



In today's Gospel we witness what happens when someone is struck with the true meaning of Christmas. That someone is Mary's cousin Elizabeth. Put yourself in Elizabeth's shoes. Mary, having just conceived Jesus in her womb, visits Elizabeth who is six months pregnant. When she hears Mary's greeting, the infant leaps in her womb, she is instantly filled with the Holy Spirit and somehow understands her son's leap was a leap for joy! And she understood why, so she

“cried out in a loud voice and said, “Most blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed are you who believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.” (Lk 1:39-45).

Simply put, Elizabeth, being filled with the Holy Spirit, understood Mary's baby was God and Mary had been blessed among all women – her dear cousin was chosen to be the Mother of God! And furthermore, the Mother of God came with her divine son to be with her and help her in the last months of her pregnancy! Yes, that was a happy day – Elizabeth was struck with the true meaning of Christmas!

The fact is, the conception and birth of Jesus was the greatest thing that had ever happened on this earth. It was the ultimate act of divine love. Jesus, Immanuel – God – is not only with us, He is one of us! He came to unite Himself with us in order to save us. He came to offer Himself on our behalf as a living sacrifice to take away our sufferings and sins and win for us the possibility of eternal life, eternal happiness, eternal love, with God and all His faithful.

How can we catch the spirit of Christmas? Let me offer a simple meditation.

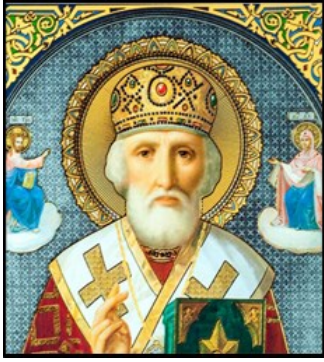
"In a few days' time we shall see Jesus in the Crib. The sight will be a proof of God's mercy and love. We will be able to say: 'On this Christmas night everything inside me stops. I am face to face with Him; there is nothing but this Child in the whole of that huge white expanse. He does not say anything, but He is there...he is God loving me.'" (John Saward, *Redeemer in the Womb*).

Perhaps we can ponder a manger scene and realize the little baby is God loving me! His very existence as a man is an incredible expression of love! Can you hear Him?

My friends, Mary can help us, as she helped Elizabeth, to be struck with the true meaning of Christmas. She brought Jesus into this world with perfect love and her loving heart felt all the love and joy in His heart; She also felt His pain and compassion when He hung upon the Cross. Mary wants to bring Jesus to us this Christmas. She is our mother, she knows what we need – we need to fall in love with her Child, Jesus, and know that He is near, even in our midst. Mary can inspire us to say with gratitude and humility: "Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"



Your servant in Christ,  
Fr. Terry Staples



# Saint Nicholas

**Feast Day: December 6**

**Born: 270**

**Died: 343**

**Patron: Children, sailors, prisoners, those falsely accused, bakers**

St. Nicholas was born in a Greek city (Patara) which was then a province of Asia Minor (part of present-day Turkey). He was from a wealthy Christian family. When he was very young, his parents died. His uncle, a bishop, raised him and helped him become a priest. He had a reputation for secret gift-giving. Ever since he was a small child, Nicholas loved God more than anything. He studied hard, prayed often, and followed Jesus by helping the poor. The people of Myra loved Nicholas so much that when their old bishop died, they immediately elected Nicholas to replace him. He served them well for a long time.

Nicholas was loved for one reason. He loved. He loved God and God's people so much that he would do anything for them. The best-known story about Nicholas concerns his charity toward a poor man who was unable to provide dowries for his three daughters of marriageable age. In those days, if a woman did not have a dowry, she would never marry. Rather than see them forced into prostitution, Nicholas secretly tossed a bag of gold through the poor man's window, thus enabling the oldest daughter to be married. He did the same for the second daughter. The man wanted to know who was helping him so he could thank him so he locked the windows and watched out the door. Legend has it that Nicholas did not want to be seen so he dropped the bag of gold for the third daughter down the chimney. This is the source of the Christmas tradition of Santa Clause delivering gifts by coming down the chimney.

Other stories are told about Nicholas. It is said that God worked through Nicholas' prayers to raise children from the dead—some who had been killed in a fire and another child who had drowned. All of these stories tell us the same thing about St. Nicholas. He lived for God, which means that he lived for love. If people were in need and he was able to help, St. Nicholas gave them hope and strength. St. Nicholas never paused for a minute to wonder what he should receive in return for his help. He only thought about what he could give to those who needed him.

Stories about St. Nicholas spread from his home in Turkey up to Russia, where he is still a very popular saint. Through the centuries, people passed on stories of him across the most northern parts of Europe, then to Germany, France, and England, and finally to the United States. The children in every country gave St. Nicholas a name in their own language, and ours is Santa Claus.

Christmas is a fun, exciting time because of all the time we get to spend with our families. It's fun because we do a lot of celebrating. It's fun because we get to think, sing, and pray about Jesus, who was born into the world to save us. Christmas is also fun because we get to give. We can show our family and friends how much we love them by giving them special gifts that we make or buy. We give because we are thankful. We are thankful for friendship and love and for all the people who take care of us. We are thankful to God for giving us life.

**Reflection:** St. Nicholas was so grateful for the life God had given him that he just could not stop giving joy and hope to others. We should try to be just like him... not only at Christmastime but throughout the year.