



Anglican Church of Australia

Primate: The Most Reverend Geoffrey Smith

Primate's Christmas Message 2024

5 December 2024

One of the key characters in contemporary Christmas celebrations is Santa Claus who developed from St Nicholas, the bishop of Myra who died around 342AD. The feast day for Nicholas is December 6 and in some countries children receive gifts on that day.

There is not a lot known about the historical Nicholas which is not surprising since he lived in turbulent times, with the church enduring persecution under the Roman emperor Diocletian, but there are many legends about Nicholas and his generosity, particularly his generosity to children and people in need. One of the best-known legends concerns Nicholas saving three young girls from prostitution by dropping a bag of gold through the window of their house for three nights so their father could pay a dowry for each of them.

It is significant that the basis for Santa Claus who is celebrated by many at Christmas was a Christian bishop known for his generosity to the poor. It is estimated that 30 billion dollars was spent on Christmas in 2023 in Australia. This is a huge amount of money and much of it was probably spent on people who didn't really need it.

One of our Christmas customs is gift giving. We give gifts and mostly receive gifts in return. One of our anxieties is trying to make sure the value of the gift we give will balance the gift we are likely to receive. I wonder whether we might consider alongside exchanging gifts, as part of following St Nicholas' example, giving to people who can't give to us in return.

There are a lot of people who are in need in Australia. Demand for food and financial assistance seems to be continuing to grow and organisations that provide that assistance report shortages in resources and volunteers. There is lots of scope for us to give without expecting anything in return.

Lots of words are used trying to explain the spirit of Christmas or the real meaning of Christmas, and for me, the kind of generosity shown by St Nicholas, mirroring the generosity of God in coming among us as one of us in the person Jesus is really at the heart of any celebration of Christmas.

Maybe, by giving to those who can't give back we will experience more of the true meaning of Christmas, and help those who are in real need.

Have a holy and happy Christmas.

The Most Reverend Geoff Smith

Archbishop of Adelaide and Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia.