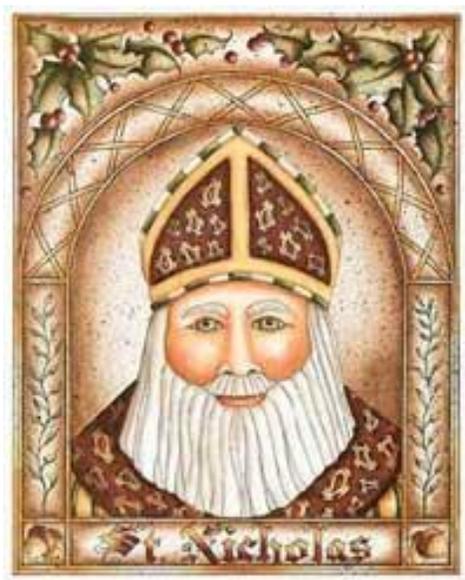


St. Aloysius Religious Education
2nd week of Advent

Saint Nicholas



Nicholas may be the most popular saint of all time. Thousands of churches are named after him. He seems to be portrayed by artists more than any other saint, with the exception of Mary. There are hundreds of legends about the kind bishop – with his mitre, staff, and bag of gifts. The current “Santa Claus” is modeled after St. Nicholas, but commercialism has tarnished the true story. Many families give gifts on both December 6th and Christmas.

Nicholas was the bishop of the city of Myra in Asia Minor, in what is now the nation of Turkey. Growing up he was known as “wonderworker” because he could heal the sick and calm storms. Centuries after he died, his bones were brought to Bari in Italy.

Bishop Nicholas was very attuned to the needs of the poor and of the children. He would drop *bags of gold coins* down the chimney of the homes of poor families ... into the shoes drying by the fireplace. In many places, **families are visited on December 6th by St. Nicholas.** **Coins or candy are left in children’s shoes as a reminder of the gold he gave to help the poor and a candy cane is a reminder of his crosier (the shepherd’s staff a bishop carries).**

The name Santa Claus means Saint Nicholas!

Catechist Background:

http://www.catholichomeandgarden.com/catholic_christmas_traditions.htm

<http://www.fisheaters.com/customsadv3.html>

http://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=371

<http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/who-is-st-nicholas>

The Christmas Tree

<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=6304>

The decorating of an evergreen tree at Christmas as we know it can be traced back to an old German custom, and more popularly known, Victorian England. Just as the evergreen wreath symbolizes eternity and fidelity, so the lush evergreen tree can be said to represent the same. Scripture is filled with the significance of trees, in both the Old and New Testaments. Generally the tree is not decorated until late Christmas Eve as Advent is still a season of penance. Customarily the tree should be adorned with little family treasures and religious symbols. Bright balls and lights are fine also and lend a festive touch especially for children of all ages, as do handmade garlands from natural items, such as popcorn or berries; little birds are very appropriate for the symbolism and dried plants and fruits. *The idea of jolly Santa's, elves, Christmas puppies in socks, etc., are of more recent development and not appropriate* because we are celebrating Jesus' birthday. Many families place the crèche under the tree and gifts, are not placed there until Christmas Day or after Midnight Mass.



Each year the Vatican sets up a tall Christmas tree in Saint Peter's Square, a custom started in 1982 by Pope John Paul II.

Christmas Tree Blessing

“Dear God, two thousand years ago, you brought your son, Jesus into this world to teach us the power of love and sacrifice. As we raise this tree, we remember his birth and the meaning of his life for us. Bless this tree as a symbol of our celebration of Jesus' birth and our gratitude for his sacrifice. May the joy this tree brings and the gifts we place under it remind us of the many gifts you have given us. We ask your blessings upon our loved ones, this day and always. Amen.”