

Defending the Faith

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December 2018

The Spirit of Christmas

Christmas is the birthday of our Lord, Jesus Christ. What an awesome gift God gave *us* on the day Christ was born. God clothed Himself in flesh and entered our physical reality as a vulnerable little baby. Oh, how He loves us! It is fitting that the Christmas season should be a time of giving. All around the world, Christians and even non-believers celebrate Christmas in some way. The map to the right shows how many countries celebrate



Christmas as a public holiday. I find it fascinating that many, who are *not* Christians, still exchange gifts and practice some of the traditions. What a powerful legacy Christ left us! He taught us the value of giving, the power of love. Thus, we describe the feeling we experience from giving at this time of year as the spirit of Christmas. Even non-believers remember and honor Christ in an indirect way.

Personally, I find the Christmas season in the United States a bit too commercial and secularized. It is very difficult to find Christmas cards with a nativity scene. Christmas songs are about reindeer, rocking around the Christmas tree, jingling bells, a winter wonderland, or Frosty the snowman. I enjoy the traditional songs, like “Silent Night,” “Angels We Have Heard on High” or “What Child Is This?” Shopping becomes so stressful with people fighting for parking spots or losing patience while waiting in lines. Yet, everyone seems intent on finding that right gift for their loved ones. Despite the commercialism, those of us who exchange gifts discover that the greater joy is watching a loved one open the gift we have given, rather than opening gifts ourselves.

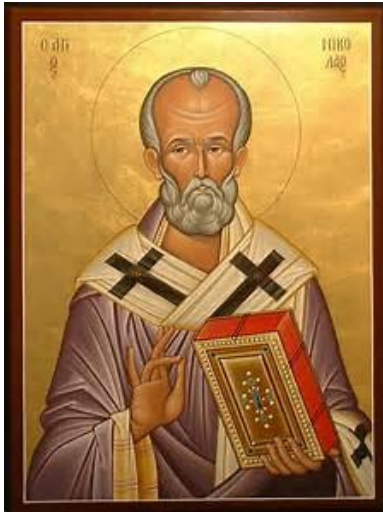
Many do not realize that Santa Claus is a real person, a saint of the church. The myth of Santa Claus, which is a German translation for St. Nicholas, was the real live Archbishop of Myra in southern Asia Minor, who lived during the fourth century. He does not have a sleigh with reindeers that fly throughout the world on Christmas Eve delivering gifts to children. Instead, he inherited his parents’ estate and promptly gave away his riches to the needy. He was known for his generosity, and therefore, exemplifies the spirit of Christmas. The following story is an example:

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The Spirit of Christmas (cont'd)



“There was a certain formerly rich inhabitant of Patara, whom Saint Nicholas saved from great sin. The man had three grown daughters, and in desperation he planned to sell their bodies, so they would have money for food. The saint, learning of the man’s poverty and of his wicked intention, secretly visited him one night and threw a sack of gold through the window. With the money the man arranged an honorable marriage for his daughter. Saint Nicholas also provided gold for the other daughters, thereby saving the family from falling into spiritual destruction. In bestowing charity, Saint Nicholas always strove to do this secretly and to conceal his good deeds.”¹

Those of us who are Christians, should strive to truly live the spirit of Christmas this year. We can be patient in those long lines. We can refuse to become upset when someone sneaks into that parking space that you had already begun to enter. We can give a gift to someone who may not expect it or make a donation for those in need. We should not neglect to thank God for all the blessings He has bestowed upon us and our families. The greatest gift we can give to our families and friends is the gift of time. Spend more intimate time communicating in person, rather than through a text on our phones or a message on social media.

One day, I was at a restaurant having dinner. A mother was having dinner with her two children. The entire time I observed her, which was about 30 minutes, she was on her phone, texting or doing something. The two children were playing games on their phones. None of them spoke a word, except to announce that it was time to go. It seemed like such a wasted opportunity. To me this was so sad! Instead, we should spend more time with one another, sharing experiences together, laughing, creating joyous memories. When we are gone and have left this life, all that will remain for our loved ones are those treasured memories.

Have a beautiful Christmas filled with God’s love and many of His blessings! May the joy of Christ’s birth fill your hearts to overflowing!

¹ Retrieved from: <https://oca.org/saints/lives/2016/12/06/103484-st-nicholas-the-wonderworker-and-archbishop-of-myra-in-lycia>).

Helen Kamenos
Readers’ Favorite Author

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The Birth of Jesus

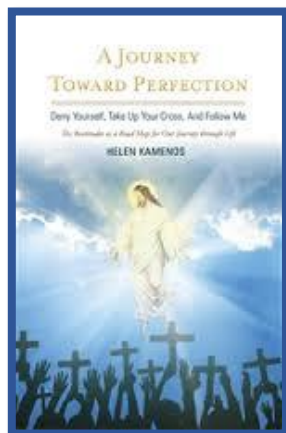
⁴ Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. ⁵ He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.



⁸ In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹ to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah,^[a] the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them” (Luke 2:4-20).



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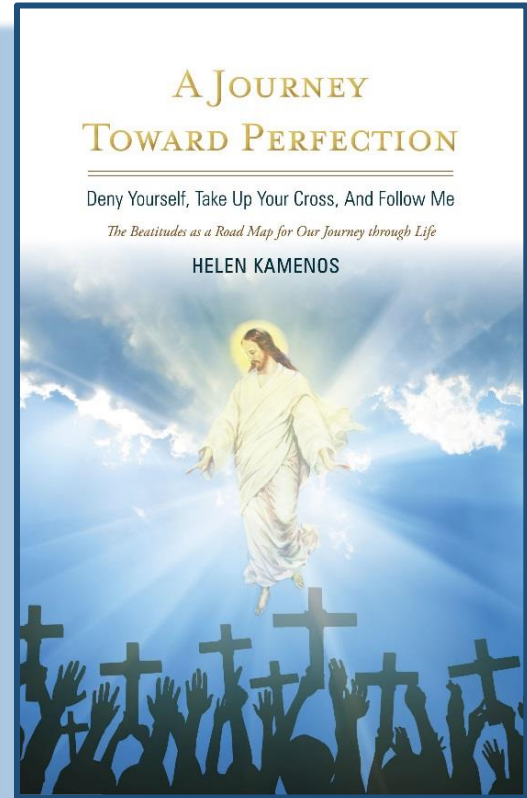
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A Journey Toward Perfection

The Beatitudes from Matthew 5:

- ³ Blessed are the poor in spirit,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.
- ⁵ Blessed are the meek,
For they shall inherit the earth.
- ⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
For they shall be filled.
- ⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
For they shall obtain mercy.
- ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
For they shall see God.
- ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
For they shall be called sons of God.
- ¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,
For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
- ¹¹ "Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you and
say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.
- ¹² Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward
in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were
before you.



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