

Sunday, December 27, 2020 -Christmas

SACRED WINDOWS

An invitation to gaze into heaven's stained glass windows
Beauty, Truth and Goodness



The Real Story Behind Santa's Pointed Hat

Greetings!

Believe it or not, Santa Claus is a religious symbol. Unfortunately, he's been *made into a pagan* by the secular culture.

Poor Santa.

His religious meaning far transcends the plump figure who travels around the whole world one night a year in a sleigh pulled by reindeer.

I learned of Santa's religious symbolism from a **fantastic sermon** I heard sometime in the '90s. I'll never forget it.

It stuck in my mind because sermons in Catholic churches are generally so...hmm, to be charitable, *mediocre*...even at Christmas (but "Who am I to judge?")

This one was good.

The sermon

The setting was Midnight Mass in a packed church. When the priest finished the Gospel reading, he began his sermon this way:

"That jolly fat guy in the red outfit with white trim is not a legend. He's a myth."

I saw some confused expressions on faces around me (mine included), but mostly, low groans filled the pews as people thought:

"Uh-oh, not another hipster sermon debunking our cherished traditions."

But that wasn't what it turned out to be. The rest of the priest's sermon went something like this:

A legend is a story for children. **A myth is a story for adults.**

(Now he had our attention.)

A legend is usually based on some historical fact, but a myth takes that legend and brings out its deeper meaning.

Our familiar Santa Claus is much more than meets the eye. Let's start with the historical fact:

The name Santa Claus is the English version of the Scandinavian name **Sinter Klaas**, which is the Nordic way of pronouncing "Saint Nicholas".

Santa – *Saint*. Has to be religious. So far, so good.

History tells us that St. Nicholas was the bishop of Myra in Turkey in the 4th century.

He is well-known for having punched a heretic in the nose at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD.

(Back then, bishops actually took heresy seriously.)

He also saved a few falsely-accused prisoners from execution by ordering the Emperor Constantine to set them free. Bishop Nicholas also performed many miracles during his life, including preventing a few shipwrecks by his prayers.

Old Saint Nick was no shrinking violet!

But these are not why he is the saint of Christmas. According to the legend, Bishop Nicholas saved three girls of his diocese from being sold into slavery to pay off their father's debts.

The good bishop did this by **throwing three bags of gold** through the window of the family's home and then running away so that no one would know that he was their benefactor.

****(By the way, anyone wishing to donate a bag of gold to the parish this evening is kindly asked to refrain from throwing it through the rectory window. You may deposit your donation in the collection plate at the Offertory. Thank you.)****

Happily, Bishop Nicholas' donation worked to save the young ladies from an awful life, but he couldn't remain anonymous, and his amazing act of charity has been remembered by the universal Church for centuries now.

So, in essence, Santa Claus was once a living, breathing, courageous, generous, and humble person who is considered the patron saint of children, condemned prisoners, shipwrecked sailors and **gift-giving at Christmastime**.

And to think that he was actually a Catholic bishop!

Then Father said: **"And now you know why Santa Claus wears a pointy hat!"**

He went on to explain that Santa's hat symbolizes a bishop's miter (that odd-looking pointed hat that bishops wear in ceremonies), which in turn resembles the **fire of the Holy Spirit** that descended on the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

We could easily miss the **religious symbolism of the hat** because Santa's hat droops and has a cotton ball on the end. It looks more like an elf hat than a bishop's miter.

That's the secular version anyway.

The myth

The adult myth of Santa includes a great deal of beautiful religious symbolism if you look closely. In fact, he's like a walking image of the Holy Trinity:

- We already noted how he symbolizes **the Holy Spirit**, but there's more...
- The *colors of red and white* on his wintery costume signify **the two natures of Jesus Christ** – divinity and humanity – they can also be taken as symbolic of the blood and water that flowed from His side on the Cross.
- Santa Claus, however, is the quintessential image of **God the Father**.

He's omniscient:

As the song says, "He sees you when you're sleeping, he knows when you're awake. He knows when you've been bad or good, etc. etc." **Nothing is hidden from God** and, like any good father, He expects you to be on your best behavior at all times.

He's omnipresent:

Poor old Santa has to hop in a sleigh to get around the world in one night, but *the Creator of the world* needs no such transportation. **He's everywhere**, and we all have direct access to Him at all times. (You have to admit, though, that Santa making all those stops in one night is pretty impressive.)

He's full of goodness and joy:

The Father gives every possible gift to His children and loves each of us as if we were His only child. All He requires is **love in return** (...apparently symbolized by the token offering of milk and cookies at the bottom of the chimney.) And...

He lives in a magnificent home:

For Santa it's the North Pole with lots of little helpers (angels maybe?), but Jesus promised that His **Father's heavenly home** is much more magnificent.

We could tease out much greater symbolism in Santa, but time is short, and I'm sure all my intelligent readers get the point.

A sacred window of Goodness

According to what we've just said, Santa Claus is the Christmas picture of *Goodness incarnate*.

Too bad the secular world has turned Santa into a Grinch or a buffoon or a sort of benign capitalist who doles out material gifts like there's no tomorrow.

If your image of Santa is the secular version, you not only miss the beautiful symbolism, but you also miss *an opportunity to teach your kids* the true meaning of Christmas.

And eventually, you have to break the bad news to the kids that ***the secular Santa isn't actually real***.

But God most certainly is.

If you believe that Santa is a rich and meaningful symbol of *the personal goodness of God*, the kids will grow up understanding the truth of Christmas and quite a lot about the reality of God's goodness.

And you won't ever have to disappoint them by shattering their legend. The **legend easily transforms into the myth** as they grow.

In other words, Santa Claus is a *sacred window* into the nature of God.

Our feature article

In The Bleak Midwinter Christ Comes To Us As Family

On the Sunday after Christmas **we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family** in our tradition. It is a very fitting reminder of the most important thing in our lives: family.

In the darkness that is our culture and politics right now, we turn to the simple joy of a familiar Christmas song, "In the Bleak Midwinter", as sung by a church family, a parish community.

Let this beautiful hymn sustain you today and during the dark times ahead.

I believe you will also appreciate our second feature, which is about the conversion of an evil man by the strength of one nun's prayers.

You will be amazed and encouraged by the power of this story.



Thank you!

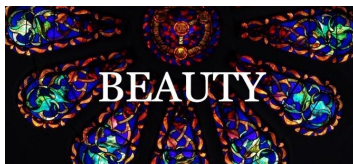
The Miraculous Conversion of A Rabid Nazi



A blessed Christmas and Happy New Year to you and all your loved ones.

Peter Darcy

(Remember: I publish one article a week - every Sunday - and the newsletter every two weeks. Please feel free to comment on any of the articles. I love to hear from readers.)



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