



Pop Quiz -- Name Santa's 8 Reindeers:

Dasher, Dancer, Prancer, Vixen, Comet, Cupid, Donner, Blitzen

Today is the memorial of Saint Nicholas, a 4th-century Greek Christian bishop of Myra in the province of Lycia, located in modern day Turkey. His uncle, the Archbishop of Myra, ordained him priest, and appointed him abbot of a monastery. When his uncle died Nicholas was elected to fill the vacancy. He became known as a protector of the innocent and the wronged, as shown in a great story.

He once heard that a man who had fallen into poverty intended to abandon his three daughters to a life of prostitution. Determined to save their innocence, Nicholas went out one night, and flung a bag of gold into the sleeping father's window. Upon waking, he deemed the gift a godsend, and with it dowered his eldest child. Overjoyed at his success, Nicholas did the same for the second daughter. But the third time the father was watching as he stole away. He overtook him and kissed his feet.

During the Middle Ages, often on the night before his December 6 Feast Day, children received gifts in his honor. The custom continued, and over the year there have been many variations of this as well as his name. For example, in Holland and some other European countries, children leave clogs or shoes out on December 5th night (St. Nicholas Eve) to be filled with presents. They also

believe that if they leave some hay and carrots in their shoes for Sinterklaas's horse, they will be left some sweets.

The name *Santa Claus* was first used in the American press in 1773. In 1823 the famous poem '*A Visit from St. Nicholas*' or '*T'was the Night before Christmas*' was published. The poem describes St. Nicholas with eight reindeer and gives them their names. They became really well known in the 1949 song '*Rudolph the Red nosed Reindeer*.'

About 150 years ago, American children began to write letters to Santa Claus. So, tonight's question is: If you were to write a letter to Santa Claus what would you ask for? Health, wealth, world peace? Did anyone think of asking for the greatest Christmas present mankind could ever receive? The Emmanuel.

He's coming! Bearing good tidings for all! It is this promise, its anticipation and preparation that define our Faith. Isaiah wrote that "the Lord himself will give you a sign; the young woman, pregnant and about to bear a son, shall name him *Emmanuel*." St. Paul told the Hebrews that "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen." Christmas, then, is one of the oldest and most profound of prophecies; and it became realized wrapped in swaddling cloth.

Some years ago, I halted my downstairs Christmas charge to sing Happy Birthday to Jesus. Sixty years later I still do. I invite each of you to do the same this year.

In closing, I leave you with this factoid to ponder. Rudolph, the red-nosed reindeer, may be female because only female reindeer keep their antlers throughout the winter.

Merry Christmas.