**Times and Seasons**

**Part 1 - Advent to the Presentation of Christ**

**Section 5**

**Appendix**

St Nicholas

*December 6*

*St Nicholas was a Greek-born Bishop of Myra (part of modern day Turkey) in the fourth century with a reputation for secret gift giving and a particular concern for the poor. He is celebrated throughout the world in many different countries and cultures and in various ways and is the 'model' of the modern day 'Santa Claus.' His feast day at the beginning of Advent is an ideal opportunity to explore and celebrate the provenance of a modern day (and seemingly secular) Christmas custom, draws us back to the call of Christ to love one another as he has loved us, and to remind ourselves of the heart of the Christmas celebrations which is God's love expressed in the birth of Christ. St Nicholas is, among many other things, a patron saint of children and seafarers.*

*This material may be incorporated into a celebration of the Eucharist or as a separate Liturgy of the Word. The Penitential Sentences for Advent may be used after the introduction.*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Grace and peace be with you

**and keep you in the love of Christ.**

***Introduction***

*The following may be used:*

Dear friends, today we celebrate the life of St Nicholas whose generosity and love are examples to all. His kindness towards the poor and his care for those who were in need call us back to the heart of the gospel: to love one another as Jesus has loved us. God loved the world so much that he sent his only Son. In the presence of Jesus, whose advent is upon us, let us pray that we may be filled with love and generosity, concern for those in need, and gratitude for all the many gifts we have been given.

***Collect***

God our Father,

you loved the world so much that you gave us your only Son, Jesus Christ,

who has taught us to love one another as he has loved us.

You continue to bless the world

by raising up holy people whose lives reveal your kingdom of light and love.

We thank you for St Nicholas,

whose love and generosity inspires us even to this day.

May his example of holiness and self giving love

move us to give as we have received.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord,

to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,

be honour and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

***Readings***

*One or more of the following readings may be used:*

Psalm 23 *The Lord is my Shepherd*

Colossians 3:12-17 *'Clothe yourselves with compassion.'*

1 Timothy 4:11-16 *'Let no one despise your youth.'*

Philippians 2:5-11 *'Sharing the human lot, he humbled himself.'*

1 John 4: 7 – 14 *'Let us love one another.'*

Mark 14: 1- 9 *'You have the poor with you always.'*

Mark 10:17-22 *'Sell what you have and give to the poor.'*

Luke 6: 31-36 *'Be compassionate as your Heavenly Father is compassionate.'*

Luke 9: 46- 48 *'Whoever receives this child in my name receives me.'*

Luke 12:13-21 *Store up treasure for yourself in heaven*

***Homily***

***Intercessions***

My brothers and sisters, let us pray to the Lord that all people may be filled with his generosity and love, which so clearly marked the life of St Nicholas.

Let us pray for all the bishops of the church: may they be shepherds of generosity and love for the whole People of God.

***R.*** Help us to love one another

**as you have loved us.**

Let us pray for all children: may the Christmas season fill them with delight and inspire them to be generous and kind. ***R.***

Let us pray for the children of our Church: may they grow closer to Jesus day by day. ***R.***

Let us pray for all parents and grandparents, godparents and Sunday School teachers and all who help to nurture children in the Christian faith: may they be shining role models for those in their care.***R.***

Let us pray for all who are poor and lack the basic necessities of life: may they receive generosity and care from others. ***R.***

Let us pray for all who work at sea: may they be strengthened in their work and return to harbour safe and sound. ***R.***

Let us pray for all who care for those in need: may their work may be a source of inspiration to others. ***R.***

*If the Eucharist is not celebrated, the intercessions conclude with the Lord's Prayer:*

Now, let us pray as Jesus himself has taught us:

**Our Father...**

*The life of St Nicholas is rich with imagery and lends itself to explore creatively the Kingdom of God with all ages, particularly children, whilst connecting with Advent themes and the way in which many people already celebrate Christmas. The following prayers and options are provided for those parishes who may wish to celebrate the feast day of St Nicholas in this way.*

**Additional Rites**

***Prayer of Blessing for the giving of Oranges or other Gifts***

*The following is provided to illustrate the joy of giving and receiving. The gifts of St Nicholas were usually small things to eat: oranges, apples, nuts, sweets and biscuits. They may seem rather meagre and unimpressive when compared to the large number of gifts given and received at Christmas by many in our society but they remind us of what's really important and help us to cherish all we have been given.*

God our Loving Father,

as we prepare for the season of goodwill,

inspire us, like St Nicholas, to live generously for others,

to reach out to those in need

and to bring light to those in darkness.

Bless us and all who receive these *oranges,*

a sign of the sweetness of your love,

so that we may reap a harvest of peace and joy

and bear the fruit of Jesus' love in our lives.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

***Prayer of Blessing for the Giving of Coins or other Gifts***

*One story associated with the life of St Nicholas involved a poor man with three daughters. He was unable to provide a dowry for his daughters and so, unable to get married, they were destined to be sold into slavery. On three occasions a bag of gold appeared in their household: tossed through the window and landing in stockings or shoes left at the fireside to dry. This led to the tradition of children leaving stockings for St Nicholas to fill with gifts. A symbol of three gold balls, coins, money bags or sometimes oranges or apples are used to represent St Nicholas.*

God our Father,

the light of Christmas is breaking upon the horizon,

the night time gives way to the coming of your Son into the world.

Bless us and all who receive these *coins.*

May they remind us of the generosity and kindness of St Nicholas

and the help he eagerly gave to those who were in trouble or need.

