



THE ANGLICAN DIOCESE OF GRAFTON

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Bishop of Grafton

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

In this Christmas season, the jolly figure of Santa Claus is all around us. This particular Christmas tradition comes to us through the Dutch Sinterklaas tradition, which went to the United States with early Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam (now known as New York). It has since been popularised throughout the Western world. What many do not realise, however, is that its origins are in 4th century Turkey with Bishop Nikolaos (Nicholas) of Myra. St Nikolaos became Sinterklaas who became Santa Claus.

St Nicholas is rather winsomely described as a man who led his diocese with 'charity, dedication and full respect for orthodoxy.' He is remembered for many generous actions and miracles.

One of the most famous of these stories concerns a poor man and his three daughters. The father could not afford a dowry for his daughters, thus almost certainly condemning them to prostitution. Nicholas wanted to help but did not want to embarrass the family by offering charity. So he went at night and threw three purses of gold, one for each daughter, through the window of the house. There are differing versions of this story but the basic thrust is the same. Through Nicholas' generosity, the lives of a family were utterly changed.

Most of the stories about him share this theme of life-changing, transforming and humble generosity. I'm not sure when the reindeer, sleighs, and elves came in, but the man at the root of the Santa Claus tradition was kind, humble, generous and compassionate.

As we celebrate God's gift of Jesus to us this Christmas by giving gifts to others, how can we capture this dimension of humble, loving, life-changing service?

The greatest gift we can offer is the faith we hold: the knowledge of the love of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Our faith is expressed not just in what we say but also in what we do. St Francis of Assisi is famously quoted as having said 'preach the Gospel at all times and if necessary, use words'.

In a world which at times seems selfish, consumerist and hard-hearted, let us speak of God's transforming love, forgiveness and kindness in all that we do and say. Let us speak of the freedom and redemption we find in Jesus.

In Jesus, God is born as one of us, heaven touches earth and we are offered new life. In awe and wonder, we gather around the crib.

+Sarah

