

The Saint Raphael Link

Some Periodic Ramblings of the Prior

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Dear Members

A young American boy once returned home from Sunday school with a new perspective on the Christmas story. He had learned all about the Wise Men from the East who brought gifts to the Baby Jesus. He was so excited that he could hardly wait to tell his parents.

"Today", he said: "I learned all about the very First Christmas in Sunday school! There wasn't a Santa Claus way back then, so these three skinny guys on camels had to deliver all the toys!"

He further continued, "And Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer with his nose so bright also wasn't there yet, so they had to have this big spotlight in the sky to find their way around!"

"**The Epiphany of the Lord**" signifies - specifically the manifestation of the Christ child to the entire world. The feast is based on the visit of the Magi, after the birth of Jesus, reported in the Gospel of Matthew: "**Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, 'where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.'**" The Magi followed the star which led them to Bethlehem. There they found the Christ child, did him homage and presented him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

The Magi represent the non-Jewish world – they represent us. Their arrival on the scene shows, as it were, that the Saviour born in Bethlehem comes not just for one people, but for all peoples, all races – of all times and places.

But who were they? We do not know a great deal about these Wise men, for very few details are given about these men in the Scriptures. Most of our ideas about them actually come from tradition or speculation. They are really known as '*The Magi*' or '*The Wise Men*' in the scriptures. They seem to have been the priest-kings and the scholars of their day. They suddenly glide into the Christmas story, pay their homage to the new-born king of the Jews, offer their gifts to him and silently slip away.

We do not know how many of them there were; but it is generally assumed three, since they brought three gifts. We don't know the names of these Wise men, but according to medieval legends, the three Wise men were named Melchior, Balthazar and Caspar - but we really aren't sure.

Tradition holds that each of them came from a different culture: Melchior was Asian, Balthazar was Persian and Caspar was Ethiopian - thus representing the three races known to the ancient world.

So, why does Matthew tell the story in the way he does? What is Matthew trying to tell us here? And what is it about Matthew's story of the Magi that has so captured the imagination of the Church in a way that the shepherds in Luke's Gospel have not? What is the point of this remarkable story of the coming of the wise men from the East? There are four key elements in the story:

1) The journey of the Magi: The story of the Magi focuses on their long journey, seeking the Saviour of the world. They placed their time, talents, and treasures at the service of their mission.

2) Following the star: There is talk of the Magi following the star that led them to the manifestation of the Christ child. They saw a star rising in the east and recognized that a new king had been born and came to visit him. This light is the theme of Isaiah the Old Testament Prophet.

3) The gifts given: The Magi went to great lengths to find the "**King of the Jews**" and "**do**

him homage." As part of that homage they offered their gifts of 'gold, frankincense and myrrh.' These gifts seem inspired by Isaiah 60:6 - **"They shall bring gold and frankincense."**

4) The return by a different way:

Having followed the star and brought their gifts, the Magi then returned home, but they did so by a different route. Matthew explains that this was to keep Herod from discovering the child, but it also indicates that things had changed for the Magi. They had found what they had come looking for, but they could not have anticipated how it would change them. And Matthew suggests that it will change us as well. When we get to know Jesus Christ, we are changed forever and cannot go back to our old ways of life.

Twenty centuries have gone-by since that first adoration of the Magi, and this long procession of the gentile world still continues to make its way to Christ.

Through this feast of **"The Epiphany of the Lord,"** the Church proclaims the manifestation of Jesus to all mankind of all times, with no distinction of race or nation. "The Epiphany of the Lord," is the feast of faith and it is a feast of our seeking & recognizing Jesus.

So let each one of us seek to worship the Lord with the gold of our love, the myrrh of our humility and the frankincense of our adoration.

With good wishes and every blessing this Christmastide.

