

**Wednesday 6 December 2023**

# St Nicholas



Nicholas was a fourth-century bishop of Myra in Asia Minor (which, today, we consider to be in southern Turkey). We know very little about the historical figure behind the legends.

His reputation as a worker of wonders was enhanced by a ninth-century hagiography, and is now better known through these stories than otherwise. Many concern his love and care for children, how he fed the hungry, healed the sick and cared for the oppressed. In one story, he saved three girls from a life of prostitution by providing them with dowries and so developed the tradition of bearing gifts to children on his feast day—a practice appropriated by later Christmas celebrations.

The manner of Nicholas' death is not known but is not thought to have been martyrdom.

**Sermon** © the Revd Dr Paul Monk.

**Liturgy** © 2000 The Archbishops' Council.

**Bible readings** © the publishers of the NRSV translation.

**Prayers of intercession** © Various, as indicated.

The liturgy assumes the service is Eucharistic. The prayers of consecration appear at the end.

All the hymns are hosted on YouTube. Please click on the links to hear them.

To see service transcripts from previous weeks, please visit the page,

<http://www.medlockhead.co.uk/resources/index.htm>

## Introduction and welcome

**HYMN 1 Be still for the presence** (please click on this link to hear the hymn)

## The Welcome

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

**All Amen.**

The Lord be with you

**All And also with you.**

## The Preparation

**All Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ said:

The first commandment is this:

‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,

with all your soul, with all your mind,

and with all your strength.’

And the second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’

There is no other commandment greater than these.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

**All Amen. Lord, have mercy.**

Christ calls us to share the heavenly banquet of his love with all the saints in earth and heaven. Therefore, knowing our unworthiness and sin, let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God’s commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

**All**    **Almighty God, our heavenly Father,  
we have sinned against you  
and against our neighbour  
in thought and word and deed,  
through negligence, through weakness,  
through our own deliberate fault.  
We are truly sorry  
and repent of all our sins.  
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,  
who died for us,  
forgive us all that is past  
and grant that we may serve you in newness of life  
to the glory of your name. Amen.**

Almighty God,  
who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you,  
pardon and deliver you from all your sins,  
confirm and strengthen you in all goodness,  
and keep you in life eternal;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**All**    **Amen.**

**The Gloria** It is usual to omit the Gloria during Advent

### **The Collect for St Nicholas**

Almighty Father, lover of souls,  
who chose your servant Nicholas  
to be a bishop in the Church,  
that he might give freely out of the treasures of your grace:  
make us mindful of the needs of others  
and, as we have received, so teach us also to give;  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

**All**    **Amen.**

## First reading

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called 'oaks of righteousness', the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

*Isaiah 61:1-3*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

## Second reading

A reading from the First Letter of St Timothy

There is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it; but if we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. But those who want to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains. But as for you, man of God, shun all this; pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.

*1 Timothy 6:6-11*

This is the Word of the Lord

**All Thanks be to God.**

**HYMN 2 Everyone needs compassion**

[\(click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

## Gospel reading

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark

**All**    **Glory to you O Lord.**

People were bringing little children to Jesus in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. *Mark 10:13-16*

This is the Gospel of the Lord

**All**    **Praise to you O Christ.**

## Sermon

We know almost nothing about St Nicholas, which has produced many problems. In part, the gaps in his story helped sponsor many legends around him, which themselves promoted the birth of Father Christmas ... who is not really at all like Nicholas.

In today's Gospel, Jesus says the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to 'such as these' by which he means the Palestinian children who approached him and wanted his attention, his blessing, and so on. We can read into the text a behaviour that was typically childlike—the children came to Jesus in love, hope and trust. But when we contrast their behaviour with the advertising world's use of Father Christmas, we can usefully explore the difference between *childlike* and *childish* ... and decide how to respond.

