



The True Saint Nicholas: Why He Matters to Christmas

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If you've ever been asked, "Who is Saint Nicholas?"...If you've ever wondered if he is just a commercial invention...If you've ever thought there is no such person...You may be surprised to know the true Saint Nicholas. You'll never again think of Santa Claus in quite the same way. An instant classic by one of America's most respected thinkers, The True Saint Nicholas is a book to be shared with family and friends every year to evoke the true spirit of Christmas.

The True Saint Nicholas: Why He Matters to Christmas Details

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From Reader Review The True Saint Nicholas: Why He Matters to Christmas for online ebook

Lars Stuys says

As stated the truth about Saint Nicholas can never be definitively stated, and this author has pieced together what most arguably is the true Saint Nicholas story and its merging with what we now know as Santa Claus. A fun seasonal telling that perfectly puts fact? With myth? With what we all enjoy during the festive season.

Richard Grebenc says

A very enjoyable little book that can be read in one sitting. Bennett seeks to remind us of the true meaning of Christmas through what has become a secular icon of the season: Santa Claus. Part One is a bio of St. Nicholas cobbled together from stories told about him (little is known of him for sure). The author does a nice job of weaving a short story together. Part Two is "Legends of Nicholas" consisting of more fantastic tales or miracles, some, if not all, embellished over time. Finally, the last section deals with the holy man's legacy. This is the most fascinating section of the book. It goes down the long and winding road, spanning the globe and ending in the USA, of how St. Nicholas ultimately became Santa Claus. I learned much here.

Adding meat to the bones of the legend of St. Nick does much to bolster the reason for the season by reestablishing his saintliness attained only through the grace of the one we honor on December 25th.

John Martindale says

It was interesting to hear the history and traditions surrounding good ol' St Nick and it is something how many legends formed around this man during the medieval period. The last half of the book concerned the many traditions of gift givers throughout Europe, the raucous winter solstice and the reaction against the saints by the Protestants. Later on how a Poem, a Cartoon artist and Coca-Cola Advertisements played a role in American traditions and also about the melding of Father Christmas, Kris Kringle, St. Nicholas and Santa Clause in the US. All of this was rather complex, and thus a bit hard to follow and Bennett quickly covered it.

Mary says

Delightful seasonal reading about the evolution of Bishop of Myra into Santa Claus. Readers begin by learning the known facts about the young Bishop's life and the legends that grew up around him citing numerous his good works and alleged miracles.

Though the development of the world mostly due to mariners, who considered Nicholas their patron saint, his reputation spread and began to combine with other legends such as stories of elves.

You will learn lots about the Eastern Orthodox Saint and the modern day Santa Claus reading this volume.

Mary Ann Horton says

Enjoyable Christmas Read

A lovely blend of history and Christian tradition. This marks a pleasant read that honestly focuses on the joy of Santa Claus, while acknowledging the distraction from the true meaning of Christmas. Much discussion is spent on the rise and fall of the sainthood of Nicholas of Myra. It explains how our American Santa Claus came to be.

Kristen says

This was a quick interesting read expounding on some of the myths and legends of Saint Nicholas and how he evolved into the American Santa Claus. One new thing I learned was that the German Christkindel (Christ child) who delivers gifts on Christmas was Americanized to Kriss Kringel with immigrants and then eventually merged together with Santa as well. The history and morphing of Santa is just interesting to me. Good read.

Sarah says

Maybe it's because I've had a couple reads that I could've done without lately, or maybe it was just reading something Christmasy during this season, but I really enjoyed this book. My kids started asking questions about Santa Claus, so I decided to do a little research on Santa Claus and Saint Nicholas and where all the traditions came from. This was a super easy read that I finished in just a few days, and it was interesting, well-researched, and organized in a way I could understand. Because Saint Nicholas lived such a long time ago and is associated with so many legends, the real history is somewhat lost. But the more recent history is very interesting, and William Bennett did a great job giving an overview and morphing of the history and legend and folk traditions of Saint Nicholas. I would recommend this book.

Michele Rearden says

We listened to this book on audible and learned quite a bit about the Nicholas of Myra. I enjoyed learning about how his life story slowly evolved into legends throughout Europe. When we got to the part about America, one of my children spoke up and said, "Mom, Santa Clause is like a mix of all of the best parts of the other St. Nicholas stories...kind of like America. We are a melting pot of the many stories from other lands." I thought that was a cool connection.

William Bennet, the author, read the book. Although his voice has a nice tone, we had to fight not to 'zone' him out and ended up repeating parts of the book because there were points where we all stopped listening. A little bit of emotion or slightly faster reading would have helped.

It was just a little over 2 hours long. We listened to 30 minutes a day in the days leading up to St. Nicholas

day.

Uri Brito says

There are too many unknown facts, as Bill Bennett rightly asserts. Much of the historical data is purely speculative with the exception of a few references, poems and prayers in honor of Saint Nicholas. The Roman Catholic tradition has largely exorcised ol' St. Nicholas from the Church, while the Eastern Orthodox tradition continues to celebrate his life every December 6th.