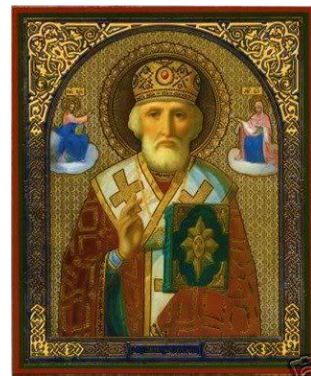
+*Geoffrey* – GRAND PRIOR



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Calendar of Saints



Separating fact from legend in the story of St. Nicholas is not difficult. So little is known of his personal life, that we must rely on the legends that have survived. As early as the sixth century, churches were being built in his honour throughout Europe. By the Middle Ages, he had become the patron saint of both Greece and Russia.

Devotion to Nicholas declined during the Protestant Reformation of the fifteenth century. The Netherlands was the only Protestant nation to maintain and embellish the legend of Nicholas. The Dutch kept his feast day of December 6 as the time to lavish presents on children who left their shoes out the night before. It was the Dutch who brought the custom of "Santa Claus" to the United States.

By the middle of the nineteenth century America had embraced the custom as the centre around which all of Christmas revolved.

Born to Wealth

Nicholas of Myra was born early in the fourth century AD in Patara, a city in the ancient district of Lycia, in southern Asia Minor (modern Turkey). His parents were wealthy and Nicholas might have lived the life of a spoiled son. Instead, it was reported that from childhood he lived a holy and humble life. When his parents died of a plague, Nicholas began to serve the

poor near his home and in the surrounding towns and countryside.

An editorial from a December 1998 issue of *The Ukrainian Weekly*, noted that, according to legend, Nicholas, became the bishop of Myra after the bishop of that city died and other bishops gathered to elect a new prelate. They asked God to show them a worthy successor. Apparently the oldest of the bishops had a vision in his sleep that the first man to enter the church in the morning to pray should be consecrated. That person was Nicholas.

By the time Nicholas died, on December 6, 345, word of his kind deeds and purported miracles was widespread public knowledge. The Roman Emperor Diocletian persecuted him for his Christian faith. Nicholas was buried in the church at Myra, where he had served as bishop. By the eleventh century, his reputation had spread as far as Italy, due in part to merchants and sailors who travelled throughout Europe and Asia. Italian sailors took Nicholas' bones to Bari, in the Puglia region of southern Italy.

A Benedictine abbot named Elia ordered the construction of a cathedral to properly house the relics. Pope Urban II officially dedicated the Basilica San Nicola when the relics were entombed. These bones reportedly turned into liquid. The container holding this liquid is still carried as the centrepiece in a parade honouring him in Bari, on his feast day of December 6. Reportedly, the scent of this liquid is like that of a sweet perfume, making him the patron saint of perfumers.

One of the most famous stories about Nicholas was that he used his wealth to protect three young girls, whose father was too poor to provide them with adequate dowries. Without dowries, the girls were doomed to a life of prostitution as the only means of supporting themselves. Nicholas, it was said, put gold in each of three bags and threw them at the girls' window. In a book titled *Saints Preserve Us!* authors Sean Kelly and Rosemary Rogers explain that three balls representing financial aid in time of need, became the emblem of the pawn brokers guild. Their symbol was derived from this legend of St. Nicholas.

Defender of Christianity

In author John Delaney's *Dictionary of the Saints*, Nicholas is said to have forced a governor, Eustaathius, to admit that he had been bribed to condemn three innocent men to death. Nicholas appeared in Emperor Constantine's dream to inform the emperor that three imperial officers, condemned to death at

Constantinople, were innocent. Constantine freed them the next morning. As a result, Nicholas became known as the patron saint of prisoners.

Some argue that Santa Claus is based on the Germanic god, Thor, who was associated with winter and the Yule log and rode on a chariot drawn by goats named Cracker and Gnasher. That the historical person of Nicholas became transformed into the kindly Santa Claus from a pagan legend was due to the notoriety he gained by extending a helping hand in the aid of children. His was not an age known for protecting children. Instead they were often left to beg when they lost their parents or lived in poverty. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Nicholas legend was that his story influenced future generations to demonstrate kindness to children, at least once a year.

