

Dear Santa

In his follow-up letter to the Great Pumpkin, Linus wrote:

"You must get discouraged because more people believe in Santa Claus than you."

Despite the disagreement between Linus and his sister Lucy over the existence of their seasonal icons, they both presented elements of faith and hope and belief that demonstrated their beliefs. Personally, I can't remember when my belief in Santa Claus changed. I don't think I ever officially stopped believing. I think my attitude changed when I figured out that the Easter Bunny was not real. (Or was it the Tooth Fairy?. I really can't remember.) I do remember one Christmas morning when I halted my stairway stampede half-way down to sing Happy Birthday to Jesus. Little did I know that was one of my first epiphany experiences—the realization that some holidays and their icons get confused with holy days and their significance.

And speaking of Santa Claus, yesterday was the Feast Day of the Patron Saint of children – a Fourth Century Bishop Nikolaos of Myra, also known as Nikolaos the Wonderworker.

The Greek histories of his life agree he suffered an imprisonment of the faith and made a glorious confession in the latter part of the persecution raised by Diocletian, and that he was present at the Council of Nicaea and there condemned Arianism.

A citizen of Patara had lost all his money, and needed to support his three daughters who could not find husbands because of their poverty; so the wretched man was going to give them over to prostitution. Nicholas became informed of this, and thus took a bag of gold and threw it into an open window of the man's house in the night. Here was a dowry for the eldest girl and she was soon duly married. At intervals Nicholas did the same for the second and the third; at the last time the father was on the watch, recognized his benefactor and overwhelmed Nicholas with his gratitude.

This custom in England is not a survival from Catholic times. It was popularized in America by the Dutch Protestants of New Amsterdam who converted the popish saint into a Nordic magician (Santa Claus = Sint Klaes = Saint Nicholas) and was introduced into this country by Bret Harte.

But let's leave the levity behind for a few moments to review the true meaning of Christmas. Please join me in singing O Holy Night.

O Holy Night
(Cantique de Noel by Adolphe Adam, 1847)

O holy night, the stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
'Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices.
O night divine, O night when Christ was born,
O night divine. O night divine.

Truly he taught us to love one another,
His law is love and His Gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break for the slaves is our brother,
And in His name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus we raise we,
Let all within us praise His holy name,
Christ is the Lord, O praise His name forever,
His power and glory, evermore proclaim,
His power and glory, evermore proclaim.

Noel Noel O night divine O night divine
Noel Noel O holy night