

MY DEAR THEOPHILUS

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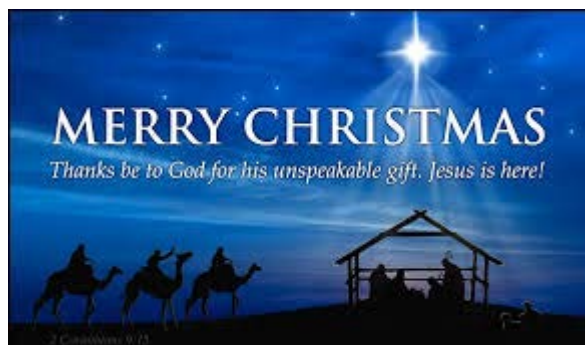
NEWS FROM AROUND THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

**New Archbishop of York
is announced to succeed
Dr John Sentamu**

The Church of England's next Archbishop of York is to be the Bishop of Chelmsford, Stephen Cottrell, who will succeed Dr John Sentamu following his retirement in June 2020.

**Theological educators
plan pre-Lambeth
Conference episcopal
consultations**

**Bishops from around the
world attending next
year's Lambeth
Conference will be able
to take part in two separate
consultations on the
future of theological
education.**



Dear Parish Family:

On Christmas, the Feast of the Incarnation, you and I are given a gift beyond telling. This gift does not come in brightly colored paper with red, green, silver and gold bows. It does not come in gift bags for those who are impaired in gift wrapping.

No today's gift comes wrapped in a crude blanket and sleeping in a barn animals' food trough. The gift comes as a helpless new born. The gift comes as one of us, one with us, Emmanuel.

This echoes what St. John Chrysostom preached on Christmas Day some one thousand seven hundred years ago: "What shall I say! And how shall I describe this birth to you? For this wonder fills me with astonishment. The Ancient of Days has become an infant. He who sits upon

the sublime and heavenly throne now lies in a manger. And He Who cannot be touched, who is simple, without complexity, and incorporeal, now lies subject to the hands of men. He, who has broken the bonds of sinners, is now bound by an

infant's bands. But He has decreed that ignominy shall become honor, infamy be clothed with glory, and total humiliation the measure of His Goodness.”

In this gift, we see the very face of God. God expresses himself in the Word, a perfect communication of who God is, and God’s Word becomes flesh and dwelt among us and in Jesus we see the very face of God.

In the gift of God with us, in the gift and mystery of the Incarnation, God not only reveals himself to us; but He also reveals us to ourselves, in all our hidden possibilities. Who could have foreseen that a woman of our race could become the mother of the eternal God’s only son? Who could have suspected humanity’s hidden talent to be able to bear God, not as a cup bears water or as the hand bears a weight, but in the most intimate, physiological sense possible: as a mother bears her child, with everything that implies for the intertwining of two beings, of mother and son? We humans are not only capable of having an intimate relationship with God, but you and I are made for a relationship with the Divine, with God.

Without knowing it, each of us, you and I, are the bearer of a mystery like this. Each of us is also caught up in a genealogy, both biological and spiritual, and we each bear the tremendous Mystery that is the personal experience of God among us and within us.

In time God does reveal to us, too, what he had hidden in us from the beginning. Truly we are almost wholly ignorant of who we are and what promises sleep deep within us just waiting to be awoken.

With the Incarnation, God has taken on our nature and He has glorified our flesh and has consecrated and sanctified our humanity. In the miracle and mystery of the Incarnation, in the person of Jesus, God has shown us who we are and what we can become.

It is only in the Incarnation that we finally see the truth of our human nature. In the Incarnation, by God becoming one of us one with us, the gulf between divinity and humanity collapsed. You and I have been enabled to share God’s own life.

The babe wrapped in swaddling clothes will show us a person fully given over to God. The Incarnation shows us that you and I have the potential to be one with

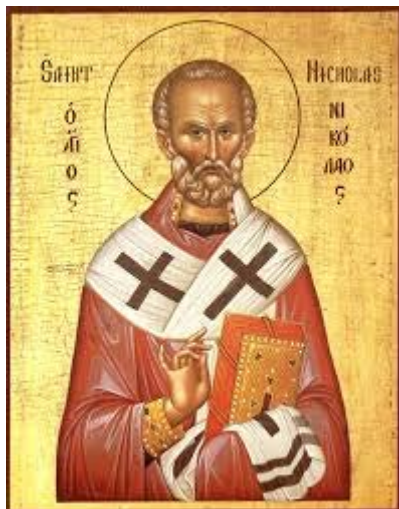
God now only now but eternally. You and I are made to be one with God. In the miracle of the Incarnation, God in a radical and loving way tells us that this is our calling, this is what you and I are born for, it is who you and I are, it is in our DNA. As St. Athanasius wrote, "God became man so that man might become one with God."

Now that is a gift. Unwrap it. Merry Christmas!