The modern tradition has remained true to the simple bishop of Myra, who devoted his life to helping the poor.

Guess the Locations:

1. Rhiour town square, Germany / 2. York Christmas Market / 3. Winchester Christmas Market.

Story Corner



A little boy and his grandmother came to see Santa at The Mayfair Mall in Wisconsin. The child climbed up on Santa's lap, holding a picture of a little girl.

"Who is this?" – asked Santa, smiling. "Your friend? Your sister?" "Yes, Santa." – he replied. "My sister, Sarah, who is very sick." – he said sadly. Santa glanced over at the grandmother who was waiting nearby and saw her dabbing her eyes with a tissue.

"She wanted to come with me to see you, oh, so very much, Santa!" – the child exclaimed. "She misses you." – he added softly. Santa tried to be cheerful and encouraged a smile to the boy's face, asking him what he wanted Santa to bring him for Christmas.

When they finished their visit, the grandmother came over to help the child off his

lap, and started to say something to Santa, but halted. "What is it?" – Santa asked warmly. "Well, I know it's really too much to ask you, Santa, but .." – the old woman began, shooing her grandson over to one of Santa's elves to collect the little gift which Santa gave all his young visitors.

"The girl in the photograph... my granddaughter well, you see ... she has leukaemia and isn't expected to make it even through the holidays." – she said through tear-filled eyes.

"Is there anyway, Santa, any possible way that you could come see Sarah? That's all she's asked for, for Christmas, is to see Santa." Santa blinked and swallowed hard and told the woman to leave information with his elves as to where Sarah was, and he would see what he could do. Santa thought of little else the rest of that afternoon. He knew what he had to do. "What if it were MY child lying in that hospital bed, dying?" – he thought with a sinking heart, "This is the least I can do."

When Santa finished visiting with all the boys and girls that evening, he retrieved from his helper the name of the hospital where Sarah was staying. He asked Rick, the assistant location manager how to get to Children's Hospital. "Why?" – Rick asked, with a puzzled look on his face.

Santa relayed to him the conversation with Sarah's grandmother earlier that day. "Common....I'll take you there." – Rick said softly. Rick drove them to the hospital and came inside with Santa. They found out which room Sarah was in. A pale Rick said he would wait out in the hall.

Santa quietly peeked into the room through the half-closed door and saw little Sarah on the bed. The room was full of what appeared to be her family; there was the grandmother and the girl's brother he had met earlier that day. A woman whom he guessed was Sarah's mother stood by the bed, gently pushing Sarah's thin hair off her forehead. And another woman who he discovered later was Sarah's aunt, sat in a chair near the bed with a weary, sad look on her face. They were talking quietly, and Santa could sense the warmth and closeness of the family, and their love and concern for Sarah.

Taking a deep breath, and forcing a smile on his face, Santa entered the room, bellowing a hearty, "Ho, ho, ho!" "Santa!" – shrieked little Sarah weakly, as she tried to escape her bed to run to him. Santa rushed to

her side and gave her a warm hug. A child the tender age of his own son — 9 years old — gazed up at him with wonder and excitement. Her skin was pale and her short tresses bore tell-tale bald patches from the effects of chemotherapy. But all he saw when he looked at her was a pair of huge, blue eyes. His heart melted, and he had to force himself to choke back tears.

Though his eyes were riveted upon Sarah's face, he could hear the gasps and quiet sobbing of the women in the room. As he and Sarah began talking, the family crept quietly to the bedside one by one, squeezing Santa's shoulder or his hand gratefully, whispering "Thank you" as they gazed sincerely at him with shining eyes.

Santa and Sarah talked and talked, and she told him excitedly all the toys she wanted for Christmas, assuring him she'd been a very good girl that year. As their time together dwindled, Santa felt led in his spirit to pray for Sarah, and asked for permission from the girl's mother. She nodded in agreement and the entire family circled around Sarah's bed, holding hands.

