

Gift Pack with a Difference



A Story and Prayer

St Nicholas and Santa Claus

Christmas is a very special time in the lives of children. They are wide-eyed with excitement at all that this wonderful season has to offer them., from the joy of the Christmas story to the arrival of Santa. The person of Santa forms a large part of children's conversations at this time of year. The goodness of St Nicholas is to be found in the person of Santa.

As Christmas comes near we hear a lot of talk about a man who wears a red outfit and has a white beard. We call him Santa Claus. We remember another man who was also very generous. He shared all that he had but people did not always know it was him who was doing it. His name was St Nicholas.

A long time ago in a country called Turkey there lived a man who loved God very much. His name was Nicholas. As he was growing up he was told about Jesus and he came to have a great love for God. While he was still very young his parents died so he went to live with his uncle who was a Bishop and so he learned even more about Jesus. Nicolas' parents had been very rich so now all their money went to Nicholas. He decided that he had too much so he did as Jesus had asked in the Bible: he sold everything and he gave it to the poor. The people were delighted but they didn't know that it was Nicholas who was helping them.

Early one morning Nicholas arrived at the Church to pray. Many Bishops were there too. They had come to pick a new Bishop for a place called Myra. The night before one of the older Bishops had a dream that the first person who would arrive at the church that morning would be called Nicholas, and that he should be the new Bishop. When the older Bishop saw Nicholas and found out his name, it was decided: Nicholas became the Bishop of Myra.

Nicholas was a good Bishop. He loved the people and cared for them greatly, just as a shepherd cares for his sheep and as Jesus cares for us. Nicholas was especially kind to the poor and those who were in trouble. It is said that at night when people were asleep, he would go around and drop off food and other things to people so that they would not be hungry. When they awoke people were delighted but they didn't know who had come to their house with the gifts. Nicholas lived and died more than a thousand years ago. After his death people called him St Nicholas.

Let us pray:

We ask God that we may be as generous in our time and place as St Nicholas was in his. As we approach Christmas may we think of those in the world who are not as lucky as we are.

Loving God, we thank you for the example of St Nicholas and his kindness to those in need. Open our hearts in generosity to all those who need our help.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

(Adapted from Prayer assemblies for Primary Schools by Maurice Harmon and Maeve Mahon)

Reflection at the Manger

This reflection is intended for groups who are gathering gifts for others in the community who may be in need (e.g. SVP collection). These gifts may be offered in a spirit of prayer.

Setting: On some purple cloth place the empty manger and the animals from the crib. Place some candles around the crib and bring the gifts to be donated so that they can be left by the manger.

Some background music, carols etc.

Reflection:

The gospels tell us 'come to me all you who are hungry' ...

What does it mean to be hungry ... to have little or no food ... to not know where your next meal is coming from or when it will come ... or what it will consist of ... will there be enough to go round ...

We come here to the stable ... the animals around the manger ... their feeding trough ... where their need for food will be satisfied regularly ... they have no worries about food ... they are content ... they sit and wait ...

We too sit and wait ... preparing for the birth of Jesus ...

While waiting we prepare ... by buying presents ... by writing and sending cards ... by decorating our Christmas tree ... putting up decorations and holly ... wrapping gifts and presents ... buying food and getting the Christmas dinner ready.

Jesus was born into the ordinary and the everyday ... he was laid in the manger at Bethlehem because there was no room at the Inn ... laid in the manger, the food container.

Let us reflect on this fact, what it means ... and we bring here to the manger our crib offerings ... gifts for those who are in need.

Just as Jesus fed the hungry crowds who gathered ... we who are his hands and feet today give a share from what we have to others this Christmas time.

(Adapted from 'On the Journey ... A Resource Book for Catechists, Chaplains and all who Pray with Young People' by Karen Kent)

Gift Pack with a difference

A simple gift pack can be included for each family member and can be included in the Christmas 'sock'. It might contain some or all of the following:

- A cardboard cutout of a heart symbolizing the love you promise to share with this person.
- A drawing or print-out of a clock – a commitment to make time for this person.
- An eraser – mistakes can be rubbed out and a willingness to forgive any mistakes.
- Fun-size Mars bars – make time to have fun together.
- A shell – to go with the flow!!
- A marble to symbolise the joy shared between you.
- A candle for the light this person brings.
- A plaster for healing for any hurts.
- A seed for growth.
- A religious medal or small rosary for faith.
- A piece of string to keep you connected.

In this season of giving and receiving may we always remember the most important things.

The letter to the Corinthians lists love along with faith and hope as a gift that lasts forever. Of the three “forever gifts,” love is the greatest. “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Cor. 13:13)

Verse for Gift Bag

This year has been different for me and for you,
But the promise of Christmas remains so true.
It's a promise of God's presence and incredible love,
A God who is within us and not just a God up above.
Because of what this year has taught me,
My Christmas gift is different wait 'til you see.
Each gift carries a wish from the bottom of heart,
Gifts that stay with you whether together or apart.
The marble is for joy to brighten your day,
The plaster is for healing to help you on your way.
The heart is for love to give meaning to your life,
The cross is for faith to help you in moments of strife.
The candle is for light when challenges you face,
The seed is for growth and the gift of God' grace.
The clock is for time, make the most of each day,
The eraser is to rub out the moments we stray.
The shell is to remind you to go with the flow,
As resisting each struggle isn't wise you know.
So, this gift carries wishes and peace like a dove,
But most of all this gift wishes you great love.