

FAMILY TOOLBOX



SERIES

**WHAT DO
CHRISTIANS
DO WITH
SANTA CLAUS?**



Children's Ministry

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A Note to Families

The Children's Ministry of Golden Hills Community Church exists to *“Glorify God by helping families develop age-appropriate disciples who impact their world for Christ”*.

In order to accomplish this task, we at GHCC have attempted to describe the discipleship of a believer, which includes these three elements:

- **Worship**
- **Grow**
- **Serve**

We believe that children, as followers of Christ, can also participate in the discipleship process. We have further identified twelve specific spiritual growth issues within these three elements of discipleship.

It is our desire in Children's Ministry, to create a balanced program, which addresses all of these spiritual growth issues, helping to produce a healthy, age-appropriate disciple.

However, statistics tell us that the national average for children attending Sunday school is 26 hours each year (that's only half of the time). And our church is no exception to this. Our average Sunday attendance is roughly half of our total registration. What does this mean? Well, we could have the best programming, the best teachers and staff (which, by the way, I think we do) and we would still have a very hard time in accomplishing the goal God has set before us. But there is a way.

The way in which we can realize the goal of making age-appropriate disciples is stated in our purpose: "...by helping *families* develop age-appropriate disciples..." In fact, the best approach to aiding your child's faith development is *not* in the formal setting of the church, but in the informal, everyday life of your home. God's Word clearly reminds us of this in Deuteronomy 6:4-7:

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. The commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress (teach) them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home, and when you walk along the road, when you lie down at night and when you get up."

We encourage you to take advantage of every opportunity to "impress upon your children" spiritual truth. Use dinner conversation, driving in the car, bedtime routines and getting ready each morning as times to reflect and teach about God and his faithfulness.

To help you in these discussions, we have developed a series of tools for you to use. These tools are series of booklets (**THE FAMILY TOOLBOX SERIES**), each addressing the spiritual growth issues. In them you will find information, discussion questions and activity suggestions to help you guide your children on their spiritual journeys.

What Do Christians Do With Santa Claus?

Santa Claus, that jolly elf, has sparked a lot of controversy with Christian parents over the years. Families must decide whether to encourage their children to believe in Santa or not. Some people are rigidly against having their children believe in Santa Claus, while others feel Christmas would not be the same without the excitement their children feel waiting for Santa to visit on Christmas Eve. Many parents take a middle of the road approach between belief in possibilities and realities. But, in order for you to make the decision on how you will handle the Santa Claus issue, you will need some information.

Who is St. Nicholas?

The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas. We know very little about him, other than he was born in the third century. He served as bishop of Myra, a town in what is now southern Turkey. There are almost no references to his actual life except for a material reference in a sixth century manuscript.

All of what we do know about him was recorded after his death. Through the centuries many stories and legends have been told of St. Nicholas life and his deeds.

These stories seem to suggest that something in his life commended him. He seems to have been a very special person.

There are a lot of stories surrounding St. Nicholas, primarily because he lived a long life. Most of the Christian saints of his time were martyred because of persecution. But Nicholas died at an old age in his bed.

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, called a dowry. The larger a dowry was, the more likely the young woman would find a good husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to be married and the family may be forced into selling her into slavery. Mysteriously (though attributed to the actions of St. Nicholas), 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 left by the fire to dry. This led to the custom of children hanging stockings, 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 by oranges, are one of the

symbols for St. Nicholas. And so, St. Nicholas is seen as a gift-giver.

Saint Nicholas is also seen as a protector of children and became the patron saint of children, sailors, bankers, scholars, orphans, travelers, merchants, judges, captives, even thieves and murderers! He is known as the friend and protector of all in trouble or need. He had become a cherished member of the home.

His popularity was evident as early as the 14th century as children all across northern Europe celebrated St. Nicholas' Feast Day on December 6th. Here, Nicholas would bring gifts down the chimney. The adoration people felt toward him helped his remembrance and celebration throughout the Reformation and beyond.

How Did He Evolve Into the Present-Day Santa Claus?

