

Lesson Plans that Work
Nicholas of Myra
Lesson Plans for Older and Younger Children
Feast Day, December 6

Nicholas of Myra
c. 270-343

The saints are “the lights of the world in every generation,” people whose lives and deeds have shone brightly and helped others more closely follow God. There are saints who lived long ago and there are saints living and working in the world today, saints who are known by the church and saints who are known only to God. We say that the church—we—are part of the Communion of Saints, the company of all faithful people, connected through our baptism to those Christians who have died, those who are alive now, and those who haven’t yet been born. The word “saint” means holy.

In the Episcopal Church we have a Calendar of Saints, holy men and women we remember in prayer and with readings from the Bible on their feast day.

Supplies needed: white cloth for prayer table, a candle. For all children: gold foil-wrapped chocolate coins. For older children: a Bible, gold foil-wrapped chocolate coins, clementines, photocopies of the St. Nicholas story, small candy canes to represent a Bishop’s crozier, other small useful items such as warm socks, lip balm, tissues (optional). For younger children: white paper sacks, holiday stickers, markers.

Prepare: Prepare your prayer/gathering space with a small table, or space with a piece of cloth. On this cloth place a white candle. You may wish to place an image of Nicholas on the table. You may also want to have a small Christmas stocking and a clementine. Ask the children to leave their shoes outside the classroom door. Ask another adult to place some of the chocolate coins in the children’s shoes while they are in class.

Welcoming the children: Gather the children around the prayer space and ask some wondering questions: I wonder what kind of person is called a saint? I wonder what the work of a saint might be? (You may wish to share the introduction above.) Today we will hear the story of Saint Nicholas of Myra.

Light the candle.

Opening prayer: Jesus, your saints are the lights of the world in every generation. Help us to shine as they do, letting your light glow in us that through us others might see you. Amen.

Tell the story:

Nicholas of Myra was born in what is now western Turkey in the later part of the second (about 1800 years ago) Later histories and legends tell us that he was raised by his uncle, a monk, after his parents died. Nicholas used all the money they left him to help the poor, the sick and the suffering, following the words of Jesus. Although he was not yet a priest, he became a bishop

(in charge of many churches) when he was a young man. The most famous story that is told about Nicholas is one that may have inspired the story of Santa Claus. There was a poor family with three daughters, and in those days young women could not be married unless they had dowries, sums of money that were to be given to their husbands. On each of three nights, a sack of gold was tossed into their home through an open window, landing in their shoes—or in their stockings hanging by the fire to dry. These gifts, given in secret, saved the young women from being sold into slavery. Some children find an orange or a clementine in the toe of their Christmas stocking to represent St. Nicholas's gift of gold. Stories are also told of Nicholas protecting children and sailors, feeding the hungry in Myra during two years of famine (when there was no rain and the wheat would not grow), going before the Emperor Constantine to ask for lower taxes (the money paid to the Emperor) for his people and attending the Council of Nicea, the first great meeting of bishops from all over the Christian world in the year 325, from where we get the Nicene Creed that we say together in church on Sundays. Nicholas is remembered especially in Europe, Greece and Russia on the anniversary of his death, December 6. Children leave hay and carrots in their shoes for St. Nicholas's horse in hope that they will be exchanged for small toys or chocolates. People all over the world honor St. Nicholas during Advent and Christmas by being generous to those in need, and by giving gifts in secret.

Reflection Questions:

- I wonder what part of Nicholas's story you like best?
- I wonder what part of Nicholas's story you think is the most important?
- I wonder what part of Nicholas's story is also about you?

You may move to another space with tables for the activity time.

Activity for Older Children: One of the readings for Nicholas is Proverbs 19:17, 20-23 Have the children read it aloud from the Bible.

- ¹⁷ Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord,
and will be repaid in full.
- ²⁰ Listen to advice and accept instruction,
that you may gain wisdom for the future.
- ²¹ The human mind may devise many plans,
but it is the purpose of the Lord that will be established.
- ²² What is desirable in a person is loyalty,
and it is better to be poor than a liar.
- ²³ The fear of the Lord is life indeed;
filled with it one rests secure
and suffers no harm.

Nicholas gave gifts in secret, and in that spirit, invite the children to fill the bags decorated by younger children with three gold foil-wrapped chocolate coins, a clementine, photocopies of the St. Nicholas story, a small candy cane to represent a Bishop's crozier, and one each of other small useful items such as a pair of warm socks, lip balm, tissues (depending on the intended recipients). Talk together about how St. Nicholas may have inspired our own Christmas traditions of gift-giving and helping others in this season of Advent and Christmas. The filled

bags can be given in secret by the children themselves (without the useful items), or with the useful items they can be distributed through a food pantry or soup kitchen.

Activity for Younger Children: Have the children decorate the white paper sacks with holiday stickers and brightly colored markers. Fill at least one bag with the items collected for the older children's project and tell the children how and to whom these gifts will be given in honor of St. Nicholas. Talk together about what else the children might do in secret to be helpful or kind in this season of Advent and Christmas.

Gather/Ending: Return to your prayer space and gather in a circle to pray.

Prayer for Nicholas of Myra: 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 Church may never cease to work for the happiness of children, the safety of sailors, the relief of the poor, and the help of those tossed by tempests of doubt or grief; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Prayer for younger children: Dear God, (Dear God),
may we with your help (may we with your help)
follow Nicholas (follow Nicholas)
protector of children (protector of children)
friend of the poor (friend of the poor)
who gave for Jesus' sake (who gave for Jesus' sake)
to your honor and glory. (to your honor and glory)
Amen. (Amen)

Written by: Wendy Claire Barrie

Printed by the Office for Formation and Vocation Ministries of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 815 Second Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017.

© 2014 The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. All rights reserved.