Help us to use our gifts to create a world of peace and love.

May we be signs of hope in a world of despair,

shining beacons of light where darkness overshadows.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

***Prayer of Blessing for Gifts for the Poor***

*It is appropriate on this feast to collect and distribute gifts for the poor, such as food and clothing.*

God our Father,

your Son Jesus Christ became poor for our sake,

stripping himself of glory

and becoming human like us.

He showed special concern for all who were in need,

bringing good news to the poor

and raising up all who are bowed down.

The church, charged with the same mission,

reaches out today to those who are in need.

With the example of St Nicholas,

who dedicated himself to works of charity and love,

bless all who receive these gifts

that they may be filled with joy

and receive all they need to lead full and wholesome lives.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

***The Child Bishop***

*This tradition began in Medieval times and has gained popularity in recent times in many areas. The chosen child is vested in appropriate episcopal garments and seated in a chair in a prominent place. The act, although fun and appealing to children, also expresses the truth of God's kingdom. The words of Mary's Magnificat, 'You cast down the mighty from their thrones and raise up the lowly,' inspire this activity.*

We proclaim your greatness, Lord God,

as your kingdom draws closer in all its fullness.

Your peace and justice is dawning,

your glorious brightness breaks through the darkness of the night.

Come now, cast down down the mighty from their thrones,

lift up the lowly,

and fill the hungry with good things.

Help us to follow your ways of humility and love

and to welcome the glorious brightness of your kingdom.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

***Final Blessing and Dismissal***

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Christ the Sun of righteousness shine on you and scatter the darkness from before you and the blessing of Almighty God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

The Lord is coming. Go out to meet him.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of Christ. Amen.**

St Lucy

*December 13*

*St Lucy is a saint of the third to fourth century, a martyr of the Roman persecutions. Her name means 'light' and she is celebrated particularly in Italy and Scandinavia. There are various popular traditions associated with her feast day: in Sweden a girl within each family dresses in white with a red sash and wears on her head an evergreen wreath with lighted candles. An Hungarian custom is the planting of the Christmas wheat which, when sprouted soft green by Christmas, may be presented at the Christmas Crib. It offers a lovely devotion to Jesus, the Bread of Life, who was born in Bethlehem ('the house of bread') and laid in a feeding trough. It provides a useful Advent devotion of watching and waiting.*

*Lucy's story of courage and the provenance of her name makes her a particularly appropriate Advent saint. Her name and various traditions associated with her have made her patron saint of the blind and those with visual impairment or eye trouble. In the Julian calendar her feast day fell on the shortest day of the year (as celebrated in John Donne's poem 'A Nocturnal upon St Lucie's day) and although this is not the case with the Gregorian calendar the imagery still fills this feast day.*

***Collect***

*Either the prayer from the Collects of the Church in Wales* or:

At the darkest hour, Lord God,

your Radiant Dawn breaks upon us,

scattering the shadows

and ending the darkness of the night.

As we celebrate the life of St Lucy

who, in the midst of danger and death, remained faithful to her calling,

may the light of your love enable us to see the beauty of your truth

and our eyes be opened to the presence of your Son,

to whom with you and the Holy Spirit,

be honour and glory, now and for ever. **Amen.**

***Readings***

Isaiah 9:1-7 *The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light*

Isaiah 62:1-5 *You are to be a crown of splendour in the hand of the Lord*

Ephesians 5:8-14 *You were darkness once but now you are light in the Lord*

John 8:12 '*I am the Light of the world'*

***Prayer for the lighting of Candles***

*The people may be given candles which may be lit during a suitable hymn or song and/or accompanied by the following prayer:*

Father of glory, holy and eternal,

let the light that filled St Lucy,

the light of Jesus your Son,

fill this space in which we have gathered,

and illuminate our hearts and minds.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus,

may our whole lives glimmer with hope

and glow with the love of Jesus,

who is Lord for ever and ever. **Amen.**

***Prayer for the planting of Christmas Wheat***

God of all Creation,

you send the rain to water the soil and give it growth

and you have set the sun and stars and moon in the sky

to warm the earth and give us light and illuminate even the darkest night.

Bless us as we plant these wheat seeds.

As we watch them grow,

may we anticipate the birth in Bethlehem of Jesus, the Bread of Life,

who feeds us with the presence of his very self,

and who is Lord for ever and ever. **Amen.**

***Intercessions***

Let us pray to God our Father, whose Son Jesus Christ, the true light which enlightens everyone, is coming into the world.

We pray for a spirit of courage within the church: may all Christians remain strong in faith, full of hope, and alive to God in Christ Jesus the Lord.

***R.*** God of light and truth:

**hear our prayer.**

We pray for all children: may the light of Christmas guide the young to Jesus, the eternal light. ***R.***

We pray for all persecuted Christians throughout the world: may they be filled with courage and faith, and find freedom to serve the Lord. ***R.***

We pray for all those with eye conditions or visual impairments: may they be treated with understanding and respect. ***R.***

We pray for a clear understanding of what the Lord is calling us to do: may our hearts be filled with a desire to welcome his will for us and the world. ***R.***

*If the Eucharist is not celebrated, the intercessions end with the Lord's Prayer:*

Let us pray to the Father, that the kingdom of light and peace may come in all its fullness:

**Our Father...**

***Blessing and Dismissal***

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Christ the Sun of righteousness shine on you and scatter the darkness from before you and the blessing of Almighty God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

The Lord is coming. Go out to meet him.

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.

**In the name of Christ. Amen.**