Santa looked intensely at Sarah and asked her if she believed in angels, "Oh, yes, Santa... I do!" – she exclaimed. "Well, I'm going to ask that angels watch over you." – he said. Laying one hand on the child's head, Santa closed his eyes and prayed. He asked that God touch little Sarah, and heal her body from this disease. He asked that angels minister to her, watch and keep her. And when he finished praying, still with eyes closed, he started singing, softly, "Silent Night, Holy Night.... all is calm, all is bright..."

The family joined in, still holding hands, smiling at Sarah, and crying tears of hope, tears of joy for this moment, as Sarah beamed at them all. When the song ended, Santa sat on the side of the bed again and held Sarah's frail, small hands in his own.

"Now, Sarah," – he said authoritatively, "you have a job to do, and that is to concentrate on getting well. I want you to have fun playing with your friends this summer, and I expect to see you at my house at Mayfair Mall this time next year!"

He knew it was risky proclaiming that to this little girl who had terminal cancer, but he 'had' to. He had to give her the greatest gift he could — not dolls or games or toys — but the gift of HOPE. "Yes, Santa!" – Sarah exclaimed, her eyes bright. He leaned down and kissed her on the forehead and left the room.

Out in the hall, the minute Santa's eyes met Rick's, a look passed between them and they wept unashamed. Sarah's mother and grandmother slipped out of the room quickly and rushed to Santa's side to thank him. "My only child is the same age as Sarah." – he explained quietly. "This is the least I could do." They nodded with understanding and hugged him.

One year later, Santa Mark was again back on the set in Milwaukee for his six-week, seasonal job which he so loves to do. Several weeks went by and then one day a child came up to sit on his lap.

"Hi, Santa! Remember me?!"
 "Of course, I do." – Santa proclaimed (as he always does), smiling down at her. After all, the secret to being a 'good' Santa is to always make each child feel as if they are the 'only' child in the world at that moment.

"You came to see me in the hospital last year!" Santa's jaw dropped. Tears immediately sprang in his eyes, and he grabbed this little miracle and held her to his chest. "Sarah!" – he exclaimed. He scarcely recognized her, for her hair was long and silky and her cheeks were rosy – much different from the little girl he had visited just a year before.

He looked over and saw Sarah's mother and grandmother in the side-lines smiling and waving and wiping their eyes. That was the best Christmas ever for Santa Claus. He had witnessed –and been blessed to be instrumental in bringing about – this miracle of hope. This precious little child was healed. Cancer-free. Alive and well.

He silently looked up to Heaven and humbly whispered, "Thank you, Father. 'Tis a very, Merry Christmas!"

Cook's Corner:



Christmas sandwiches

It's Christmas and your fussy tot refuses to eat the roast turkey you've been slaving over - what do you do? Why you throw together one of these Christmas-themed mixed sandwiches of course! Just watch them guzzle down one of these cute sambos.

METHOD:

On one piece of bread spread the peanut butter, followed by the mashed banana. Press closed with a second piece of bread. Cut out sandwich shapes using a biscuit cutter and arrange on a plate.

On another piece of bread spread the avocado, cream cheese, and grated apple. Press closed with a second piece of bread and again use cookie cutters to stamp out a shape.

Stamp out more Christmas shapes from slices of cheese, then scatter over sandwiches and serve.

NOTES:

Use bread that is as fresh as possible to make the shapes easier to cut out.

Try different fillings to expand your kids' tastes: Vegemite, cream cheese and lettuce OR cream cheese, sultanas and grated carrot OR ham, cheese, and sweet beetroot relish.

