

The Festival of St. Nicholas of Myra, Bishop and Confessor
Advent Midweek 1
St. Luke 12:35-40
December 6th, 2017
Sts. Peter and Paul Ev. Lutheran Church
Greenville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

Blessed Are Those Servants

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we celebrate the Festival of St. Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra, who is also called a confessor, because he is listed as one of the attendees to the Council of Nicæa. There is *much* legend surrounding this saint. As you are probably aware it is said that this is the saint upon whom image of the modern Santa Claus is based. This is said, because according to legend, St. Nicholas of Myra had a habit of tossing bags filled with gold coins into the homes of the poor. From this the legend that he would give gifts to poor children sprang up. In truth, it was actually only one person to whom he gave a bag of gold coins, and he was not a child. He was in fact the father of a daughter who could not marry because her father could not afford the dowry. Therefore, St. Nicholas gave the money in secret to help pay the dowry so that she could get married.

So we can see that the legends that surround St. Nicholas are exaggerated and many. He would find the modern “image” of him—Santa Claus—an appalling representation of him. We learn this from the type of Bishop he was. He was a faithful Bishop. He was a defender of the faith. He helped frame and confessed the Creed of Nicæa. He defended the Church against heresy, especially the heresy of Arianism that denies the Trinitarian formula of one God in three Persons, and three Persons in one God. You have probably heard the tale of how he punched Arius in the face because of Arius’ false teachings on the Trinity.

St. Nicholas promoted the Gospel of salvation through the Lord + Jesus Christ alone. Unlike Santa Claus who only gives presents to those children who are good—whose gift giving is dependent upon a person’s works—St. Nicholas taught salvation by the grace of our Lord + Jesus through faith. Like all the orthodox fathers of the Early Church, he believed that man was sinful and could not save himself, therefore mankind needs a savior, and that savior is found in the man who is God—Christ + Jesus. St. Nicholas of Myra was a faithful Bishop, who preached the Word of God in its truth and purity, and administered the Sacraments according to Christ’s institution.

This is why the Gospel appointed for today from the twelfth chapter of the Evangelist St. Luke is fitting for this great saint. For, he is the perfect example of someone who girded his waist, and kept his lamp burning; who was always ready for the coming of the Lord. Truly *“blessed are those servants whom the Master, when He comes, will find watching”* like St. Nicholas of Myra. What does all this mean? To be ready, to be watchful, to gird yourself, and keep your lamp burning is nothing more than

to hold fast to the pure preaching of the Word of God, and hold fast to the correct and true administration of the Blessed Sacraments as our Lord Christ instituted them for our use and benefit. To allow these things to become corrupt, either through slothful disregard and apathy, or to violently change these things to make them mean and teach something that they are not meant is not being watchful; it is not being a good servant of the Master—the Lord + Jesus Christ.

In his defense of the Trinity, and his confession of the Creed, St. Nicholas of Myra shows himself to be a faithful steward of the gifts given to him by God. He shows that he remained watchful, in the midst of persecution by heretics, and He kept himself ready by diligently defending the truth of God's Word against those who would destroy it by either corrupt teaching, or violent hands through the removal of the true orthodox preachers of the Word of God from their pulpits.

Santa Claus is not the true St. Nicholas, nor does he represent him in any real way. For, St. Nicholas never would have directed men to their works, but he, as a faithful shepherd, would have directed his hearers to Christ alone. Christianity is not about being naughty or nice. It is never about our works, especially when we talk about the rewards. We certainly will on the Last Day give an account of all that we have done, whether good or evil, but even in this case we will not point to our works, or our righteousness, which are and never will be good enough. Rather, we will point to the Lord + Jesus Christ and to His work of salvation on our behalf, just like St. Nicholas did in his lifetime when in his life and in his world, he was surrounded by Arianism. He defended the Son of God, Who was made man, born of the Virgin Mary through the power of the Holy Ghost, Who came down from Heaven so that He might fulfill the whole Law and will of God, and sacrifice Himself on the tree of the holy Cross once and for all for the salvation of mankind.

It is upon our Lord Christ's works that we trust. It is upon His works to which we cling. It is upon His works of salvation for us upon whom we stand firm and keep vigilant watch, with our waist girded and our lamps burning. For when anything other than the works of Christ are put forth as a means of our salvation, whether that be good works, acts of charity, and the like, we will fail miserably to our utter eternal destruction in Hell. Our Lord + Jesus Christ has accomplished all that is necessary for our salvation. We dishonor our Lord + Jesus, just as St. Nicholas of Myra is dishonored when compared to Santa Claus, when we say that we are saved by our works, or that Christ has started salvation on the holy Cross, but we have to now finish it with our works, or any other corruption of true justification by our Lord + Jesus alone through faith alone.

Therefore, my dear friends, you also be ready, just as St. Nicholas of Myra was ready to defend the Word of God. Hold fast to that which has been handed down to you from the Apostles; cling to the faith confessed every Lord's Day and every Feast and Festival Day in the words of the Nicene Creed. Defend it with pure teaching, and demand it be preached from your pulpit. Demand that the sacraments be administered according to Christ's institution and according to the Apostles' teaching regarding them, so that you may be found ready and watching when the Master—the Lord + Jesus Christ—returns in His glory to judge both the quick and the dead. Mark and avoid those preachers who are either too weak to remain faithful, and especially those who actually believe the lies they tell.

Instead, cling to the pure preaching of the Word of God. Cling to those preachers who bring you as the means of your salvation the Lord + Jesus Christ and Him alone, and do not direct you to your deeds as a means of your salvation. For when you cling to this pure Word of God in faith, your soul is comforted by the working of the Holy Ghost, and you are comforted with the promise of forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation. May the Heavenly Father forgive you all your sins, on account of His + Jesus Christ's perfect life and sacrificial death for you, and may He grant you grace to always keep watch until He calls you to your eternal home in Heaven. Lord, grant this unto us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.