

Pylypiwka - The Pre Christmas Fast Week #3

A Journey of Expectation, Preparation and Fulfilment

Feast day of St. Nicholas

December 6

By popular culture, St. Nicholas is perhaps the most closely linked saint to the Christmas season. As Archbishop of Myra, Nicholas was noted for his deeply religious life, his generosity and love of the poor, his battles against heresies, against persecutors of Christians and human injustice. He was a true shepherd of his people and a model of faith. His life of gift giving and defense of the faith connect with the spirit of Christmas within us.



The proximity of his feast day to the feast of the Nativity is an accident of history. Saint days are on the church calendar for the day the saint fell asleep in the Lord. On December 6 we remember St. Nicholas. The date for the feast of the Nativity was set for December 25 in Rome to help counteract the pagan festival of the God Saturn. This feast day was celebrated by the exchanging of gifts. As with many non-Christian customs, the church took over the festival and the customs, and gave them new meaning. Saint Nicholas gave of his wealth to help others throughout his lifetime. Connecting the giving to the feast of the Nativity and the pagan custom of gift giving was an easy transition.

On St. Nicholas day we sing the canon of the Nativity. We link the celebrations. Because of his generous actions, St. Nicholas is a strong reminder of the call of Christ. Immediately after our Baptism we are anointed with the Chrism, myrrh. This anoints us into our vocation in the Christian people. Everyone is reminded of the blessings that come from God and the great gifts given to us, symbolized by the fragrant oil. During the feast of St. Nicholas we connect this fragrant myrrh with our **actions** as Christians. Our deeds become the oil that anoints others.

The feast day of St. Nicholas falls on December 6, during the time of Pylypiwka when we are preparing our hearts to celebrate the birth of our Lord. St. Nicholas shows us the ideal of love, charity, and generosity. He was ready to help anyone in any situation, regardless of the cost to himself.

In our Ukrainian tradition, we celebrate St. Nicholas, **not** Santa Claus. Gifts are given only on December 6, not at Christmas, and they are given only to the children. Regardless of when we exchange gifts, and with whom, let us celebrate St. Nicholas' memory by imitating his goodness, generosity and selfless giving.

Adapted from The Winter Pascha bulletin series week 2 by Steve Puluka

St. Nicholas lives today! but what about Santa Claus?

Following the Reformation many people ceased to honour saints, but they weren't willing to give up the traditions linked to St. Nicholas. In America, St. Nicholas was transformed into the chubby, red cheeked, white bearded Santa who loves children, is loved by all and is most generous in giving gifts. Let's face it; Santa Claus is here to stay. But think about it. For how many years do humans believe in Santa? Five, six, seven years? And then what? That's where St. Nicholas comes in.

In the case of children we should allow them the few precious years to believe in Santa. Then, we can help them to realize that Santa is a symbol for someone far more significant; help them learn about St. Nicholas, the good acts he performed, and the generous spirit of giving that we practice with each other thanks to his wonderful example.

Adapted from Christ is Born: A Journey of Expectation, Preparation, and Fulfillment; Office of Religious Education, Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, 2005: pages 82-83

A Priceless Gift List

The gifts on this list cost almost no money, but they have GREAT value. When we give one of these gifts, we are giving a priceless gift - ourselves.

- The gift of **listening** - One of the greatest things we can do for another person is to listen without interrupting, daydreaming or thinking about our next leap into the conversation.
- The gift of a **compliment** - Help people reach their full potential - catch them doing something right. Compliment children for listening, for their smile, for giving a hug, for sharing.
- The gift of **showing affection** - Demonstrate the love we feel deep inside with hugs, kisses, a gentle squeeze of the hand, pats on the back, smiles.
- The gift of **laughter** - Everyone loves to laugh. Try to see the humor in day-to-day living. Develop the ability to laugh at yourself.
- The gift of **cheerfulness** - This means no complaining, no feeling sorry for yourself, no nasty comments, no screaming. Our gift of cheerfulness will be precious for everyone including ourselves.
- The gift of **doing a favor** - Help with the dishes, type a letter, run an errand.
- The gift of a **game** - Most people have at least one game they like to play... softball, cards, chess, checkers. Offer to play your loved one's favorite game in a non-competitive spirit. Introduce cooperative games. We're winners whenever we share an experience.
- The gift of **contact** - Write notes as simple as "thinking of you today." Make phone calls if someone is having an especially trying time. Reach out with support.
- The gift of **acceptance** - Accept with fortitude the things we can't change. This gift makes a difference in the lives of your friends, family, and colleagues.
- The gift of **prayer** - - The hidden gift.

Taken from <http://simpleliving.startlogic.com/indexoth.php?place=archives/XB/XB1999Presence.php>

A Birthday Gift for Jesus: When we celebrate a birthday, we are careful to give what the person really wants or needs. Is there any doubt what Jesus wants from us? He insists that in order to give to him, we must find him in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. By helping to provide a goat for a farmer in Honduras, a decent home for a family in Haiti, food for those who are victims of war, or company for a lonely senior, you can give Jesus a birthday gift he really wants.



Resources:

The Winter Pascha bulletin series by Steve Puluka [Phil-Fast week two \(puluka.com\)](http://puluka.com)

Christ is Born: A Journey of Expectation, Preparation, and Fulfillment; Office of Religious Education, Archeparchy of Pittsburgh, 2005

Copies of the book are available from:

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