

The saints of Christmas

Our present-day Santa Claus has roots in third-century **St. Nicholas**. Orphaned young, he was left rich and gave money generously. A legend involving the saint concerns a desperate man who needed money to pay his debts. Nicholas secretly threw a bag of gold down his chimney. To the Church, Nicholas is a confessor of the faith, and a holy bishop.

St. Lucy lived in pagan Sicily around the year 300 during a time of great religious persecution. Lucy refused marriage to a



determined suitor, and he exposed her to authorities as a Christian – a charge resulting in her death. The courage of this young martyr is a guiding light for all young women and men.

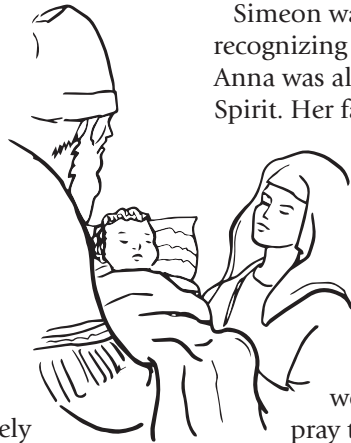
St. Boniface converted many in Germany and the surrounding area to Christianity. He is credited with taking the fir tree for a Christmas symbol. After encountering pagans about to sacrifice a child tied to a fir tree, Boniface cut down the great tree and used it to preach about the Incarnation.

Scripture LESSON

Luke 2:22-40, No ordinary child

Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews and did what was required by their faith to celebrate the birth of their son. They couldn't afford the customary offering of a lamb and presented two pigeons instead to thank God for their son. To the uninformed observer, Jesus' birth was unremarkable and his family quite ordinary.

Yet, Simeon immediately recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he prophesied that Jesus was to be *"a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for*



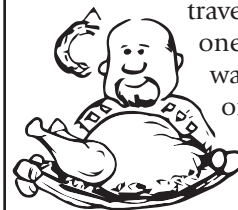
your people Israel" (Luke 2:32).

Simeon was not alone in recognizing the Lord in the temple. Anna was also filled with the Holy Spirit. Her faith in God's promises gave her hope. The hope God places in our hearts gives us a desire for the kingdom of Heaven.

What can a parent do? Teach children to look for Jesus in the world. Encourage them to pray to him. Tell them that the Holy Spirit will reveal the presence of the Lord to those who want to know him, receive him, and to be with him forever.

Parent TALK

Every year, we have a tradition of visiting my family for Christmas. My parents and siblings live two hours away, so visiting them is special. I was so disappointed last year when a surprise snowstorm prevented us



traveling as usual. It was one of the few times I wasn't with my family on Christmas but I couldn't let my disappointment ruin the holiday

for my own family.

I found out that our next-door neighbors weren't traveling for Christmas, either. They recently moved to the area away from family. So, I invited them for Christmas dinner after Mass. My husband made turkey and fixings, and our guests brought their traditional dishes. We turned on Christmas music and everyone helped finish decorating the Christmas tree. The children played together while the adults chatted.

Looking back, that snowstorm turned out to be providential; we all had a wonderful time and made great friends.

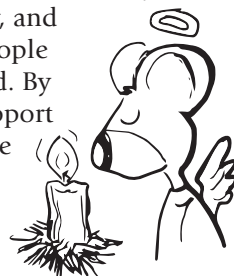
Feasts & Celebrations

Dec. 8 – Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1854). On this Holy Day of Obligation, we commemorate that Mary was conceived in St. Anne's womb without original sin. In addition to attending Mass, praying a joyful rosary is a wonderful way to celebrate.

Dec. 9 – St. Juan Diego (1548). A simple, humble Native American who became a faithful Christian, St. Juan Diego was visited by the Blessed Virgin Mary at Tepeyac Hill in Mexico. She asked him to have the

bishop of Mexico build a chapel for her, and had him carry roses to the bishop as a sign. When the roses were emptied from his tilma (cape) before the bishop, it retained the image of the Blessed Mother.

Dec. 31 – The Holy Family (1st century). On the feast of the Holy Family, we celebrate the family life of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph – three people who lived for God. By their love and support of one another the Holy Family is a model for all Christian families.



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