

Resources for Special and Seasonal Observances

Back-to-School Prayer

O Lord, as our children return to school, we pray for the safety of all students, teachers, administrators and staff. We pray for strength to comfort the fearful and face the challenges ahead. Surround parents and caregivers with peace to ease any anxiety about reentering the buildings. Give our children patience to deal with new rules as they renew friendships and develop new relationships in safe ways. Encourage parents and caregivers to nurture children at day's end so that they may thrive another day in school. We pray for churches to surround all those in schools with more prayer and support this year than ever before so that all children reach their full potential. *Amen.*

St. Nicholas Day

Written by Lisa Puccia

Saint Nicholas is honored on December 6. This feast may be an opportunity to connect the gift-giving of Santa Claus with the generosity of one of the saints of the church.

"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven."

— Matthew 6:1

LEARN

Who was St. Nicholas?

The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara in Asia Minor. At the time, the area was considered part of Greece; today, the village is on the southern coast of Turkey. Nicholas's wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while he was still young. Obeying Jesus's words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children and his concern for sailors and ships. [Read more here.](#)

Ways to Engage:

- [Find Myra and Turkey](#), where Saint Nicholas lived, on a globe or map.
- Help children learn about the difference between St. Nicholas and Santa Claus. St. Nicholas was a real person who lived hundreds of years ago. Many people around the world celebrate his life and good deeds on December 6. This is a day to think more about giving than receiving!
- Adults and older teens can learn about helping the poor today. Another saint who modeled how to help the poor was [Basil of Caesarea](#).

SHARE

Especially for Older Children and Youth

- Do you like origami? Make [St. Nicholas' bishop's miter](#) and use them to decorate your house or add them to St. Nicholas treat bags and Christmas gifts.
- This can be a great day for older children and youth to better understand the story of St. Nicholas. Watch [this short video](#) about how to "become" St. Nicholas. The video shows how to become St. Nicholas every day by making simple acts of kindness a routine. Start on St. Nicholas Day with some special "Nicholas Deeds."
- Post a St. Nicholas image on social media or in a text stream to let others know you are celebrating the life of St. Nicholas. You can choose from [one of these](#) or choose another. Nicholas gave secret gifts to those in need and people he cared about. Plan a day of sharing the story of this beloved saint!
- Make gift bags for neighbors for older folks in your community and plan a way to leave them on their porch or doorstep when no one is looking.
- St. Nicholas Treat Bag. You can decorate your own or find [a fancy one](#). Fill the bag with gold-wrapped chocolate coins (a reminder of Nicholas's many gifts of gold coins to the needy), a candy cane (a sweet treat shaped like the bishop's crozier), and a St. Nicholas prayer.

St. Nicholas Prayer:

God of joy and cheer, we thank you for your servant,
the good bishop Nicholas.
In loving the poor, he showed us your kindness;
in caring for your children, he revealed your love.
Make us thoughtful without need of reward
so that we, too, may be good followers of Jesus. *Amen.*

GIVE

- As a family, make a list of what you would buy if you had \$15. In the [Gifts for Life](#) catalog, you can spend \$15 to help support a caregiver in Africa, Asia or Latin America. Instead of purchasing items on your list, share that \$15 with those in need.
- Oranges signify the gold St. Nicholas gave away to the poor. At this time of year when oranges aren't in season, they were once considered a rare winter treat. Donate a case of oranges to your local food pantry.
- Begin or end your day with a [3-minute retreat](#) that will help you put the holiday season in perspective and leave you inspired by the life of St. Nicholas.



Episcopal Relief & Development has been partnering with the Zambia Anglican Council (ZACOP) to create safe spaces for children to grow and thrive. The program's holistic approach leverages the churches' networks and volunteers to organize communities, support parents and caregivers and provide stimulation and enrichment for young children.

Advent Wreath Prayers & Devotions

Episcopal Relief & Development offers a variety of ways to help individuals and communities observe the season of Advent. Our [Advent Toolkit](#) provides weekly prayers and activities for children, families and adults. For this season of giving, we also offer an alternative gift market, a fun way to enjoy fellowship, do some community building, and give gifts. [Here](#) is a model designed specifically for the season of Advent.

Here are some other options for engagement:

Wreaths

Ideas for Advent wreaths and prayers for children and families, including ways to make simple wreaths can be found DIY [here](#). These resources are also available in Spanish [here](#) and [here](#).

How can you, as an individual, a family or a congregation, make a significant change in the lives of children this Advent?

Prayers

A Reflection for Adults: As you light your Advent wreath each week, [this printable resource](#) will guide your hearts through sharing, giving and praying about the coming of Jesus as a child, again. You are invited to reflect on the joy and wonder of children in our lives and around the world and to join us in making lasting change through our early childhood initiatives.

Devotions

There are a number of Advent studies, stories and devotions on our website to choose from.

Learn about the practice of **Christkindl** in [this reflection](#) on observing Advent written by Chad Brinkman, Director of Faith Fundraising at Episcopal Relief & Development.

A devotion on **The Advent Paradox** written by Sean McConnell, Senior Director, Faith & Community Engagement at Episcopal Relief & Development, can be found on our website [here](#). He writes, "The challenge for us [is] to celebrate the story of God acting in a specific, self-revelatory instant and to share the message that Christ is always present."

Almighty God, as we await the coming of the Christ child and prepare to sing of "peace on earth, goodwill to all," help us to remember that our own peace must be bound in the peace of all your children on earth. Open our eyes and our hearts during this season of joy and giving that we would treat every child as lovingly as we welcome the Savior, born a child, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.