



*Jolly Old St. Nicholas:  
Meet the REAL Santa Claus!*  
**“St. Nicholas: A Critic of Idol Worship”**  
Exodus 20:3-6; John 4:23



**First Time:** December 27, 2015

**First Place:** Enola First Church of God

### **Introduction**

*How many of you remember the Christmas movie that came out 11 years ago, The Polar Express? You may remember that the signature song in that movie was “Believe” by Josh Groban. Sing that song to yourself (or listen to it sometime).*

-That’s a very nice song, isn’t it? There’s only one problem with it. If you listen to the song, the entire song, it’s not clear at all what you are to believe in. If I am to believe that means that I am to put my faith in someone or something. There has to be an object of that faith. So since this song encourages us to just “believe” but doesn’t tell us what to believe in, is it o.k. for me to believe in anything?

-The Bible tells us that “There is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.” Therefore, if I choose to believe in someone or something else besides Jesus Christ as the object of my faith or my god, I am committing idol worship. What does the Bible have to say about this? That’s what we will look at today. And as a bonus, we’ll get to see what the REAL St. Nicholas had to say about it as well!

### **1) The Scriptural Prohibition Against Idol Worship**

-Exodus 20:3-6

Well, there you have it. It needs very little explanation. Idol worship is a No-No; God wants us to worship Him.

-Now I have to admit, I have yet to drive around East Pennsboro Township and find someone out in their back yard with a pile of wood and tape measures,

hammers, circular saws and nails pounding together some large giant statue of someone or something for people to come to in order to bow down and worship. If someone were to do that, I wonder they would build? I doubt it would be a statue of Richard Simmons or Stephen Colbert or Donald Trump.

-No, people aren't building statues or tiki poles in their back yards around here but trust me, idolatry is alive and doing well.

### **Illustration**

*Pastor James Emery White of churchandculture.org says this: "Whatever you love most, serve most, seek out most, give to the most, worship the most, and care about the most is your god. Your "god" can be your career, your bank account, the way you look, a particular position or degree, influence, power, or physical pleasure. It can even be something that is considered intrinsically good, yet you allow it to dominate your life more than God."*<sup>1</sup>

### **-John 4:23**

Jesus made it clear that when people are truly worshiping God, not an idol, but God the Father, we will be able to recognize it by how they are doing it:

-In Spirit. That's the joyful part that involves our emotions. Frankly, I get a bit concerned around here sometimes. When we sing the hymns or choruses and I look out into the crowd, I notice that some of you completely keep your mouths shut looking either bored or bullheaded like 4-year-old kid who won't eat his green beans. If I'm talking to you today you better go home, take inventory of what's going on in here and ask yourself, "Why am I sitting there with my mouth shut?" Maybe there's something else you're worshiping and you can't give your praise to God – maybe your own pride, nursing a hurt, or whatever.

-In truth: Yes we are to be excited when we worship

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/god-is-to-be-feared-steve-shepherd-sermon-on-gods-judgment-173146.asp>

God, but we're not supposed to get all wound up and act like a nut.

-Worshiping in spirit and in truth. That's what God wants us to do.

## 2) **The St. Nicholas Connection to Idol Worship**

a) Good news from the life of St. Nicholas of Myra

-St. Nicholas of Myra was born in 270 A.D. into a wealthy Christian home in the southern part of what is now Turkey. He grew up to be a passionate follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

-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 as a Bishop in the Church at Myra.

-While serving as Bishop, he secretly gave a portion of his inherited wealth to a destitute family so that their three daughters could marry and be rescued from being sent into a life of prostitution.

-He died December 6, 340 A.D. Since his death came during the Advent Season, he became associated with the Christmas season. He and his tradition of generosity paved the way for the various Santa Claus traditions that we see to this very day.

-As bishop, one of Nicholas' tasks was to help people turn away from idol worship to the worship of the One true eternal god.

-In the region where Nicholas ministered, there was this generational problem of idol worship that just wouldn't go away. For generations, the people gave their allegiance to the goddess, Artemis. It was believed that she kept a watchful eye and a gentle hand on every link in the food chain, from the farmer who planted the seed to bakers who baked bread.<sup>2</sup>

In ignorance, the religious people of that time would thank the goddess Artemis for her generous provisions, not knowing that, "every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the

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<sup>2</sup> The Saint Who Would Be Santa Claus. p. 23.

