

Resources for Special and Seasonal Observances

Back-to-School Prayer

O Lord, as our children return to school, we pray for the safety of all students, teachers, administrators and staff. We pray for strength to comfort the fearful and face the challenges ahead. Surround parents and caregivers with peace to ease any anxiety about reentering the buildings. Give our children patience to deal with new rules as they renew friendships and develop new relationships in safe ways. Encourage parents and caregivers to nurture children at day's end so that they may thrive another day in school. We pray for churches to surround all those in schools with more prayer and support this year than ever before so that all children reach their full potential. **Amen.**



Health volunteer visiting a family in Malawi. Episcopal Relief & Development partners with the Anglican Council in Malawi to support families through our Moments that Matter® program partnership. Moments That Matter® is an evidence-based early childhood development initiative that prepares parents and caregivers to provide more moments of engagement, nurturing and stimulation in the first 1,000 days of children's lives.

St. Nicholas Day

Written by Lisa Puccia

Saint Nicholas is honored on December 6. This feast may be an opportunity to connect the gift-giving of Santa Claus with the generosity of one of the saints of the church.

“Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

—Matthew 6:1

LEARN

Who was St. Nicholas?

The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara in Asia Minor. At the time, the area was considered part of Greece; today, the village is on the southern coast of Turkey. Nicholas’s wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while he was still young. Obeying Jesus’s words to “sell what you own and give the money to the poor,” Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children and his concern for sailors and ships. [Read more here.](#)

Ways to Engage:

- [Find Myra and Turkey](#), where Saint Nicholas lived on a globe or map.
- Help children learn about the difference between St. Nicholas and Santa Claus. St. Nicholas was a real person who lived hundreds of years ago. Many people around the world celebrate his life and good deeds on December 6. This is a day to think more about giving than receiving!
- Adults and older teens can learn about helping the poor today. Another saint who modeled how to help the poor was [Basil of Caesarea](#).

SHARE

Especially for Older Children and Youth

- Do you like origami? Make [St. Nicholas' bishop's miter](#) and use them to decorate your house or add them to St. Nicholas treat bags and Christmas gifts.
- This can be a great day for older children and youth to better understand the story of St. Nicholas. Watch [this short video](#) about how to "become" St. Nicholas. The video shows how to become St. Nicholas every day by making simple acts of kindness a routine. Start on St. Nicholas Day with some special "Nicholas Deeds."
- Post a St. Nicholas image on social media or in a text stream to let others know you are celebrating the life of St. Nicholas. You can choose from [one of these](#) or choose another. Nicholas gave secret gifts to those in need and people he cared about. Plan a day of sharing the story of this beloved saint!
- Make gift bags for neighbors for older folks in your community and plan a way to leave them on their porch or doorstep when no one is looking.
- St. Nicholas Treat Bag. You can decorate your own or find [a fancy one](#). Fill the bag with gold-wrapped chocolate coins (a reminder of Nicholas's many gifts of gold coins to the needy), a candy cane (a sweet treat shaped like the bishop's crozier), and a St. Nicholas prayer.

St. Nicholas Prayer:

God of joy and cheer, we thank you for your servant,
the good bishop Nicholas.
In loving the poor, he showed us your kindness;
in caring for your children, he revealed your love.
Make us thoughtful without need of reward
so that we, too, may be good followers of Jesus. **Amen.**

GIVE

- As a family, make a list of what you would buy if you had \$15. In the [Gifts for Life](#) catalog, you can spend \$15 to help support a caregiver in Africa, Asia or Latin America. Instead of purchasing items on your list, share that \$15 with those in need.
- Oranges signify the gold St. Nicholas gave away to the poor. At this time of year when oranges aren't in season, they were once considered a rare winter treat. Donate a case of oranges to your local food pantry.
- Begin or end your day with a [3-minute retreat](#) that will help you put the holiday season in perspective and leave you inspired by the life of St. Nicholas.

Advent Wreath Prayers and Reflections

How can you, as an individual, a family or a congregation, make a significant change in the lives of children this Advent?

Episcopal Relief & Development offers [Advent Wreath Prayers and Reflections](#). Set aside time each day in Advent to light the candle, pray and learn about Episcopal Relief & Development's Early Childhood Development work.

Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday

A Day to Remember Those in Need

Your community is invited to observe [Episcopal Relief & Development Sunday](#) on the **first Sunday in Lent**. You are welcome to celebrate the work of Episcopal Relief & Development whenever it makes sense for your community, and you are invited to join us in praying for those living in need throughout the Lenten Season.

The Episcopal Church's General Convention has officially designated Lent as a time to encourage dioceses, congregations and individuals to remember and support the life-saving work of Episcopal Relief & Development. (You can view the official designation statement [here](#).)

*Because in Jesus Christ
our Lord
you knit us together in love
to strengthen communities,
empower those who are poor, nourish those who are hungry,
heal those who are sick
and
renew victims of disaster.*
— PROPER PREFACE FOR EPISCOPAL RELIEF & DEVELOPMENT SUNDAY