

Who is the Father in Christmas?

Peter Kirk, November 2003

There is something wonderful about a traditional Christmas, especially for children. Putting up a tree, decorating it, arranging the presents, and then waiting for Christmas morning and the thrill of opening them. But perhaps the most exciting thing for children is to find by their bed in the morning a stocking full of presents. Father Christmas has called!

But who is this Father Christmas, and how long has he been calling? He is also called Santa Claus, which is short for St. Nicholas. Nicholas was bishop of Myra, now in Turkey, in the 4th century AD. The stories tell us that he secretly gave presents to poor children by hiding them in stockings hung up by the fireplace to dry. But it seems that Father Christmas now lives not in warm Turkey but in frozen Lapland, the north of Finland. He spends most of the year there, looking after his reindeer, answering his mail, and preparing his gifts. And each year he spends more and more of the autumn visiting shopping centres.

He visits each home just once a year, on the night he is expected. In Holland and Germany he comes on 6th December, St. Nicholas' day. In the Soviet Union people were not supposed to celebrate Christmas, but they let Father Christmas bring his gifts at the New Year, and called him Grandfather Frost. But his busiest night of the year must be Christmas Eve, when he has to fly right round the world filling all the stockings which good children have hung up ready for him.

Yet these days there are so many poor children around the world that Father Christmas can't bring them all that they need on his own. He needs some help from us.

Operation Christmas child, an international charity, helps to make sure that disadvantaged and poor children around the world have something to celebrate. Many from our churches and other groups in Great Baddow have supported and still support their aims and appeal through filling a shoe box each with toys and gifts. The boxes are collected in local centres and then delivered, often in huge Antonov cargo planes, to countries like Georgia, Armenia and Bosnia.

The Great Baddow churches also support poorer communities in Britain. Every year Meadgate Church Centre collects toys and gifts and delivers them to the Islington health visitor centre for distribution to needy children. St Mary's Church collects for the needy elderly and housebound in Victoria Docks.

Ending A:

Different ways of helping Father Christmas, yet the same spirit, the spirit of giving, of when we are focused on the needs of others. I suppose that is the spirit at the heart of Christmas itself, when God thought of our needs and gave us his son.

Ending B:

St. Nicholas was not the first to bring gifts at Christmas. The wise men brought gifts to the baby Jesus. But the first Christmas gift was that baby himself, given to the world by his heavenly Father to lead us all to true life. The gifts in our stockings will make us happy for a short time, but only that first and greatest gift can bring us lasting joy and peace. The real Father Christmas is the Father who gave his Son, and who wants to be the loving Father of us all. Will you accept his gift and join his family this Christmas?

See the back page for details of the churches' Christmas services.

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