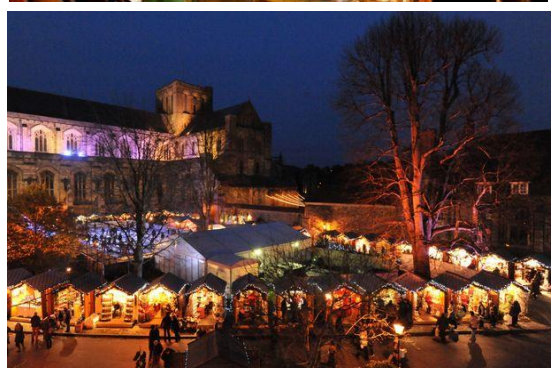
Guess the Locations:



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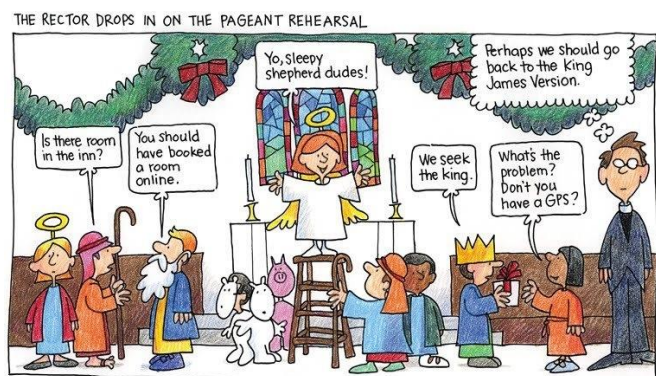
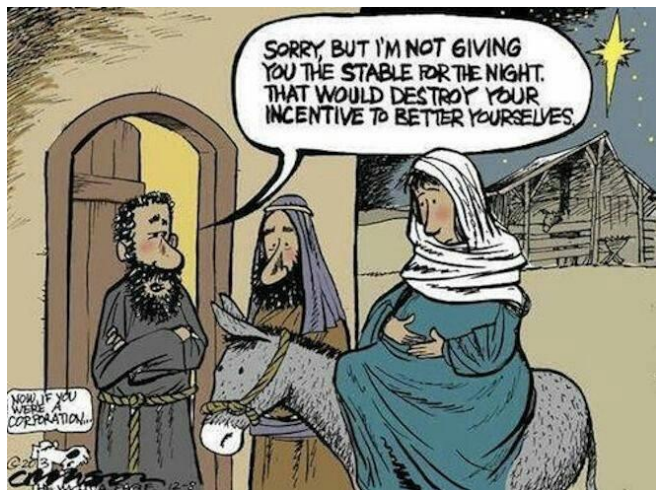


2.



3.

Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh and you couldn't spring for a GPS?



Partridge in the Tree
Two Turtle Doves
Three French Hens
Four Calling Birds
Five Gold Rings
Six Geese A Laying
Seven Swans A Swimming
Eight Maids A Milking
Nine Ladies Dancing
Ten Lords A Leaping
Eleven Pipers Piping
TWELVE DRUMMERS DRUMMING

this carol as a catechism song for young Catholics. It has two levels of meaning: the surface meaning plus a hidden meaning known only to members of their church. Each element in the carol has a code word for a Catholic reality, which the children could remember.

The partridge in a pear tree was Jesus Christ. **Two turtle doves** were the Old and New Testaments.

Three French hens stood for faith, hope, and love.

The four calling birds were the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

The five golden rings recalled the Torah or law, the five books of the Old Testament.

The six geese a-laying stood for the six days of creation.

Seven swans a-swimming represented the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit: Prophecy, Serving, Teaching, Exhortation, Contribution, Leadership, and Mercy.

The eight maids a-milking were the eight beatitudes.

Nine ladies dancing were the nine fruits of the Holy Spirit: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self Control.

The ten lords a-leaping were the Ten Commandments.

The eleven pipers piping stood for the eleven faithful disciples.

The twelve drummers drumming symbolized the twelve points of belief in the Apostles' Creed.



The Healing Teaching & Chivalric Order of St Raphael

www.orderofstaphael.org.uk

Have you ever wondered about **THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS?** What in the world do leaping lords, french hens, swimming swans, and especially the partridge who won't come out of the pear tree have to do with Christmas? Well, from 1558 until 1829, Roman Catholics in England were not permitted to practice their faith openly. Someone during that era wrote