

"A Story About St. Nicholas for All Ages!"

Colossians 1:15-19, 3:12-14

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1. Introduction

- a. Every year at Christmas time, I get bombarded with St. Nicholas everywhere I go.
 - i. **Illustration** - *Several years ago, I was in a mall and I saw Santa Claus sitting in a nice big comfy chair where he was letting children sit on his lap and tell him everything they wanted for Christmas. All of a sudden, I saw Santa get up, and walk briskly away from his seat. A little girl ran up to him and asked rather frantically, "Santa, Santa, where are you going?" His reply was, "Well, little girl, I am going to tend to my reindeer." She was satisfied with the answer, but as I watched Santa continue on his brisk walk, he headed right for the men's room. I thought that was rather interesting.*
 - ii. **Illustration** - *Over the past several years I have been running into a man that works locally here in a store on the west shore, and he has a bushy white beard, long hair, and well he looks just like St. Nick himself. Of course, I ran into him recently here during the Christmas season, and I felt once again, I was encountering this whole Santa Claus theme.*
 - iii. **Illustration** - *On Thursday when Judi and I were at Allenberry, Santa was*

there to greet us as Judi and I went into the lodge.

- iv. **Illustration** - *Then on Saturday when I went to Kmart for their 50% off sale, I saw Santa again! He sure lost a lot of weight between Thursday and Saturday.*
- v. **Illustration** - *And as you can imagine, with three new members of the Jensen household this year, there is more talk in our house about Santa Claus than I can ever remember [Clarification Note: This was the year that Pastor & Mrs. Jensen's adoptive daughters came into their family].*
- vi. So, since I was so bombarded with this jolly old elf everywhere I've been this Advent Season, I started doing some research. I am so glad I did, because what I learned actually encouraged me in my walk with the Lord. You may ask, "How is that so?" Well, I can't wait to tell you today. I never thought I would do this, but I am actually going to preach my very first Santa Claus sermon - "A Story About St. Nicholas for All Ages."

2. **Santa Claus: Where Does He Come From?**

- a. Many of you would say, "That's easy to answer - the North Pole!"
- b. The truth
 - i. Santa Claus comes to us from an actual historical figure named St. Nicholas.
 - ii. Born - in Turkey in the town of Pantara during the 3rd century A.D. into a very wealthy family.
 - iii. Upbringing - raised to be a strong Christian by his Christian parents until

their untimely death while Nicholas was fairly young.

- iv. Nicholas grew in his faith and eventually became a Bishop.
 - (1) Def. of Bishop - in the church of that time as well as the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and other "high" churches, a bishop is essentially an overseer of several churches. He is a pastor to other pastors and churches.
- v. He became bishop of the Turkish city of Myra, a city, by the way, which Paul passed through on his trip to Rome some 250 years earlier (Acts 27:5).
- vi. Nicholas died on December 6, 343 A.D. and was buried in the cathedral in the city of Myra, Turkey.
- vii. How did he become associated with Christmas? Nicholas's death, December 6, is during the season of Advent, so he became associated with the Christmas season. In fact, to this day, many churches in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox denominations recognize December 6 as the Festival of St. Nicholas.
- viii. By the way, Nicholas was given the title "saint" because he was an exemplary follower of Jesus Christ.
 - (1) In the church at that time and in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches, the title "saint" is given to special Christians who are exemplary followers of Christ.
 - (a) We believe the Bible tells us that all Christians are

saints. Nonetheless,
that's why he is called St.
Nicholas.

