

# EXCELSIOR NEWSLETTER

Excelsior Classical Covenantal Community

December 2009

[www.excelsiorclassical.org](http://www.excelsiorclassical.org)

## “St. Nicholas” by George Grant

The fourth century pastor who inspired the tradition of Santa Claus, may not have lived at the North Pole or traveled by reindeer and sleigh but he certainly was a paradigm of graciousness, generosity, and Christian charity. Nicholas of Myra's great love and concern for children drew him into a crusade that ultimately resulted in protective Imperial statutes that remained in place in Byzantium for more than a thousand years.

Though little is known of his childhood, he was probably born to wealthy parents at Patara in Lycia, a Roman province of Asia Minor. As a young man noted for his piety, judiciousness, and charity, he was chosen bishop of the then rundown diocese of Myra. There he became gained renown for his personal holiness, evangelistic zeal, and pastoral compassion.

Early Byzantine histories reported that he suffered imprisonment and made a famous profession of faith during the persecution of Diocletian. He was also reputedly present at the Council of Nicaea, where he forthrightly condemned the heresy of Arianism--one story holds that he actually slapped the heretic Arius. But it was his love for and care of children that gained him his greatest renown. Though much of what we know about his charitable work on behalf of the poor, the despised, and the rejected has been distorted by legend and lore over the centuries, it is evident that he was a particular champion of the downtrodden, bestowing upon them gifts as tokens of the grace and mercy of the Gospel.

One legend tells of how citizen of Patara lost his fortune, and because he could not raise dowries for his three young daughters, he was going to give them over to prostitution. After hearing this, Nicholas took a small bag of gold and threw it through the window of the man's house on the eve of the feast of Christ's Nativity. The eldest girl was married with it as her dowry. He performed the same gracious service for each of the other girls on each of the succeeding nights. The three purses, portrayed in art with the saint, were thought to be the origin of the pawnbroker's symbol of three gold balls. But they were also the inspiration for Christians to begin the habit of gift giving during each of the twelve days of Christmas--from December 25 until Epiphany on January 6.

In yet another legend, Nicholas saved several youngsters from certain death when he pulled them from a deep vat of vinegar brine--

### Mission Project

Laura McCoy is organizing our missions project this year to collect socks for missionaries in Mexico to distribute to patients in a mental facility there. Please be sure to bring the socks to Excelsior by our last day of classes on December 11. Also, if you have any toboggans, gloves, scarves, or blankets (like throws) that you do not use and would like to know that they kept someone warm this winter, please bring those as well.

Ladies' Christmas Brunch  
Saturday, December 5th 10:30am  
Home of Connie Ramsey  
267 Hwy 9 N - Pontotoc  
489-5120



again, on the feast of the Nativity. Ever afterward, Christians remembered the day by giving one another the gift of large crisp pickles.

The popular cultural representation of St. Nicholas as Father Christmas or Santa Claus, though drawing on a number of such legends, was based primarily on a the Dutch custom of giving children presents--slipping fruits, nuts, and little toys into shoes or stockings drying along the warm hearthside--on his feast day, December 6. Throughout the rest of Europe during the middle ages, that day was marked by festively decorating homes and by a sumptuous feast that interrupted the general fasting of Advent. And in Scandanavia it was celebrated as a day of visitation, when the elders of all the remote country churches would bundle themselves in their thick furs and drive their sleighs laden with gift pastries through the snowy landscape to every home within the parish.

The transformation of St. Nicholas into Santa Claus is rooted in a number of intertwined traditions, legends, and archetypes. But perhaps more than any other sources, the advertising of soft drink manufacturer Coca Cola and the holiday cartoons of New York newspaperman Thomas Nash have profoundly shaped our perception. Coca Cola's serving trays, signage, and print ads popularized the Nash caricature of a rotund, jolly, fur-draped, gift-laden, and unbidden visitor who pops down chimneys and distributes gifts to children all over the world.

Alas, thus stripped of his pastoral function and parish proximity, Santa has become almost fairy-like in his mythic proportions--and this day of remembrance has become little more than just one more shopping day before Christmas.

This article was originally posted on Dr. Grant's blog and can be found at <http://grantian.blogspot.com/2007/12/st-nicholas.html>

*Kindly to the Crown*

## TeenPact Mississippi Informational Meeting

Monday, December 7, 6:00 p.m., Hope Church.

Pizza will be provided

Please join us as we hear from TeenPact Regional Director Pam Minyard and several TeenPact Alumni from DeSoto County.

TeenPact Mississippi will be February 22-25, 2010, and is designed for homeschoolers ages 13-18. If you are interested in having your children learn civics hands-on instead of from a textbook, you must attend this meeting. TeenPact teaches the foundations of government with the legislative branch, beginning with a four-day session at the capitol.

The civics course offer an incredible platform for rhetoric, interpersonal communication, and current events, and is sufficient for a 1/3 high school Carnegie credit.

Spiritually, TeenPact teaches Biblical principles of government and family, going hand-in-hand with the values of families who participate.

The cost for the week is \$220 for first-time students, \$180 for returning students. \$15 Early-bird discount available if you register by Dec. 22, 2009; \$20 discount if you come with a group of 10+. Housing will be provided free of charge for the first 47 registrants at Camp Garaywa in Clinton, MS. We hope to defray the expense with our fundraisers. Anyone interested in these funds should contact Shelley Crampton.

For more information see [www.teenpact.com](http://www.teenpact.com) or contact Shelley Crampton at 840-1923; [scrampton@afo.net](mailto:scrampton@afo.net).

## Preparing for December...

December Headmasters

December 4th - Anthony Mathenia

December 11th - Trey McCoy

Lunch:

December 4th -

**Steak Escape**

December 11th - **Abner's**