

# The Real Story of Saint Nicholas

## Materials:

- felt underlay
- small miter
- pipe cleaner crozier and candy cane
- three bags containing pennies
- one clementine
- basket of stockings with treats and napkins at bottom

## Presentation:

There is someone who comes into the hearts of children at this wintry time of the year, someone known and loved by children all over the world. In Germany, he is known as *Kriss Kringle*. In France, he is known as *Père Noël* (pronounced *pear no-ell*). British children call him Father Christmas. Of course, many of you know him as Santa Claus.

And each place tells the story of Santa Claus in their own way, stories that are a lot like the ones we know, and stories that are wonderfully different. He wears a red and white coat in some stories, and a blue-hooded cloak in others. In some stories he lives at the North Pole and brings gifts in a sleigh pulled by eight reindeer. In other stories, he lives in Finland and rides on an eight-legged horse! Each place tells the story in their own wonderful way. But there is one story that nearly everyone tells alike: the story of Saint Nicholas who actually lived hundreds of years ago in a seaside town named Myra, in the country we now call Turkey.

Ever since he was a small child, Nicholas loved God and people more than anything. He studied hard, prayed often, and followed Jesus by helping the poor. The people of Myra loved Nicholas so much that when their old bishop died, they immediately elected Nicholas to be their new bishop. Nicholas served them well for a long time.

Nicholas was loved for one reason: he loved others. He loved God and God's people so much that he would do anything for them. When Nicholas became a bishop, he wore a red hat called a *miter*. It looked like this:

***Place the miter on the underlay.***

Imagine what it would look like if the top bent down (*hint: Santa's hat*). Bishop Nicholas also carried a staff called a *crozier* (pronounced *kro-zher*). Candy canes are shaped like this to remember Nicholas' care for the people of Myra.

***Place the crozier and candy cane on the underlay, next to the miter.***

Here is one story about Nicholas that has been passed down through many generations:

In those days, when a woman got married, she had to bring money or property with her into the marriage. This is called a dowry. If a woman didn't have this money, she wouldn't get married.

There was a man living in Myra who was very poor. He was so poor that he had little money to take care of his three daughters, and certainly no money for his daughters' dowries. He thought that his only choice was to sell them into slavery.

Nicholas heard about this terrible situation. And late one night, Nicholas snuck to the man's home and threw a bag of gold through the window.

***Take out a bag with coins, shake it a little, and set it on the underlay.***

The man and his daughters were overjoyed to discover the gift! The oldest daughter was able to marry, but there were still two younger daughters needing dowries. Sadly, the father prepared to send them away. But Nicholas returned another night, and threw another bag of gold through the window. The father again rejoiced, but he wondered who was helping him... and why?

***Take out a second bag with coins, shake it a little, and set it next to the first.***

Nicholas felt that it was best to help others without letting them know he was helping them. If he helped others in this way, he knew that he was helping them because he truly wanted to, and not because people would praise him for it.

The father hoped that he would be helped again, for his third daughter but also because he wanted to find out who was doing it. So he locked the windows and kept watch out the door. Nicholas wanted to help the third daughter just as he did for the older sisters, but he also did not want to be seen. So he dropped the bag of gold down the chimney, and it's said that the gold fell right into the third daughter's stocking that was hung inside the fireplace to dry.

***Take the third bag with coins, shake it a little, and set it next to the others.***

***Then place a clementine on the underlay next to the bags.***

Oranges are round and can have the color of gold, and so a wonderful symbol for gold! So sometimes when people eat oranges, they think about this story of Nicholas. We will have oranges later today inside stockings, just like Nicholas' coins.

Nicholas lived for God, which means that he lived for love. If people were in need and he was able to help, Saint Nicholas gave them hope and strength without expecting anything in return. He thought only about what he could give to those who needed him.

Stories about Saint Nicholas spread from his home in Turkey to nearby Russia, where he is still a very popular saint. Through the centuries, people passed on stories of Saint Nicholas across the northern parts of Europe, then to Germany, France, and England, and finally to the United States. Children in every country gave Saint Nicholas a name in their own language, and ours is Santa Claus.

Christmas is a wonderful time, isn't it? It's a wonderful time we get to spend with our families. It's a wonderful time filled with celebrations. It's wonderful because we get to think about the birth of the child Jesus, sing, and pray.

Christmas is also wonderful because we get to give. We can show our family and friends how much we love them by giving them special gifts that we make or buy. We give because we are thankful, for friendship and love and for all the people who take care of us. We are thankful to God.

Saint Nicholas was thankful too, and at Christmastime we try to be like him. He was so grateful for all that God had given him that he just couldn't stop giving joy and hope to others... no matter how far he had to travel or how many roofs he had to climb!

**Wondering Questions:**

I wonder what part of the story you liked the best?

I wonder what part felt most important?

I wonder where you are in the story?

I wonder if there is any part of the story that we can leave out and still have all the story we need?

***Set the basket of stockings in front of you.***

Now we will all give a gift to each other. We will go around the circle and give a stocking to the person next to us. If we want, we can close our eyes and do it in "secret." Then we can all eat our oranges. We will save the candy canes for a time that parents agree that it's ok to eat them.

- ***Go around the circle having each child give a stocking to another.***
- ***Pass napkins around and enjoy clementines together.***
- ***Children choosing not to eat clementine should still stay in the group until everyone is done sharing.***
- ***Please ask children to put napkins and food waste in the metal bowl for composting and empty stockings back in the basket.***