- ix. Today, he is called "Santa Claus" because "santa" is a Latin form of the word "saint" and "Claus" is a nickname for "Nicholas."
 - (1) That's the truth of where Santa Claus comes from.

c. The twist

- i. Unfortunately, there's a dark side to Santa Claus. As the story of St. Nicholas was passed down through the ages, various traditions about Santa Claus evolved that had pagan and occultic influences.
- ii. Take Great Britain, for example. When the Vikings invaded Great Britain, they brought their god, Odin with them. They believed that Odin took on a different character for each month of the year. His character for December was known as, "Yule," and the month was known as "Yuletide." Thus, we have tradition of "Yuletide carols being sung by a choir."
 - (1) Note: To this day, there are clusters of earth worshippers or pagan believers who celebrate the holiday of Yule rather than Christmas. Obviously, Christians should not take part in authentic Yuletide rituals because of their pagan origins.
- iii. But, 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.

- iv. This tradition, combined with St. Nicholas, probably evolved into the traditional British Santa Claus figure known as "Father Christmas."
 - (1) Father Christmas is familiar to many older British people. Today, due to American influence, younger people know mainly of the American Santa Claus.
- v. This is but one example from many around the world of how the tradition of St. Nicholas was unfortunately combined with pagan and occult influences.

d. The tradition

- i. The tradition we as Americans are familiar with - the fat jolly old elf, dressed in a red suit and a red hat, riding a sleigh with 8 reindeer -- or 9 if you count Rudolph -- sneaking down the chimney to put presents under the Christmas tree, was actually popularized in America in 1823 by the popular American classic, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," now known as "The Night Before Christmas."
 - ii. That's where the American St. Nicholas, that fat jolly old elf, gained his tradition and popularity.
- e. Let's shift our focus now from where St. Nick came from to what he can teach you and I as born again believers in Jesus Christ.
- i. It may surprise you, no matter how

young or old you are, how much you can learn from old St. Nick.

3. **St. Nicholas: What Does His Life Teach Us?**

- a. St. Nicholas's life teaches us to:
- b. Believe in Jesus
 - i. When Nicholas was first born, Christianity was illegal in all of the known world at that time. The Roman emperor, Diocletian, cruelly persecuted all Christians. Young Nicholas suffered for his faith - he was exiled and even imprisoned.
 - ii. Christianity was later legalized by the emperor Constantine. Nicholas was released and became a bishop.
 - iii. As a bishop, in the year 325 A.D., Nicholas reportedly attended a very important meeting in the history of the church known as the Council of Nicea.
 - (1) The church at that time was very fragmented, and many different churches were teaching many different doctrines. One of the major doctrines being discussed at this council was the doctrine of God.
 - iv. It was an intense meeting, and one individual at that meeting was a man named "Arius." Arius passionately argued that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, but that He was not equal to God. He taught that Jesus was a created being, rather than God, and He was inferior to God the Father. In other words, he didn't believe that Jesus was God.
 - v. Bishop Nicholas, however, believed with his whole heart that Jesus Christ

is King of kings and Lord of lords. Nicholas believed this so fervently that it is reported that as Arius continued to vigorously defend his false doctrine, Nicholas became increasingly more and more disturbed.

vi. Finally, he couldn't take it anymore and St. Nicholas got up, ran across the room, and smacked Arius right in the face!

(1) Imagine the newspaper headlines - "Santa Claus Smacks Religious Heretic in the Face."

vii. Yes, Santa acted in the flesh, and by the way, he did ask forgiveness for what he did and he repented, but even in this inappropriate response, we see a passion for knowing the true Christ. What did He believe?

viii. ***Colossians 1:15-19***

(1) 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.

(a) "firstborn" - Arius and other heretics have used this phrase to argue 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.

- (2) v. 16 - Jesus was co-creator with God the Father. If you look at the creation account in Genesis 1:26, God said, "Let us create man in our image." Who was God talking to? God was talking to Himself - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, all equally God, were present at the Creation and carried it out. So much for Arius's point of view.
- (3) 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?
- (4) 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?