The western idea of Santa Claus is actually a combination of the European traditions of Kris Kringle, Father Christmas and the Christian St. Nicholas.

Kris Kringle

Kris Kringle derived from the German "Christkindl" which translates to "Christ Child" in English. The German version of Kris Kringle portrayed a slightly younger boy that brought gifts to the children in the Germanic countries. Although Kris Kringle is used interchangeably with Santa Claus in the U.S., the traditional Kris Kringle is very different from our modern version of Santa Claus. In fact, the idea of Santa Claus as we know him today has been imported to these countries replacing the traditions of the Christ Child.

Father Christmas

Like Kris Kringle, Father Christmas shares some attributes with Santa Claus. Father Christmas was a traditional figure during the pagan celebration of the Winter Solstice. Instead of bringing gifts to homes, Father Christmas (also known as Old Man Winter) would travel from home to home where people would give him food and drink. In return he would grant them the blessing of a mild and kind winter.

During the 1800's, the American version of Santa Claus spread to Britain where Father Christmas assimilated Santa's attributes. To this day, Father Christmas serves as Britain's version of Santa Claus. Like Kris Kringle, Father Christmas is used interchangeably with Santa Claus in the United States.

Saint Nicholas

St. Nicholas was the biggest influence on the Santa Claus we know today. In the late 18th century, a re-versioning of Santa Claus took place in what is now Manhattan.

The name "Santa Claus" is an American accented version of the Dutch "Sinterklaas." St. Nicholas and Santa Claus are the same person, but many people don't realize that.

We don't know when the idea was carried from Northern Europe to New Amsterdam (now Manhattan). It is safe to say he came the early settlers and lay dormant until the 18th century.

The next event to propel the evolution of Santa Claus was the Industrial Revolution. The industrial Revolution ushered in the concept of mass production. Retail shops opened, toys became

available from northern Europe, and books, musical instruments, and linens and other goods all became purchasable.

Gift giving, which had until that time been a local and seasonal exchange of homemade objects, suddenly exploded into something much bigger. The effect was that gift-giving customs were transformed out of recognition. This caused the need for providing a spirit of giving. St. Nicholas was the gift giver of the old world in both the Dutch and English traditions and they didn't have to think back too far to remember him. As he became popularized, his name was changed to Santa Claus.

In the 1820's he began to acquire the familiar trappings of reindeer, sleigh, bells. They were simply the actual bearings in the world from which he emerged. At that time, sleighs were how one got around in the Manhattan winter.

The poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas", also known as "Twas the Night Before Christmas", debuted in 1822 and described Santa in all his glorious details.

In the 1930's Coca-Cola began to run a series of advertisements that forever sealed the image of Santa into the American conscience. Santa Claus became more and more associated with commercialism and consumerism. Today, what we call Santa Claus is a corruption of what he originally meant-a symbol and icon of charity.

So, What Do We Do?

Well, now that you know something of historical evolution of the figure we know as Santa Claus, what will you do? Let's list some pros and cons.

Pros

Some Families Believe...

Not believing in Santa may steal some of the "magic" from Christmas.

Santa may represent the Christian perspective of giving and thus relate to Christ.

Cons

Some Families Believe...

They don't want this Christian holiday dominated by a belief in a pagan symbol.

An emphasis of Santa Claus takes away the true meaning of Christmas.

It is an outright lie to their children and breaks their trust. They want to save their children disappointment later.

Whatever we do with Santa Claus, we must always teach our kids that Santa Claus is a symbol of giving, and while believing in the symbol is wonderful, Christ is the reality. Christmas has to always come back to Jesus. It is His birth we celebrate. We must also be sensitive to those families who have chosen to make Santa Claus part of their family tradition. So, let's remember that Christmas is really all about the birth of our savior, God's redemptive plan from the beginning of time was made flesh this day.

The Spiritual Growth Issues:

Worship

- Salvation
- Worship

Grow

- Bible knowledge/Application
- Bible Memory
- Stewardship
- Healthy Relationships
- Using Gifts, Talents and Skills
- Church Commitment

Serve

- Outreach
- Missions Involvement
- Christian Service