One on-line dictionary describes 'childlike' as 'having the good qualities, such as innocence, associated with a child'. A person described as childlike is likely to be trusting, honest, enthusiastic, and biddable. We usually regard being spiritual in a childlike way as a positive thing. Conversely, being 'childish' is a negative thing: the same on-line dictionary suggests the word means 'silly and immature'. For example, if a person is being childish, they remind us of a badly-behaved child who is not acting their age. By implication, being spiritually childish is a negative thing.

Scripture offers only a small number of texts on this topic. Today's Gospel passage cites the first, which occurred when Jesus saw his disciples stopping local children from coming to him. He was indignant with the disciples, not the children, and said, 'it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs'.

Matthew 18:6 offers another key text which helps explain it:

Jesus said, 'If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea'.

where a '*great* millstone' was used to mill the grain for a village and needed a strong donkey to even turn it. It was huge. (A '*small* millstone' was a prized family possession and quite small: it could be operated by a young woman.) We see Jesus expressing fury and was again taking the children's case against the adults.

Jesus is championing these children because they 'believe in' Jesus. In similar vein we might think of John 6:29 in which Jesus says, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has seen'. We discern that a *childlike* faith is a form of belief in which we see Jesus and respond. In our minds' eye we can see children running to Jesus just to receive his attention, affection, love. Thinking about the young children we know suggests they would have run toward Jesus, laughing and enjoying him to the exclusion of everything else. Our faith is similarly childlike if we drop everything for Jesus to think about him, bask in his presence, to the exclusion of almost anything else.

A *childish* faith looks different, so try reversing the traits above. A childish faith might mimic the behaviour of children on a sugar rush when Father Christmas enters the room—they want something for themselves and might be out of control; it might involve sulking and refusing to engage; they might engage, but only on their own terms. These circumstances might look like a caricature, but the contrast is important. Childish behaviour is not appropriate because it does not react to what is actually happening: a *childlike* response has *Jesus* at the centre but when our response is *childish*, we take the centre.

Straightaway, we discern how, in reality, a spectrum exists from behaviour that is purely *childlike* through to purely *childish*, and some aspects of spirituality will not straightforwardly fall within a single category. One behaviour might seem childlike in one person and childish in another. So how do we tell the differences between a childlike faith and a faith that is childish?

The word translated 'children' in Mark's Gospel is *teknon*, which literally means *young* children, probably of primary-school age. Anyone who visits many schools will notice differences between the behaviour in schools that understand firm and gentle discipline and schools that don't. When respect and boundaries are applied with wisdom and affection, the children do as they are told and thrive. When wisdom and affection are lacking and the imposition of boundaries is inconsistent, the children behave accordingly.

By these criteria, is our faith childlike or childish? Are there things we need to work on?

## The Creed

Do you believe and trust in God the Father,  
the source of all being and life,  
the one for whom we exist?

**All We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son,  
who took our human nature,  
died for us and rose again?

**All We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,  
who gives life to the people of God  
and makes Christ known in the world?

**All We believe and trust in him.**

This is the faith of the Church.

**All This is our faith.**

**We believe and trust in one God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
Amen.**

## Prayers of intercession

O good St. Nicholas, you who are the joy of the children, put in my heart the spirit of childhood, which the gospel speaks, and teach me to seed happiness around me. You, whose feast prepares us for Christmas, open my faith to the mystery of God made man. You good bishop and shepherd, help me to find my place in the Church and inspire the Church to be faithful to the gospel. O good Saint Nicholas, patron of children, sailors and the helpless, watch over those who pray to Jesus, your Lord and theirs, as well as over those who humble themselves before you. Bring us all in reverence to the Holy Child of Bethlehem, when true joy and peace are found.

**All Amen.**

*Missionary Society of St Columban*

Loving God,  
we thank you for the example of St. Nicholas,  
who fed the hungry, brought hope to the imprisoned,  
gave comfort to the lost, and taught the truth to all.  
May we strive to imitate him by putting you first in all we do.  
Give us the courage, love and strength of St Nicholas, so that,  
like him, we may serve you through loving  
our brothers and sisters.

