



*Jolly Old St. Nicholas:
Meet the REAL Santa Claus!*
“St. Nicholas: A Cheerful Giver”
2 Corinthians 9:6-8; 1 John 3:17-18



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First Place: Enola First Church of God

Introduction

You know that old classic, “The Night Before Christmas” by Clement Clarke Moore. When I was in third grade, I memorized the whole thing and my teacher gave me this little book as a reward:

[View Picture: The Night Before Christmas book]

It’s a book containing “The Night Before Christmas.”

I am going to invite you to humor me a minute and let’s say the opening lines of that poem: “Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.”

-Did you ever wonder where that idea came from?

Hanging your socks by the fireplace on Christmas Eve and waiting for this guy to slide down the chimney and fill them – that sounds like a goofy dream someone would have after chowing down on a late night snack that gave you indigestion!

-But actually, this “hang your stockings” tradition evolved from an event in the life of St. Nicholas of Myra; the event that Nicholas is most famous for. He demonstrated what it means to be a generous giver according the principles we find in God’s Word.

1) Being a Cheerful Giver: The Conduct of Nicholas

-You’ve heard of that jolly old elf from the North Pole, Santa Claus, but the real St. Nicholas was born in the

southern part of Turkey in 270 A.D.

-He was born into a wealthy Christian home and grew up to be a passionate follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

-When Nicholas 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.

-His wealthy parents left him a sizable inheritance. But Nicholas didn't allow his inherited wealth to distract him from following Christ. In fact, he used it to perform the biblical act he was most famous for. Let me tell you about that:

-A man living near Nicholas fell into great poverty and distress. Having no food and no provisions, he was desperate. As the father of three beautiful daughters, decided to do something that sounds unthinkable today: He decided to make his daughters prostitutes so that he and his family could survive.

-You may be thinking, "What? What kind of father would ever think of doing something like that?" We need to remember at this time there were no such things as retirement plans, lines of credit or a Department of Public Welfare.

Therefore, the practice of prostituting daughters or selling your children into slavery was not uncommon for those who fell on hard times even though society at that time didn't approve of it.

-When Nicholas heard about this man's predicament, he turned to the Scriptures and meditated on various verses from the Book of Proverbs; those that speak of virtues like charity and caring for the needy.

-So one night, he put some gold coins into a purse, tied it shut and secretly tossed it through an open window into the man's house. When the family found the coins, they rejoiced! The father cried out to God with gratitude and praise. Rather than send his daughters into prostitution, he used the money as a dowry for his first daughter to marry. Again, this was something very important at that time: No dowry-no husband. No

husband, no means of support. Sorry, ladies, that's just how it was.

-Guess what? On a second occasion, Nicholas did the same thing again – he tossed money secretly into the man's house so that the second daughter could have a dowry and marry.

-And, as you might guess, he did it a third time.

-Now Nicholas was striving to honor Jesus' command in Matthew 6:3 when he said, "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret."

-But this time, the man caught Nicholas in his generous act and ran after him. He said to him, "If it were not for your goodness, which was stirred up by our Lord Jesus Christ, I would have long since consigned my life to ruin and shame."

-You see, that's what happens when we are generous and bless others in Jesus' Name.

-By the way, as the story was told and retold down through time, it grew into a legend. In one retelling, the money bags landed in the girls' shoes. In another retelling, the house was locked so Nicholas dropped the bags of gold down the chimney where they fell into the girls' stockings.

-And there's one more thing you should know: St. Nicholas died in the year 343 on December 6. Do you know what today is? December 6! In many places, especially in Europe, today, December 6 is known as the "Feast of St. Nicholas." That's why I was so excited to talk about St. Nicholas' most famous act today!

-So putting it all together, with this embellished legend of Nicholas tossing the gold down the chimney landing it in the girls' stockings, and since St. Nicholas' December 6 Feast Day occurs during Advent—just prior to Christmas, today on Christmas Eve we say, "The stockings were hung by the chimney with care in hopes that St. Nicholas soon would be there." As the late Paul Harvey would say, "Now you know the rest of the story!" -It's all fascinating and very interesting, but you may be

asking, "What does this theme of being a generous giver have to do with the REAL meaning of Christmas?"

2) Being a Cheerful Giver: The Connection to Christmas

a) **John 3:16** – say in unison in KJV

-Time and time again God tried to get His message of love through to His human creation with little response. Finally, when there was no other way, He wrapped up His message in person and gave Him to us. That's how much He loves us! God is a cheerful giver.

-Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

-He cheerfully gave us His Son on Christmas Day. That's the connection to the REAL meaning of Christmas!

3) Being a Cheerful Giver: The Call to Christians

– **1 John 3:17-18, 2 Corinthians 9:6-8**

a) Be a cheerful giver to those in need – 1 John 3:17-18

i) Refusal to do so indicates a spiritual problem

Illustration

We're good at diagnosing all kinds of problems:

-Someone with a fever, upset stomach, sore throat and achy bones probably has the flu

-Someone with shortness of breath, pain in the chest who is blacking out probably has a heart problem.

-v. 17 – Take someone who has the world's goods, sees somebody else with a legitimate need, is called by God to meet that need and then closes their heart to that individual in need and says, "I don't care" – guess what: that person has a spiritual problem!

-v. 18 – Therefore, let's not express love by our words, but let's do something about it through our actions: Let's be cheerful givers.

Illustration

Don't you just love it when politicians say, "I feel your pain!" When I hear that I feel like saying,

“OK, buddy, why don’t you do something about it?”

Let us follow Jesus’ model – not just talk the talk, but put our faith into action by being cheerful givers!

- b) Remember: As a cheerful giver, one reaps what one sows – **2 Corinthians 9:6**

-In this passage, Paul is encouraging the Corinthian Christians, who were generally well-off to generously give to Christians in Jerusalem who were suffering in poverty. It was a very worthwhile cause just like Nicholas’ was.

-If we are generous and bless others, we will be blessed. If we bless others not so generously, we will be still be blessed but not as much.

Illustration

On just about every day this past February, you could have easily gotten away with singing, “Walking in a Winter Wonderland.” Man, did it snow! Out in Colorado Springs on one snowy day in February, 2015 a man named Shelby Hudgens spent hours pushing strangers’ cars that were stuck in a snowstorm. And guess what? He was homeless. A stranger who watched Hudgens’ was touched. That stranger set up a GoFundMe was account to help Hudgens find a place to live. Get this, more than \$22,000 was raised through that GoFundMe page for Shelby Hudgens!¹

- c) **Be a cheerful giver with pure motives**
– **2 Corinthians 9:7**

i) Not reluctantly – “Oh, alright, where’s my wallet? I’ll help!”

ii) Not under pressure – “Write out a check to keep people from getting on our case.”

-God doesn’t want us to give with that attitude because when we do, we’re not being cheerful givers, we’re just being givers, or maybe “bull-

¹ <http://www.cbsnews.com/media/10-inspiring-acts-of-generosity/4/>

headed givers.”

-And it is a blessing to give for the right reasons. This is an important part of Gospel message that begins with the Christmas story – He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? – Romans 8:32

d) Remember: God blesses cheerful givers sufficiently so that they can give! – **2 Corinthians 9:8**

-If God is calling you to be generous and bless someone or a particular cause, He will provide the means for you to do it.

-In the story of Nicholas, God provided him the means to bless the impoverished man through the inheritance he received.

-God has provided us with a lot!

-I am going to encourage us to do that with all that we have.

-If you're afraid, step out on faith.

Illustration - *When we tithe, God has always provided*

Closing

-Here we are together on St. Nicholas' Day.

-We are encouraged by the example of cheerful giving that this godly man performed many, many years ago.

-We are compelled by God's word to be cheerful givers when we see a need and God calls us to meet that need.

-TONIGHT: We are going to provide you with an opportunity to “dip your toe in the water” and give this “generous giver” thing a try:

-At 6:30 pm, we are gathering together for “Carols, Cookies and a Christmas Cruner.” We're going to have a wonderful concert and carol sing in the Sanctuary. Afterwards, we're going to have some fun by sampling different kinds of Christmas cookies in the fellowship hall. And you are going to get to vote for your favorite one.

-How will we vote? Most importantly, in an expression biblical cheerful giving and less importantly in the tradition of St. Nicholas here on his day, we are going to invite you

to vote with your coins! All received will go to Bethesda Mission; a wonderful Christian organization that provides for those in need?

-So go ahead this Christmas Eve and “hang your stockings by the chimney with care.” But when you wake up Christmas morning, if they’re full, consider how you can take that blessing, be a cheerful giver and bless someone in Jesus’ Name. It’s just what we as Christians do.