

## THE REAL SANTA – December 2022

This may sound blasphemous, but I'm weary of all the silly and schmaltzy holiday specials. Yes, they are full of nostalgia, but they consistently miss the true meaning of Christmas. For them, Christmas is about Scrooges and ghosts, snowmen and reindeer, Grinches and Whos, small town romance and even Red-Rider bb guns....pretty much anything *except* the birth of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

And perhaps the biggest troublemaker is none other than Santa Claus himself – that ancient spirit who is always watching and threatening us: “you better watch out!” And then on the night before Christmas, he sneaks into our homes to pronounce his judgment: *naughty or nice?*

What is going on?! This Santa sounds more like the Prince of Darkness than the Savior from Bethlehem. And that is a shame, because the real Santa (Saint Nicholas of Myra) was nothing at all like his contemporary counterpart. In fact, the real Santa not only understood the true meaning of Christmas, but he also captured the true *spirit* of Christmas. We would do well to ignore the myths and learn the truth.

Nicholas was born in 270 AD in Patara (Turkey). His parents were devout Christians who instilled in him a deep faith in Christ and love for others. When Nicholas was still a teenager, both of his parents died from the plague and he was raised by his uncle. Upon receiving his inheritance, he determined to share his wealth, especially with the poor and needy in the church.

On one occasion, Nicholas heard about a man with three daughters who had fallen on hard times. With no money for dowries, his daughters would have no chance of marriage and might even be forced into prostitution just to survive. One night, Nicholas secretly went to the man's home and dropped a bag of gold through an open window – enough for one dowry. He did this again the second night. The father watched and waited on the third night and discovered the identity of his secret benefactor. Nicholas implored the man to tell no one: "You must thank God alone for providing these gifts in answer to your prayers for deliverance."

Later in his life, Nicholas was elected bishop of Myra. He became known not only for his kindness and generosity, but also for his passion for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He proclaimed Jesus as the only Lord and boldly confronted the pagan temples that had deceived so many in his district. Some said that the demons “fled howling before him.”

In 303 AD, Diocletian began the last and most severe persecution of Christians by a Roman Emperor – one that would endure for 10 years. Nicholas was arrested and thrown into prison. He was beaten repeatedly but held fast to his confession that only Jesus is Lord. When he returned, he devoted the rest of his life to the bold teaching and defense of the Gospel – which is the *true* meaning of Christmas.

This Gospel does not begin at the North Pole; it begins in the highest heaven, from which God sent his only Son to earth. He humbled himself to be born like us and suffered and died on a cross for our sins. God then exalted Jesus to the highest place where He reigns forever over heaven and earth. He now offers forgiveness and eternal life to all who repent of their sins and confess and follow Jesus as Lord...just as the real Santa did over 1700 years ago.

Saint Nicholas' quiet deeds of love and bold confession of Christ together *clearly* display the true meaning and spirit of Christmas. So, on this *foggy* Christmas Eve, may the real Santa guide our *faith* tonight....