Father of the heavenly lights.” (James 1:17)

-This problem had been going on for hundreds of years all the way back to the time of Paul the Apostle. You can read in Acts 19 about the time when Paul went to Ephesus and people came to know Christ forsaking Artemis causing a great shake-up to the economy and an uproar there.

-In Nicholas’ time, the idolatrous worship of Artemis was a problem. The people loved the festivals, traditions and all the benefits that came through the worship of Artemis. Even when people became Christians, they had a hard time forsaking these practices and giving their whole hearts and minds to Christ.

-Nicholas courageously spoke against this worship of a false goddess. He did not confine his message to preaching in churches, but he took his message to the villages and the roadside markets.

-He did not use violence against anyone, but relied on the invisible weapons of prayer and righteousness and armed himself with hope and firm confidence.<sup>3</sup>

-You see, this man of God knew that there is one God and One mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, and only He is worthy of our worship.

-He was a critic of idol worship.

b) Bad news from the legends of Santa Claus

-Unfortunately, there's a dark side to the legend of Santa Claus. As the stories and legends of St. Nicholas were re-told and embellished down through the ages, various traditions about Santa Claus evolved that had pagan, occultic and even idolatrous influences.

-The Vikings believed that their god, Odin took on a different character for each month of the year. His character for December was known as, "Yule," and

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<sup>3</sup> The Saint Who Would Be Santa Claus. p. 120.

the month was known as "Yuletide." Thus, we have the tradition of "Yuletide carols being sung by a choir."

-By the way, to this day, there are clusters of earth worshippers or pagan believers who celebrate the holiday of Yule rather than Christmas.

-It was believed that Odin, coming in December as "Yule," would go about the earth in a long, blue hooded cloak carrying a satchel of bread. He was often accompanied by a raven. Yule (or Odin) would join groups of people sitting around a fire and listen if people were happy or not. He would often leave the loaves of bread at the homes of poor people - so it was believed.

-Here we go again, a good generous man going around in December giving out gifts; it's a re-molding of the Nicholas story into something it wasn't meant to be.

-Today, it continues in a different way: When in December, families, consciously or even unconsciously make these legendary Christmas figures of elves, reindeer, Rudolph and Santa Claus more important than the Lord Jesus Christ and the story of how He came into this world on Christmas Day, those families are leading their children down a path of idol worship. Period. It's not about Santa Claus. It's about Christ.

### **3) A Christmas Story Destruction of Idol Worship**

#### **a) *Matthew 2:1-11***

-These wise men or "Magi" coming to find the Christ child were part of a priestly group of people. Not a group of priests to the most High God, but priests of some sort of pagan religion. We know this because that's what the word, "magi" or "magoi" in the Greek means. These magi functioned as the religious, civil, and political counselors to the kings of Media and Persia. They were schooled in science, religion, astrology and even the occult.

-So, as star worshippers. But ironically, they knew

about the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning a king who would be born to the Jews. It is very possible that some of their predecessors from the past learned from the prophet Daniel, and man of God who was a prisoner in Babylon but stayed true to God and testified about him there.

-So if you think about it, you have a group of well-educated people who are dabbling in a mix of science, astronomy, astrology, the occult, and a pinch of the message of God's word!

-Doesn't that sound like people today?

-But by the end of this story, these guys get it! They become worshipers of the One True God! How do we know that? By the gifts they give.

-In the Scriptures gold was a symbol for royalty. It and was thus an appropriate gift to give to God the Son.

-Frankincense was a sweet incense that was used in connection with some of the offerings in the Temple, it's aroma rising to God as a prayer.

-Myrrh was an embalming ointment which would be wrapped in the garments of the deceased. It signified the fact that Jesus was born to die. In fact, the wise men are almost prophetic in giving Jesus myrrh.

-Star worshipping occultist practitioners who make a radical change to worship Jesus Christ and recognize Him as King, and God and the One Who came to give His life so that we may live—these guys get it!

-This version of the Christmas story is shows a tremendous victory: people who change from idol worship to the true worship of God!

## **Closing**

-I think it's fitting that since the last of the gospel Christmas accounts speaks of idol worshipers becoming worshipers of Christ, we end this series recognizing that only He is worthy of our worship.

-Anything can become to us an idol, an object of worship,

even Santa Claus.

-I am grateful that the real St. Nicholas was a critic of worship. As we enter into the New Year unaware of what tempting idols may come our way, let us, as Nicholas was, be directed by Scripture and be not just critics of idol worship, but true worshipers that worship God in spirit and in truth.