Your servant in Christ,

The Rev. Chester J. Makowski, Rector

***REMEMBER TO DONATE TO, SHOP AT, AND, IF POSSIBLE
VOLUNTEER AT THE OASIS, A MINISTRY OF OUR PARISH.***



***FEATURED HOLY PERSON OF
THE MONTH
NICHOLAS, BISHOP OF MYRA
Died 6 December 326***

By James Kiefer

The story of St. Nicholas offers a possible way of dealing with the "Santa Claus" problem, to parents who do not want to lie to their children, even in fun, but do not want to say simply: "Bah, humbug! There is no such thing as Santa. Forget about him."

Nicholas was a native of the western part of what is now Asiatic Turkey. He became Bishop of Myra in the fourth century, and there are many stories of his love for God and for his neighbor.

The best-known story involves a man with three unmarried daughters, and not enough money to provide them with suitable dowries. This meant that they could not marry, and were likely to end up as prostitutes. Nicholas walked by the man's house on three successive nights, and each time threw a bag of gold in through a window (or, when the story came to be told in colder climates, down the chimney). Thus, the daughters were saved from a life of shame, and all got married and lived happily ever after.

Because of this and similar stories, Nicholas became a symbol of anonymous gift-giving. Hence, if we give a gift to someone today without saying whom it is from, it can be called "a present from Saint Nicholas (or Santa Claus)." Some parents explain this to their children and invite the child to join them in wrapping a toy (either something purchased for that purpose, at least partly with the child's allowance, or else a toy that the child has outgrown but that is still serviceable) or an outgrown but not shabby item of the child's clothing, or a package of food, and then going along to donate it to a suitable shelter that will give it to someone who will welcome it. This gift is then called "a present from Santa," so that the child understands that this is another name for an anonymous gift given to someone whom we do not know, but whom we love anyway because God does. (Presents within the family can be "From Santa" or "From Santa and...")

Pictures of Nicholas often show three bags of gold next to him, and often these bags have become simply three disks or balls. Nicholas became the patron of an Italian city (I think Bari, which is where his body is now buried) that was a center of the pawn broking business, and hence a pawn broking shop traditionally advertises by displaying three gold balls over its front. It is thought that some persons looking at pictures of Nicholas confused the three round objects with human heads. Hence there is a story of a wicked innkeeper who murdered three boys and salted their bodies to serve to his guests, to save on the butcher's bill. Nicholas visited the inn and confronted the innkeeper, who confessed his crime, whereupon Nicholas prayed over the brine-tub and the three boys leaped out unharmed. Other stories have him saving the lives of three innocent men who had been condemned to death. Still other stories have him coming to the rescue of drowning sailors (could this be related to the brine-tub incident?). Nicholas has always been popular with children, mariners, pawnbrokers, the Dutch, the Russians, and recently, the department-store owners. (American

readers may remember the story of the brine-tub through reading it as children in the book *The Dutch Twins*, by Lucy Fitch Perkins, author of *The Spanish Twins*, *The Italian Twins*, and many similar books, all children's favorites in the middle of this century. They may now be banned as politically incorrect -- I have no idea. If your children know the brine-tub story, from this book or elsewhere, they may be interested to know how it may have originated.)

In many countries, Nicholas visits children on his feast day, 6 December, and brings them gifts then. In these countries, there is usually no exchange of Christmas presents, but there may be gifts again on January 6, the feast of the coming of the Wise Men, who brought gifts to the Holy Child of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. In America, it may be thought necessary to yield to outside pressure and let Nicholas distribute gifts on December 25.

If you want to show your children (or yourself) how Nicholas is remembered by Christians with a background different from your own (unless, of course, this IS your background), you might want to attend an East Orthodox service at this time. Many Eastern Orthodox congregations have services on the evening before 6 December that feature "visits from Saint Nicholas." He appears as a bishop, with no red suit. The faithful leave their shoes outside the church door, and find in them afterwards gold coins (actually chocolate wrapped in gold foil) representing the gold dowries of the three daughters. To find a service and inquire what it is likely to be like, look up CHURCHES, ORTHODOX in the Yellow Pages. For an English-language service, "Orthodox Church in America" or "Antiochan Orthodox" parishes are likely choices, but do not overlook other possibilities.

We are told, but it is uncertain, that Nicholas was imprisoned for his faith before the accession of Constantine, and that he was present at the Council of Nicea in 325. We may note in passing that the picture of him as roly-poly is a late development. Early stories indicate that he was generous to others, but not given to self-indulgence. Indeed, even as an unweaned infant, he fasted regularly on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Let us pray: Almighty God, who in your love gave to your servant Nicholas of Myra a perpetual name for deeds of kindness on land and sea: Grant, we pray, that your

MAKE A *Joyful* NOISE



***Don't forget to bring pork and beans for our
Mannafest outreach.***



St. Luke's Episcopal Church

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