

Saint Nicholas ~ A Children's Sermon

by the Rev. Mitchell Williams, Central United Methodist Church, Decatur, Alabama, December 2001
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Boys and girls, what is Christmas about? *(This makes the parents a little nervous, hoping that their kid is not the one to yell out, "Getting presents!" Actually, that is expected. It seems that all adults can think to ask children during December is, "What are you going to get for Christmas?" Some child eventually will point out that it is Jesus' birthday.)*

Yes, it is the birthday of Jesus. But we end up talking about another man too. Who is that? *(Someone will say, "Santa Claus.")* Do you know another name for Santa Claus? *("St. Nicholas.")* Today, I'm going to tell you the truth about St. Nicholas. *(Some parents will shift in their seats.)*

He wasn't born being called a , of course; he was called a saint later. Nicholas was born 300 years after Jesus, which is still a very long time ago. He was born in a country called Lycia, which is today called Turkey. *(Acknowledge their giggles.)* That's a different kind of name for a country, isn't it? He was born rich, but throughout his life he gave away his money to the poor.

I wanted to show you what he looked like in those early days, so I'm going to dress up like him.

First, he wore a basic robe that everyone wore in those days. *(Put on an off-white alb.)* Have you seen drawings of Jesus wearing something like this? Well, pants were not invented yet.

Nicholas was a Christian. In fact, he became a pastor of a church in, just like the Rev. *(insert your pastor's name here)* is our pastor. So, on Sundays he would wear a stole around his neck just like our pastor does. *(Don a stole.)* He was so good and loving at being a pastor that he was asked to be in charge of all the churches in that region. That job is called a . As a bishop he would travel from church to church wearing a cape. *(Put on a .)* It's actually called a "cope." Can you see the cross on it? And, on special occasions, he would wear a special hat. *(Pick up .)* You know, kings and queens have special hats; what are they called? *(Crowns.)* Well, the bishop's hat is kind of like a crown. It is called a "miter" *(Put it on.)* There are still some bishops that wear this same outfit.

It doesn't look much like we picture St. Nicholas in our country, but they do view him this way in other parts of the world. Here is a drawing *(or statue)* of St. Nicholas. *(Take off the miter.)*

Let me tell you a story. Back in those early days, a girl could not get married unless she paid her husband to do so. Isn't that an odd way to do things? It was called a ". Once a man that Nicholas knew had three daughters but no dowry. Pretty sad, huh?

One night, Nicholas got on his horse—he was pictured riding a horse in those days—and he sneaked up to the man's house. He took a bag of gold, threw it into an open window, and rode off. The next morning on the kitchen floor they found all this gold! They didn't know where it had come from, but the first daughter could get married.

A little while later, Nicholas rode up in the middle of the night again, threw another bag of gold through another window and rode off. The next morning there, on the den floor, was a bag of gold! They didn't know where this had come from either, but the second daughter could get married.

A third time, a little while later, Nicholas rode up in the middle of the night. And just as he was about to throw another bag of gold, out stepped the father from behind the bushes where he had been hiding. The father said, "Bishop Nicholas! You're the one who's been giving us the gold! Why didn't you tell us?"

And Nicholas answered with something that is very important. Nicholas said, "It's better to give in secret, when no one knows that it is you. It is more fun that way too!"

Ever since then, people have been giving in secret in the name of Nicholas, and in the name of Jesus. In fact, our church gives in secret. (*Name some ministry your church does, especially for children, this time of year.*) And more churches are named after St. Nicholas than after any other saint, just to help us remember that Christmas is not so much a time of getting—not even with Santa Claus—as it is a time of giving, especially to the poor. Do you think we can all remember to give in secret this year? Let's pray.