- (5) v. 19 - As a human being, Jesus was also fully Divine, because all of the fullness of the Deity dwelt in Him.
- ix. That's what St. Nicholas believed with his whole heart. Therefore, I'd say that's a pretty good example for us to follow
 - (1) Believing that on Christmas Day, God sent into this world His Son - Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man.
 - (2) St. Nicholas believed it, I hope you believe it too!
- x. Now, another thing we can learn from St. Nicholas is how his conviction in Jesus Christ as the Son of God Who came into this world effected all of his actions throughout life:
- c. Follow Jesus - **Colossians 3:12-14**
 - i. How do we know that his faith in Christ made him a man who followed Christ as described in these verses?
 - ii. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to the those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships.
 - iii. Illustration - *One story tells of a poor man with three daughters. In those days a young woman's father had to offer prospective husbands something of value a dowry. The larger the dowry, the better the chance that a young woman would find a good husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to marry. This poor man's daughters, without dowries, were therefore destined to be sold into*

slavery. Mysteriously, on three different occasions, a bag of gold appeared in their home providing the needed dowries. The bags of gold, tossed through an open window, are said to have landed in stockings or shoes left before the fire to dry. The kind man who tossed the bags of gold secretly into the house of these poor maidens was -- St. Nicholas!

- (1) He inherited a lot of money from his deceased parents, but He wasn't greedy with it. That shows the love of Christ that was in Him!
 - (2) This, by the way, is probably the origin of children hanging stockings by the fireplace on Christmas Eve.
- iv. Other stories tell of Nicholas saving his people from famine, sparing the lives of those innocently accused, and much more. He did many kind and generous deeds. Within a century of his death he was celebrated as a saint.
- v. Why did He do it? Because He believed in Jesus Christ, and Christ's love flowed through Him.
- (1) 2 Corinthians 5:14 states, "Christ's love compels us." It compels us to serve Him by serving others.
- vi. Furthermore, he gave in secret, alert to others' needs, and expecting nothing for himself in return.
- (1) It kind of reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew 6:3-4, "But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what

your right hand is doing that
your alms may be in secret; and
your Father who sees in secret
will repay you."

4. **Santa Claus Vs. St Nicholas: Being Jolly Vs. Being Joyful**

- a. Following Santa Claus's example may make you jolly. After all, remember what we have been told: "He was chubby and plump, a right jolly old elf, and I laughed when I saw him, in spite of myself:
 - i. Sure, giving presents once a year, that will make you jolly -- but probably only for one day.
 - ii. There's nothing wrong with being jolly, but I would like to offer another alternative:
- b. Following St. Nicholas's example will make you joyful - Being jolly lasts for a brief period time, having the joy of the Lord is continuous - it never ends.
 - i. Believing in Jesus and Following Jesus--that brings true joy.
 - (1) Believing that on Christmas Day, God came into this world as a baby to live, and serve, to die for our sins and rise again; and then following Jesus example of being kind, merciful, humble, willing to serve -- all of this is what that brings true joy!
 - ii. 1 Peter 1:8 - "And though you have not seen [Jesus], you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory."

5. **Closing**

Suppose you have the privilege to be with a young

person who doesn't know Jesus Christ and therefore has no joy. And perhaps last Christmas this same young person was so excited about Santa coming down the chimney and leaving gifts. However, since that time, that young person discovered what you and I as adults know about Santa Claus -- in other words, they "found out." Perhaps, therefore, they are not even jolly this Christmas. Maybe either in your home or out along the street you will see a typical holiday display with Santa Claus on one side, and a manger scene with the baby Jesus on the other. What are you going to say to this young person?

Perhaps you could say something like this: "Yes Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. And He believed with all of his heart that the baby boy in the manger was the Son of God."

Maybe you, with the help of St. Nicholas, can help bring a little joy into that young person's life and introduce them to Jesus Christ.

Pastor Jensen's post script note:

Much of the research for this message came from two sources on the internet:

www.stnicholascenter.org

www.christmasarchives.com

Note: Some of the materials on these websites do not come from an evangelical Christian perspective. Christian parents or others interested in researching these websites should be prepared to separate truth from legends and non-biblical traditions