Bennett provides a pleasant read filled with fantastical stories and a delightful context to the Bishop of Myra.

The records at the very least seem to concur with the general perception that the Saint Nicholas that existed in the days of Constantine (yes, he most likely slapped Arius!) was indeed filled with generosity and abounding in love for all sorts of people.

Bennett illustrates that Saint Nicholas, the Bishop, had become commercialized only a few centuries after his death. The entrepreneurial spirit was alive and well in those days. The life of Saint Nicholas was being used by manipulative men to sell and to attract business. This commercialization is no different than the Americanized Santa Claus (invented much later in the 20th century).

At the same time it is important to note that abuses are always prone to happen, and that simply doing away with the figure in order to avoid the tough questions is no way to handle the matter. Rather, there is a legitimate way to use the history of Saint Nicholas, and its subsequent re-adaptation-- with all its colors and jolly-ness in the North Pole Santa Claus-- to draw us and our children's attention to those rare gifts and virtues of the Christian faith.

Bill Bennett connects the modern Santa Claus with the faithful Bishop who suffered and lived for the sake of His Lord. The connection, though foggy at times, is still sufficiently clear to remind us of that ancient giver of gifts and rejoice in his life.

Sasha says

I was really excited when I saw this book. Maybe 2 stars isn't fair, maybe my expectations were too much from Bennett. I read it in a couple of hours. It just didn't affect me much other than to say that it opened my eyes more to the saint worshipping of Catholics and I found that disturbing.

There's no doubt that Saint Nicholas was a wonderful man. This book does provide more background and history than many other accounts, albeit somewhat speculative. Still, he was made into a medieval superhero, and many of the legends just obviously cannot be true. Again, not to take away from the truly good man that he was.

There are a couple of passages that I really liked:

"In this age of modern science, it is difficult for us to comprehend the notion of miracles. We turn with confidence to physics, chemistry, neurology, and the like to explain the extraordinary. That was not true for

ancient and medieval minds. The miraculous was easier to accept in the centuries before the Scientific Revolution. In those times, the world was full of mystery and wonder. Miracles were rare but not out of place in people's comprehension of the universe.

"Does this mean that we moderns must regard old legends or miracles as necessarily false? No, on two counts.

"First, many old legends contain our best expressions of the human condition. They reveal the soul.

Metaphors they may be, but they are metaphors that illuminate eternal truths.

"Second, even in this high-tech world, it takes a pretty small mind to declare that there is absolutely no such thing as an honest-to-goodness miracle. Many of us run into a miracle or two during our lives--something that defies all rational explanation. Who is to say that God does not move in mysterious ways? As Hamlet told his friend, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'"

And:

"Perhaps not literally true. But the stories of Saint Nicholas and Santa Claus are arguably true in a more important way. They are morally true. They offer generosity, kindness, justice, and self-sacrifice over avarice, cruelty, injustice, and self-indulgence. They are about the celebration of human closeness and decency, and the caring for others. They are about families at the hearth. In their totality, they are about the raising of sights and efforts toward a better life."

Samantha Williams says

Enjoyable read. Enjoyed the writing style. You can almost hear Bill Bennett speaking in some parts like a good storyteller. Nice coverage from the real to the transformation of Santa Claus and Americana culture.

Eric Fehr says

William Bennett's short biographical explanation of the "true" Saint Nicholas and the overview of the generations of commercialization into Santa Clause is almost magical.

Bennett provides great detail of the many stories and written histories and legends of Saint Nicholas and paints a vivid picture of who he was and his impact on the faith of Christians for generations after.

This is worth a read, and may just help you reconsider your presupposition of Santa Clause.

Joseph W. Gooch says

The history of the real St. Nicolas was fascinating; along with historical figures who have burnished his legend over the centuries. The "recent" history, as the legend morphed into Santa Claus, was exceptionally pleasing. An altogether interesting and joyful read for this time of year!

Dann says

From William Bennett comes *The True Saint Nicholas: Why He Matters to Christmas*, a fascinating look at the evolution of Saint Nicholas to Santa Claus. Bennett chronicles the life of Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, or at least what church tradition tells us about him, and how his reputation soon spread and made him one of the most popular and well-known saints in Christendom. He also recounts a number of apocryphal stories that were told about his wondrous works and how, after the Reformation, Saint Nicholas was transformed into a mythical figure in the local folklores of various regions of Europe and Asia Minor, and was finally made into the American icon Santa Claus. Yet Bennett refrains from any cynicism or condemnation, and instead frames Nicholas' transition into legend within the context and traditions of the time, and points to the greater truth that lies within the myth. *The True Saint Nicholas: Why He Matters to Christmas* celebrates the tradition of Saint Nicholas and the good that he inspires.

Mike says

A short history of St Nicholas. insofar as it's possible to give much in the way of facts, and a survey as to how this real person became a variety of other personages, the most famous in the Western world, perhaps, now being Santa Claus.

Bennett writes with style and humour and for anyone unacquainted with the origins of the current red-suited fat person who can be seen everywhere in December, this will give you some insight.
