

## Pk's Perspectives ... The Gift of Giving.

Christmas Eve will soon be upon us. I have always felt drawn more to Christmas Eve than to Christmas day itself. When I was little, Christmas Eve was spent at my grandparent's house creating memories of family, food, and of course a few gifts. We still celebrate Christmas Eve at my parents house and I love the sometimes chaotic gaggle of family that gather together because so many memories are being made.

Another reason I love Christmas Eve is I've always liked the legend of Santa Claus, but I'm more drawn to the vintage ilk of Santa Claus rather than the portly, red suited one of today. But it's more than his appearance that has changed, our concept of what Santa does has changed over the years. The legend of Santa Claus is based on a real person — a bishop of the church in the 4th century, Saint Nicholas. He was bishop in the area which is now modern day Turkey and died on December 6, 343 AD.

He was known as a generous man and he had a habit of secret gift-giving. One of his most famous stories is that of how he helped the poor man who had three daughters. The father could not afford the daughter's dowries, which would mean they would remain unmarried and in that day and location, unmarried women would often become slaves or prostitutes because of a lack of other options. The accounts vary slightly, but in essence St. Nicholas threw three bags of gold through the poor man's window and despite his best efforts to remain anonymous, he was discovered and his generosity became well known through this act of kindness as well as many others. His legend grew, creating a reputation for secret-gift giving. It's easy to see where the basis for the modern Santa Claus originated. (Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who ruthlessly persecuted Christians, Bishop Nicholas suffered for his faith, was exiled and imprisoned.)

Contrast that to the current image of Santa Claus. While the basics are still there, it seems that we've lost the magic of secret gift-giving to those in need. The modern Santa Claus has been commercialized to a point where despite appearance, he's becoming unrecognizable. It's becoming more of how much money can you spend and how can you let everyone know how much you've given. The recipients of the gifts have become expectant of them, instead of grateful. I relate the story I heard on-line a few years back where a parent purchased an expensive new phone for their teenage child. Instead of being grateful, the child was upset and went into a rage because it was the wrong color. He wanted a black one instead of a white one.

How have we gotten to this point where a gift is expected and it should be better than last year? My wife and I are guilty of this with our own children to certain degrees, but one thing we always did was to instill in our children a love of giving and a grateful heart. And it's not something we just practiced around the holidays, it was something we partook in year round. One of my favorite acts throughout the year is to bless someone anonymously. I tell you this, not to shine a light on me, as that would defeat the purpose, but to illustrate a point. I've been blessed to be a blessing. And in reality, I have little compared to many, but the act of giving gives me a great joy. I've spoken many times on here how a small gift or display of generosity can change a person's life; not only the recipient of the gift but it can change you as a giver as well.

It's always fun to receive! I love a gift as much as the next person, but I love the gift given in secret and I love one that is given with love no matter how small. My favorite gifts were those given to me by my children. It may have been something that I would never use, but the fact that they made it or found it and thought dad would like it gave me great joy. So what kind of Santa do I want to be? I want to be that vintage Santa, the one that gives from a generous heart to those in need. I hope I'm getting there, but it will be my little secret anyway. *(a blog by Jason Lautzenheiser)*

Grace, peace, & Christmas joy! Love you, PK.