

Another Word December 6, 2022

To our family and friends of First Christian Church

Happy Saint Nicholas Day, December 6th! Saint Nicholas was a fourth century bishop known for selling all his possessions and giving his money to the poor. Raised as a devout Christian, St. Nicholas loved children and spent his whole life serving others and spreading the Gospel in eastern Europe. He used imaginative ways to teach Bible stories.....but more on this later.

We hope that during this season of Advent you are cleaning, preparing, and letting go of worry and the petty things of life. We are to look forward and wait with great anticipation, because something remarkable and loving is about to happen!

As a reminder, the Foster Children's presents are to be dropped off here at the church on December 12th or 13th. (You may bring them this Sunday, also) They need to be wrapped, marked with the case number, and all gifts for each child should be placed in a large gift bag. (We have some large bags at the church if you can't locate one.) Thanks for your support in this great outreach.

On Dec. 18th, we will be packing and delivering gift bags to our loved ones who can't be with us. If you would like to help pack and deliver, we will start right after our morning service.

There will be a Christmas Eve Service starting at 7pm, and a Christmas Day Service at our regular time. We hope to see you then.

Our scriptures for Dec. 11th: Isaiah 40:1-5, and Malachi 3:1-4 read by Dale Campbell. Luke 1:39-63 Read by Mary Hensel. "Two mothers meet."

Our scriptures for Dec. 18th: Isaiah 9: 1-3a, 6-7, read by Lana Bell. Luke 1: 56-80, and Matthew 1: 18-25 read by Alan Girard. "What John becomes, and who Joseph is."

As we go to prayer, please remember Ken Donelson, and Dick and Vera Baum. May we pray.

O most Holy God, we lift up our voices in praise to Your name, and celebrate Your great works. Accept our thanks for the plans You have made for us. We cherish the gifts of hope, peace, comfort, and joy that You have blessed us with. It is a challenge to live in Your will but it is also a blessing and our desire to do so. We are humbled that You care and love us so. We now lift up to You O God, what is on our hearts, and also lift up to You those who need Your care and mercy..... May we always look out for our neighbors, and spread Your good will to the world. In Jesus' most Holy Name we pray, Amen.

Well, I guess it's later! I know I spoke of this last Sunday, but it's such a great story and many on our email list may not have ever heard it. So, I decided to tell it again.

As a child on Christmas Eve, we would hang the largest socks we could find on the mantle in hopes that Santa would fill them to overflowing. While digging through the sock each Christmas morning, I began noticing that there were, regardless of the toys, toothbrushes, and socks, always 4 specific gifts. Every Christmas morning, we found an orange, an apple, some candy, and some nuts. I just figured Santa wanted us to try to eat a little healthier but still threw in a few pieces of candy, because he knew I have a sweet tooth!

Fast forward a whole bunch of years. Donita and I were leading a youth group and I heard of a Greek Orthodox Church outside of Hayesville.

We thought it would be a great experience to take our group to a different type of Christian Service. It happened to be December 6th, The Feast of Saint Nicholas. It was a marvelous and beautiful service. Candles, incense, Priests chanting, hymns sung, Icons explained. What a wonder evening it was.

But then the Priest began his Homily, which is a **short** message. (I know, I know. I can hear someone out there saying, “Rich, take a lesson!”) He first gave a short background of Nicholas and how he walked from town to town in eastern Europe. Helping the poor was his first priority, and many children were amongst the poorest. Often, he carried a large sack over his shoulder filled with gifts. And because of the extreme cold, his garments were fur lined. (Now you know where St. Nick. aka Santa Claus got his start.) So, how do you help the needy and tell of God’s greatness at the same time?

The Priest told us what St. Nicholas would do. He would reach into his bag and pull out an orange and hold it up high and ask, “What does this remind you of?” Of course, it looked like the sun. Then Nicholas would tell them how God placed light in the sky; light that gives life to the world.

He then would pull out an apple and ask, “What color is the outside and the inside?” The children would answer red and white. Nicholas would then explain that the Son of God, Jesus was the only one on earth that was pure, as white as snow, with no sin, and yet, He shed His own blood to save the souls of us sinners.

Sugar was the next gift. In the fourth century, honey was the common sweetener. Sugar on the other hand was very rare, expensive, even a treasure. To receive it in any amount was almost unimaginable. The lesson was that knowing God through Jesus was worth more than all the treasures of the world.

The last gift given was a handful of nuts. He would explain that squirrels would collect nuts during the fall season and store them in safe places, knowing that when the weather turned harsh, they could always find a meal. His words were very simple, "The squirrels used God's wisdom." As for us, the knowledge of God is the beginning of His gift of wisdom.

I can still remember the shock and amazement in realizing that the four seemingly insignificant items I received each year in my stocking were lessons and reminders as to who our Great God truly is!

So, maybe this Christmas, it would be a good time to pick up a few extra items at the grocery in order to give the gift of light and life, the gift of a perfect Son who died for us, the great treasure of knowing our Savior, and the depth of God's love through His wisdom.

What a great way to spread the Gospel. A way that has stood the test of time, a way that is clear, understandable, enjoyable to tell, and delicious!

In His Peace,

Rich