

Sunday 6 December 2020 – St Nicholas' Day

Today at St Nicholas' tide, we hear three Christmas stories, each with a gift to help us tell a story...

Story 1 (boat)

Bishop Nicholas of Myra lived in the fourth century in a country that is now known as Turkey. He is the Patron Saint of children and of sailors, and presents and sweets are traditionally given on his feast day in a number of European countries.

There are many miracles and stories of generosity associated with him. Today you will hear three of these. While I tell the first story, you can put together your boat and think about St Nicholas' actions and the decision the merchant makes. This miracle might remind you of one of Jesus' miracles.

Once there was a famine in Myra – Bishop Nicholas prayed to God to help him feed the people. One day a ship sailed into the harbour with a merchant who had bags and bags of grain for his rich master. St Nicholas begged him for some of the bags to feed the hungry people of the town. The merchant knew his master would be angry if he didn't receive all the grain, but eventually he gave two bags to Nicholas. Nicholas distributed the grain amongst the people – and however much he gave out, there was always plenty left. The merchant went away, scared of the reaction of his master – but when he counted the bags of grain, he found he had just as many as when he started.

Prayer

Sometimes the people who live really close to us are suffering. Sometimes we don't even notice - sometimes we don't know what to do. When we don't know how to help, help us to pray and to listen to what you are saying to us. Help us to take responsibility for our neighbours - to do what we can to help, just as you did.

Thank you for people who take risks to help others - thank you for the merchant who gave away the grain even though he was scared of the consequences. Thank you for St Nicholas for his bravery in speaking out for the needs of his people. Help us never to tire of doing good, and to remember our responsibility to the poor.

Story 2 (fruit)

One day St Nicholas heard about a famine in the West, far away from Myra. He said to all the people 'Bring me the fruits of your gardens and the fruits of your fields so that we can do something about the children who are hungry far away. The people brought baskets full of apples and nuts, and on top lay honey cakes which the women had baked, and the men brought sacks of wheat. Bishop Nicholas had all these things taken onto a ship. The wind blew into the sails and sped the ship along, And when the wind dropped, the rowed the ship to the country in the West.

It took them seven days to get there, and when they arrived it was evening. The roads were empty, but in the houses there burnt lights. Bishop Nicholas knocked at a window. The mother in the house thought a late wanderer had come and she asked her child to open the door. Nobody was outside. The child ran to the window. There was nobody outside the window either. But instead, there stood a basket filled with

apples and nuts, red and yellow, and a honey cake lay on top. By the basket stood a sack which was bursting with golden wheat grains. The people of the land ate the secret gifts that Nicholas brought and once again became healthy and happy.

Prayer

Heavenly father, sometimes we forget that people far away need our help as much as those on our street. Forgive us for somehow slipping into feeling that our neighbourhood deserves our help more than those in distant lands. Thank you for the example St Nicholas, who did not stay in his own country - despite the fact that his own country had its problems of poverty and hunger, but rather he demonstrated your all encompassing love for the world by travelling far away and showing your generosity to those in need. Help us to be a generous people too, fired by your generosity to us.

Story 3. (A golden coin)

There was a man, once rich, who had fallen on hard times. Now poor, he had three daughters of an age to be married. In those days a young woman's family had to have something of value, a dowry, to offer prospective bridegrooms. The larger the dowry, the better the chance a young woman would find a good husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to marry. This poor man's daughters, without dowries, were therefore destined to be sold into slavery, or worse.

Word of the family's misfortune reached Nicholas, who had the wealth inherited from his parents. Coming in secret by night, he tossed a bag of gold into the house. It sailed in through an open window, landing in a stocking* left before the fire to dry. What joy in the morning when the gold was discovered! The first daughter soon wed.

Not long after, another bag of gold again appeared mysteriously. The second daughter was married. The father, now very anxious to know who the secret benefactor was, kept watch during the night.

A third bag of gold landed inside the house and the watchful father leaped up and caught the fleeing donor. "Ah, Nicholas, it is you!" cried the father, "You have saved my daughters from certain disaster."

Nicholas, embarrassed, and not wishing to be known, begged the man to keep his identity secret. "You must thank God alone for providing these gifts in answer to your prayers for deliverance."

Prayer

Lord Jesus, sometimes when we do good, we really want others to notice. Thank you for the example of St Nicholas, who did good deeds in secret and gave the glory to God. This Christmas time, help us to appreciate the wondrous mystery of your generosity and love to us, and to give thanks to you.

We listen to "In the bleak mid winter"