



St. Luke's East Hampton Reflections from Fr. Ben

December 7, 2025



From the Rector

It's a rare and wonderful thing when the sacred and secular calendars come together. This Saturday, December 6, is one of those days. Saturday is Santa Fest. It is also the Feast of St. Nicholas. For those who might not have put it together, "Santa" means saint and Claus – or Klas - is a diminutive of Nicholas. Brought to America by Dutch colonialists and immortalized in "the Night Before Christmas," Saint Nicholas is near and dear to many. The real St. Nicholas was a 4th century bishop of Myrna (in Turkey) who was known for his generosity, particularly in one story of giving gold coins to poor children. Before he was known as Santa Claus, St. Nick was known as the patron saint of sailors, with many renaissance paintings showing him flying through the clouds (no helicopter needed) in full bishop regalia (no elf suit or reindeer required), protecting ships in storms at sea. St. Nick is also known as the patron saint of pawnbrokers, archers, and repentant thieves, though how all that worked, I am not sure.

As one of the bishops who attended the Council of Nicaea, St. Nicholas was in the center of the debate of whether Jesus was *homoiousios* (of similar substance with God) or *homoousios* (of the same substance of God.) The difference of the two words is just the letter "i". (This is the root of the phrase "not one iota of difference")

Theologically, whether or not the “I” is there is huge. St. Nicholas was so passionate about this that legends say that in a decidedly un-Santa moment he punched Arius (the leader of those who argued that Jesus was human and not divine), thus silencing the heretic and winning the debate. Whether or not this happened, the bishops at Nicaea went on to affirm that Jesus and God were of the same substance, “true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father.” As demonstrated in Pope Leo’s visit to Nicaea last week, the creed which those bishops created would stand as a symbol of unity that would tie together people of diverse backgrounds and spiritual paths for the next 2000 years.

It turns out that St. Nicholas’ greatest gift is not about what is under the tree but about who is in the manger. His greatest gift is the understanding that the baby born in Bethlehem is the word made flesh, that the baby born in the manger is God.

Imagine what would happen if that St. Nick came to town, flying down through the clouds with his bishop robes flapping in the wind. With that St. Nick, children in need would receive assistance. People tossed by the storms of life would find safety. Those wondering about Jesus would find out who Jesus really is – and would find them welcomed into a truly ecumenical and inclusive church. The Feast of St. Nicholas is here to remind us of all the first St. Nicholas was and did... and to follow his example by being and doing those things ourselves.

Santa Fest in East Hampton will be wonderful this year. May our celebration of St. Nicholas Day be wonderful as well.

-Father Ben