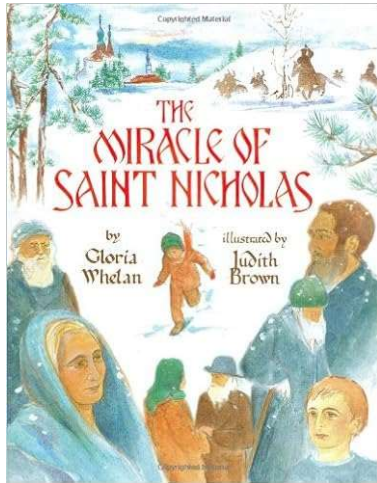


Sunday Storytellers

The Miracle of Saint Nicholas

By Gloria Whelan, Illustrated by Judith Brown



Summary: It is the day before Christmas in a small Russian village. Alexi's babushka is telling him what Christmas was like when she was a girl – before the soldiers came. Alexi has many questions, including, "Why can't we celebrate Christmas tomorrow in St. Nicholas?" Babushka sadly replies that it would take a miracle after sixty years. Alexi thinks that if there truly was such a thing as a miracle, why couldn't it happen here? And so unfolds a story that reveals how, though quiet and hidden, faith and hope cannot be suppressed by soldiers or by time.

On Sunday:

Welcome the children as they come in. Ask them to leave their shoes outside the door before they enter.* Have a simple activity and crafting materials available so they can do something while they wait for the others.

When it feels like all have arrived, gather the children.

Introductions all around – Is there anyone who knows everyone's name (including yours!)?

Introduce the book – Read the title and share a little about St. Nicholas:

Today we're celebrating the feast of St. Nicholas (also known as Santa Claus). He was known for the good deeds he did, including leaving gifts and surprises for children. He always gave in secret and expected nothing in return. It is this selfless generosity which made Nicholas' gifts the gifts of a saint. (From the St. Nicholas Center.)

Then ask the children how they would describe a miracle... Have they experienced one themselves? Have them share details. [Have you? Please share it!] Write the responses on the flip-chart pad or whiteboard. Examples of every-day miracles might include:

- Coincidences – you hear from someone or see someone you were just thinking about
- Answers – you have to make a decision or solve a problem and then suddenly the solution seems clear; maybe it comes in the form of a message, a word or a dream that provides guidance

- Understanding – after disagreeing with someone you finally achieve a peaceful resolution or are able to forgive them
- Signs – you are feeling sad or angry and then you see something beautiful like an eagle flying overhead or a mother deer and her faun
- Healing – someone you love is sick or dying and then suddenly their health changes for the better

Read the book – Read it “librarian style” with pages out. Before you turn the page, make sure everyone has had a chance to see the pictures.

Wondering Questions – [Affirm all responses. Ask for elaboration where needed.]

- I wonder which miracles you observed in the story?
- I wonder what was the most important part of the story?

Hands-on Bible

What does the Bible have to say about miracles? Let’s look! [Hand out Bibles.]

As you’re handing out the Bibles ask: Does anyone remember any miracles from the Bible? [e.g. the burning bush, Jesus walking on water, Jesus multiplying the loaves and the fishes, etc.!]



The verse we’re looking for is:

Psalm 66:5 [Write this on the flip-chart pad or whiteboard.]

Note: the Book of Psalms is a collection of 150 poems and songs. It’s located in the Old Testament and, most of the time, you can find it right in the middle of your Bible.

- This time we don’t have to go to the Table of Contents! To find the book of Psalms, just crack open your Bible in the middle. [Make sure this works for everyone!]
- Now let’s go to the 66th Psalm – see the blue numbers at the top of the page?
- If you’ve found the 66th Psalm, go to the 5th verse – do you see those tiny numbers? Find 5...
- Wait until everyone is there and then read:

**Come and see what our God has done,
what awesome miracles he performs for people!**

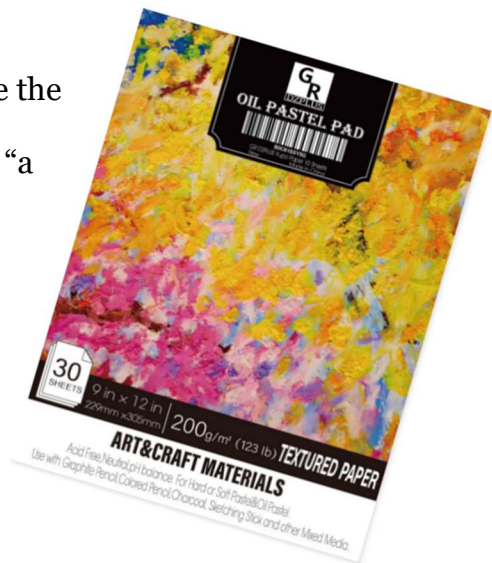
The miracles that happen in the Bible are often big, powerful and dramatic but miracles happen all the time to us and around us. If we’re observant, we can start to recognize them when they happen to us and thank God for them...



