



Registered charity no 251394



## December 2024

It's nearly Christmas! But what does that mean to you?

Presents Good Food Holiday Family Games

Or singing carols, hearing the story of the first Christmas, sharing?

Or perhaps all of the above. There are so many layers to Christmas. A big part is the giving and receiving of presents, but why is that such a big thing at this time?

Here is one reason:- It's all tied up in the history of Father Christmas.



There are many legends of someone who distributes gifts at Christmas time. Here we call him Father Christmas which comes from a long time ago when there was a tradition of having a Father Winter character. Then he was dressed in a whole range of different colours - blue, green, brown or red.

Then, Christians heard about St Nicholas. Long ago he was a Bishop in the country 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 poor and sick as he travelled the country on horseback.

He was made a Bishop, and on his travels learnt about a poor family with daughters who couldn't get married because there was no money. Bishop Nicholas secretly dropped bags of gold through their window (or down the chimney into stockings or shoes by the fire, there are many versions of the story). The father of the girls eventually found out and he told everyone of the generosity of Bishop Nicholas, and the legend of leaving secret gifts was born.

After his death Bishop Nicholas was made a saint and his legend spread through Europe. The Dutch particularly adopted him and their name for him was 'Sinter Claes', which soon became 'Santa Claus'. Paintings of him turned his bishop's robe into a long, red, winter coat, and his mitre became a fur cap. Bishop Nicholas had given gifts to many poor children in his country and 'Santa Claus' / 'Father Christmas' became the Christmas gift giver.



The brightest decoration in many homes is a Christmas tree, topped with a Christmas angel, a star (or a fairy?).

The first Christmas trees were hung in Eastern Europe – upside down! They were often not decorated at all, just there as a reminder that the shape of the tree, triangular, represented the three persons of God - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

The fairy has some connection to the Good Fairy in pantomimes, but angels and stars remind us of the true Christmas story,

## A St Nicholas Craft Activity - Make yourself a Christmas tree decoration.



Cut a strip of card, red if possible, to about 3cm wide & 7cm long. Colour in in red if needed. Cut a small circle for the face, in pink, or colour a white piece. Stick that to one end for the face. Next take a little cotton wool and tease it out so that it isn't too thick and stick around the face for his beard. Draw on his eyes. Make his Bishop's mitre – see the illustration, and draw on a gold colour cross, or use gold paper. Make his Bishop's crook from a gold pipe cleaner. Add a little parcel to look as if he is holding it. Put a hole in the top of his mitre and thread cotton or wool to hang him on the tree.

Using the patterns below, make a pretty "Heart Angel" to remind you of the kind heart of St Nicholas, and all the people who love and care for you. Make it sparkly if you can and perhaps give it to someone to hang on their tree as a thank you for their kindness.

