

Tradition in my family has it that a certain member - no names, no pack-drills! - was the last person in the world to realise that Luke Skywalker is Darth Vader's son. I have to admit however, that I'm probably the last person in the world to have realised that the sports company, "Nike," is named after the ancient Greek word for victory.

It's also how Saint Nicholas got his name: from that word "nike" and another old Greek word, "laos," meaning, "the people," we get, "victory of the people." His victory was care for the people. (The word "saint," from Latin, means, "holy.") Saint Nicholas had a number of variations on his name, including, via the Dutch Sinterklaas, Santa Claus.

Great news for children everywhere. Good news also for us grown-ups for any number of reasons, not least of which is that we can, hand on heart, say that Santa Claus is real. He is. He has a birthday: 15 March 270 (in Patara, modern Turkey); and we know when he passed on to life immortal (I'm picking my words carefully), which was 6 December 343. In fact, he has a face, too. A couple of years ago there was some forensic work done to find out what he looked like. Curious? You can have a look online:

<http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/liverpool-john-moores-university-professor-8234749>

However, Christmas celebrates Jesus' birthday, so how does Santa Claus get in on the act? Simple: Nicholas took seriously what Jesus said about giving. God gave us Jesus, Jesus gave us his life, so St Nicholas gave what he could to people in need, especially children. As bishop of Myra, he was able to show how God's love works by generosity. This is how St Nicholas (Santa Claus) is responsible for all the gifts given to celebrate Jesus' birthday (again, I chose my words carefully!). In many places in Europe, Christmas season really starts on 6 December, the Day of Saint Nicholas/Santa Claus.

Every year, this season gives us a reminder that God's gift of love can be accepted the way children accept the gifts they get - hopefully with gratitude(!) - that is, with joy. But, in the words of the song, "the reason for the season some folks just don't understand."

Let us understand: this Christmas let's pray for the reality of Christmas: God's gift to us - and not get our Nicholas in a twist about it!