Little Flower Catholic Elementary School -- **Newsletter** for Friday, December 5, 2014

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Little Flower School students learn about many saints of the church. One saint that has always held a special place in the hearts of children is Saint Nicholas, just as St. Nicholas holds children in a special place in his heart – as their patron and protector. Tomorrow, December 6, is the feast of Saint Nicholas. [Below is information from these sites: http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/stories-legends/ ; http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/who-is-st-nicholas/; http://www.biography.com/people/st-nicholas-204635#synopsis]

Stories about St. Nicholas were first told while he was living, as sailors already claimed him as their patron saint. Sailing to different ports and along rivers, they carried Nicholas stories throughout Europe. As stories were told and retold, imaginative and sometimes miraculous details were added—details which vary in different accounts of the same episode. Only a unique and special person inspires such a rich legacy. These stories reveal St. Nicholas' character; the story of a man who embodied love—love for God and care for people. He was ready to help in any way—truly loving neighbor as himself. The stories reveal a man, lover of the poor and patron saint of children, who is a worthy example. Bishop Nicholas put Jesus Christ at the center of his ministry and his entire life—a true saint.

The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara. At the time the area was Greek and is now on the southern coast of Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships.

 Under Roman rule, Christians were persecuted, so Bishop Nicholas suffered for his faith, was exiled and imprisoned. When Constantine came into power, Nicholas was released. He died December 6, AD 343 in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church. The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration, St. Nicholas Day.

One story tells of a poor man with three daughters. In those days a young woman's father had to offer prospective husbands something of value—a dowry. The larger the dowry, the better the chance that a young woman would find a good husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to marry. This poor man's daughters, without dowries, were therefore destined to be sold into slavery. Mysteriously, on three different occasions, a bag of gold appeared in their home-providing the needed dowries. The bags of gold, tossed through an open window, are said to have landed in stockings or shoes left before the fire to dry. This led to the custom of children hanging stockings or putting out shoes, eagerly awaiting gifts from Saint Nicholas. Sometimes the story is told with gold balls instead of bags of gold. That is why three gold balls, sometimes represented as oranges, are one of the symbols for St. Nicholas. And so St. Nicholas is a gift-giver.

One of the oldest stories showing St. Nicholas as a protector of children takes place long after his death. The townspeople of Myra were celebrating the good saint on the eve of his feast day when a band of Arab pirates from Crete came into the district. They stole treasures from the Church of Saint Nicholas to take away as booty. As they were leaving town, they snatched a young boy, Basilios, to make into a slave. The emir, or ruler, selected Basilios to be his personal cupbearer, as not knowing the language, Basilios would not understand what the king said to those around him. So, for the next year Basilios waited on the king, bringing his wine in a beautiful golden cup. For Basilios' parents, devastated at the loss of their only child, the year passed slowly, filled with grief. As the next St. Nicholas' feast day approached, Basilios' mother would not join in the festivity, as it was now a day of tragedy. However, she was persuaded to have a simple observance at home—with quiet prayers for Basilios' safekeeping. Meanwhile, as Basilios was fulfilling his tasks serving the emir, he was suddenly whisked up and away. St. Nicholas appeared to the terrified boy, blessed him, and set him down at his home back in Myra. Imagine the joy and wonderment when Basilios amazingly appeared before his parents, still holding the king's golden cup. This is the first story told of St. Nicholas protecting children—which became his primary role in the West.

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The Dutch continued to celebrate the feast day of St. Nicholas, December 6. It was a common practice for children to put out their shoes the night before. In the morning, they would discover the gifts that St. Nicholas had left there for them. Dutch immigrants brought St. Nicholas, known to them as Sint Nikolaas or by his nickname Sinter Klaas, and his gift-giving ways to America in the 1700s.

In America, St. Nicholas went through many transformations and eventually Sinter Klaas became Santa Claus. Instead of giving gifts on December 6, he became a part of the Christmas holiday. In the 1820 poem "An Account of a Visit from St. Nicholas" by Clement Clarke Moore, he is described as a jolly, heavy man who comes down the chimney to leave presents for deserving children and drives a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer. The cartoonist Thomas Nast added to the St. Nicholas legend with an 1881 drawing of Santa as wearing a red suit with white fur trim. Once a kind, charitable bishop, St. Nicholas had become the Santa Claus we know today.

We hope the children of **Little Flower School** can take the example of Saint Nicholas and become children who put Jesus Christ at the center of their life. We hope our children can truly love their neighbor as themselves. We pray that our children can take the example of St. Nicholas and show love for God and care for people .

Saint Nicholas, pray for us! Saint Therese, the Little Flower, pray for us!

++++++++++++++++++++ Additional Information For You To Know ++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

+++ This Sunday is the 1st Sunday of the month. All Little Flower Families are invited to attend **Community Prayer** from 10:00 am – 10:15 am in the Parish Hall.

+++ Little Flower School Christmas Program will be Sunday, Dec. 7th at 2:00 pm in Rugby HS auditorium. Students in grades K-6 will be participating. There will also be a special presentation by Mrs. Swanson's Preschool students.

+++   Advent is a time of giving and preparing for Jesus. With Advent season, comes **Project Joy**, and that means it is time for us to think of others who have very little. We will begin to collect for "Project Joy," on Monday, December 1st. There will be a special jar in each classroom for the children to put their donations. The project will end on Wednesday, December 10th. The following Friday a.m., December 12th, the third and fourth grade students will purchase gifts from Shopko with the help of Mrs. Bethany Mack and some parents, to be given to children from the local area in hopes of making their Christmas a bit brighter. Thank you! Mrs. Mack.

+++ The results of our first **Box Top "Turkey Trot Contest":** Grade K = 586 Labels; Gr. 1 & 2 = 814 Labels; Gr. 3 & 4 = 375 Labels; Gr. 5 & 6 = 879 Labels; Total = 2654 Box Tops.

+++ Assorted packs of 20 Religious **Christmas cards** are now on sale in the school office. Cost is $5.00 per box of 20.

+++ Parents: With the onset of **colder weather**, please make sure your child wears a warm coat, gloves, boots and hat before coming to school or boarding a rural route or activity bus. DON'T FORGET YOUR SHOES!