he was teaching.

-Nicholas wrote letters to him and patiently persuaded him to go along with what was right.

-The verse he quoted: "See how good and pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity."

-He contended for the truth of the Person of Jesus Christ; and did it in a loving way!

-Give me a guy like that.

Closing

-I've come across a lot of Santa Claus's throughout the years and I really don't know what they believed about Jesus Christ.

-Tim Allen in "The Santa Clause 1, 2 and 3"

-The Night Before Christmas – silent about St. Nick

-The guy I saw dressed as Santa just the other day.

-But as for the real Santa Claus, St. Nicholas of Myra, I know where he stood. He was a Contender for Jesus Christ.

-According to His example and more importantly, following the truths of God's word, let us be Contenders for Jesus Christ: Standing strong in the face of adversity and helping others understand the truth of who this One is who came into the world on Christmas Day: God in the flesh, fully man and fully God.