**All Amen.**

*Amy Welborn, author of St Nicholas of Myra: A saint for Advent and Christmas*

Merciful Father,

**All accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ.  
Amen.**

## **The peace**

Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given,  
and his name shall be called the Prince of Peace.

The peace of the Lord be always with you,

**All And also with you.**

**HYMN 3 How deep the Father's love for us**

[\(please click here\)](#)

The liturgy of the Communion Service appears below



## The Dismissal

The peace of God which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,  
and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord;  
and the blessing of God the Almighty,  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
be with you now and remain with you always.

**All Amen.**

**HYMN 4 Lord I come to you**

[\(please click on this link to hear the hymn\)](#)

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**All In the name of Christ.  
Amen.**

# The Liturgy of the Sacrament

## Eucharistic Prayer (prayer E)

The Lord be with you

**All and also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**All We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**All It is right to give thanks and praise.**

It is indeed right, our duty and our joy,  
always and everywhere to give you thanks,  
holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And now we give thanks, most gracious God,  
surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses  
and glorified in the assembly of your saints.

The glorious company of apostles praise you.

The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.

The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.

We, your holy Church, acclaim you.

In communion with angels and archangels,  
and with all who served you on earth and worship you now in heaven,  
we raise our voice to proclaim your glory,  
for ever praising you and saying:

**All Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.  
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.**

We praise and bless you, loving Father,  
through Jesus Christ, our Lord;  
and as we obey his command,  
send your Holy Spirit,  
that broken bread and wine outpoured  
may be for us the body and blood of your dear Son.

On the night before he died he had supper with his friends  
and, taking bread, he praised you.

He broke the bread, gave it to them and said:  
Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you;  
do this in remembrance of me.

When supper was ended he took the cup of wine.  
Again he praised you, gave it to them and said:  
Drink this, all of you;  
this is my blood of the new covenant,  
which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.  
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

So, Father, we remember all that Jesus did,  
in him we plead with confidence his sacrifice made once for all upon the cross.

Bringing before you the bread of life and cup of salvation,  
we proclaim his death and resurrection  
until he comes in glory.

Great is the mystery of faith:

**All Christ has died.**  
**Christ is risen.**  
**Christ will come again.**

Lord of all life,  
help us to work together for that day  
when your kingdom comes  
and justice and mercy will be seen in all the earth.

Look with favour on your people,  
gather us in your loving arms  
and bring us with St Nicholas and all the saints  
to feast at your table in heaven.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
all honour and glory are yours, O loving Father,  
for ever and ever.

**All Amen.**

## The Lord's Prayer

As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**All**     **Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and for ever. Amen.**

## Breaking of the Bread

We break this bread to share in the body of Christ.

**All**     **Though we are many, we are one body,  
because we all share in one bread.**

**All**     **Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
have mercy on us.**

**Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
grant us peace.**

Draw near with faith.

Receive the body of our Lord Jesus Christ  
which he gave for you,  
and his blood which he shed for you.

Eat and drink in remembrance that he died for you,  
and feed on him in your hearts  
by faith with thanksgiving.

**All** We do not presume  
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,  
trusting in our own righteousness,  
but in your manifold and great mercies.  
We are not worthy  
so much as to gather up the crumbs under your table.  
But you are the same Lord  
whose nature is always to have mercy.  
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,  
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ  
and to drink his blood,  
that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body  
and our souls washed through his most precious blood,  
and that we may evermore dwell in him,  
and he in us. Amen.

Communion is distributed.

### **Prayer after Communion**

God, shepherd of your people,  
whose servant Nicholas revealed the loving service of Christ  
in his ministry as a pastor of your people:  
by this eucharist in which we share  
awaken within us the love of Christ  
and keep us faithful to our Christian calling;  
through him who laid down his life for us,  
but is alive and reigns with you,  
now and for ever.

**All** Amen

**All** Almighty God,  
we thank you for feeding us  
with the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.  
Through him we offer you our souls and bodies  
to be a living sacrifice.  
Send us out in the power of your Spirit  
to live and work  
to your praise and glory.  
Amen.