*It’s a tradition for St. Nicholas’ Day is to put candy in the shoes of children! Have one of your adult or teen guides put an individually wrapped chocolate or candy in each shoe while the children are otherwise occupied.

Art – Here are two options (adapt as you see fit):

■ Refer back to the flip-chart page/whiteboard where the children shared something miraculous in their lives. They can use some oil pastels and art paper to depict “a miracle that has happened in my life” or “a miracle that I wish would happen in my life.”



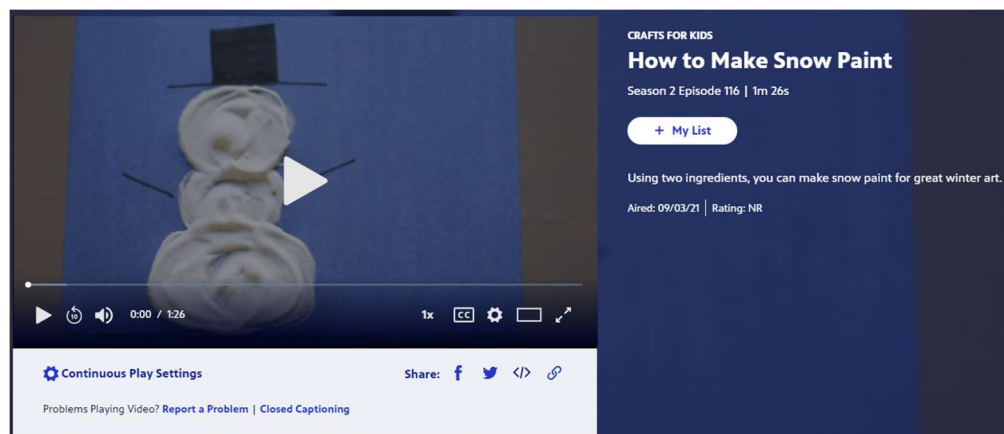
■ Give out large pieces of color construction paper and have the children draw a winter scene with markers. They can use the images from the book as inspiration. To finish it with “snow” use this formula to create a 3-D effect...

Snow:

1 part – Elmer’s glue
2 parts – shaving cream

Mix well. Put a dollop into a bowl for each child.

With paintbrushes of different sizes, they can add the snow to their picture.



<https://www.pbs.org/video/how-to-make-snow-paint-tw2b1d/>

Snack – Babushka gives Alexi and Natasha gingerbread men (made from her precious store of molasses) as a gift. Maybe gingerbread cookies for this special Sunday?



SUNDAY STORYTELLERS IS A PROJECT OF
The Episcopal Diocese of Olympia
The Episcopal Church in Western Washington

FOR MORE CURRICULUM GO TO SUNDAYSTORYTELLERS.ORG

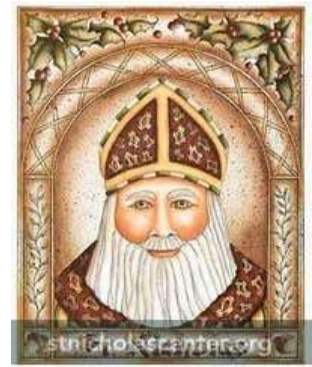
Additional Background for Adults...

Who is St. Nicholas?

From the St. Nicholas Center – <https://www.stnicholascenter.org>

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 Greek and is now on the southern coast of Turkey.

His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus' 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.



St. Nicholas
Artist: Susan Seals

Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who ruthlessly persecuted Christians, Bishop Nicholas suffered for his faith, was exiled and imprisoned. The prisons were so full of bishops, priests, and deacons, there was no room for the real criminals—murderers, thieves and robbers. After his release, Nicholas attended the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. He died December 6, AD 343 in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church, where a unique relic, called manna, formed in his grave. This liquid substance, said to have healing powers, fostered the growth of devotion to Nicholas. The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration, St. Nicholas Day, December 6th.

Through the centuries many stories and legends have been told of St. Nicholas' life and deeds. These accounts help us understand his extraordinary character and why he is so beloved and revered as protector and helper of those in need.