



## Gold, incense and the myrrh

The Savior was born in a stable that sheltered animals and not in a five Star hospital. There was no suite reserved for him or a crib. He was laid in a manger. Neither doctors nor nurses took care of him. Nobody bought his baby clothes from Macy's and nobody gave him flowers or roses. They did not offer "Meghli" with walnuts and almonds. His only visitors were sheep and the three kings of the Orient.

**The first king** was King "Yor" who gave him gold symbol of virtue being the King of Kings.

**The Second king** was King "Gaspar", who gave him the incense symbolic of prayer.

**The third king** was King "Balthazar", who gave him bitter symbol of suffering and pain.

Three Kings worshiped the baby King.

We in the Middle East after the 2012 calendar year nobody gave us gold or incense. Lebanon did not see or hear the gold sounds, neither Syria, Palestine or Iraq saw the incense. All what we have seen in the Middle East is the bitter and heard the song " Marmar Zamani ".

## الذهب والبخور والمرّ

ولد المُخلص في مغارة وعلى مزود، لم يولد في مستشفيات الخمس نجوم ، ولم يُحَجَزْ له suite، ولم يأتي لخدمته أطباء وممرضات ولم تقدّم له الزهور وباقات الورد ، ولم تُصنع له المغلي بالجوز واللوز ، ولم يُهيء له جهاز طفل من محلات Macy's ، فكان زوّاره رعيان وخراف وثلاثة ملوك من بلاد المشرق :

الأول : يُدعى الملك يور الذي قدّم له ذهباً رمزاً للفضيلة كونه ملك الملوك .

الثاني: يُدعى الملك غاسبار الذي قدّم له البخور رمزاً للصلاة .

الثالث: يُدعى الملك بلتازار الذي قدّم له المرّ رمزاً للمُعاناة والآلام .

ثلاثة ملوك سجدوا للطفل الملك .

ونحن في هذا الشرق وبعد 2012 سنة ميلادياً ، لا أحد قدّم لنا الذهب ، ولا دولة قدّمت لنا البخور . فلبنان لم يُشاهد أو يسمع الرنين الذهبي ، ولا سوريا ولا فلسطين ولا العراق شاهدوا البخور .. لم نشاهد ولم نتذوّق في هذا الشرق إلا المرّ .. وأغنية مرمر زمني .



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## Herod of the third Millennium

When King Herod learned that the King of Kings was born in Bethlehem, he ordered the murder of the children of Bethlehem because of his fear of the child King.

The Angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph and said to him : "take the boy and his mother to Egypt because King Herod wants him dead", and that's what happened...

Today after 2012 calendar year ....

What do you think about the Herod's of today, and how many Herod exists in the world? King Herod killed children only. Today there are the worse than King Herod; they kill children, the elderly, women, men. Destroy houses on the heads of their inhabitants and places of worship on the heads of worshippers. How merciful you "Herod" who killed the children of Bethlehem only to compare with the Herod's of today.

## هيرودوس الألفيّة الثالثة

... وقبل 2012 سنة ميلادياً

ارتعب الملك هيرودوس عندما علّم بأنّ ملك الملوك قد وُلِدَ في بيت لحم . وحفاظاً على مملكته وخوفه من الطفل الملك ، أمر بقتل أطفال بيت لحم .

فظهر ملاك الربّ على يوسف النجّار قائلاً :

قم خذ الصّبي وأمه إلى مصر لأنّ الملك هيرودوس يريد هلاكه ، وهذا ما حصل .

... واليوم بعد 2012 سنة ميلادياً

ما رأيكم بالهيرودوسيين ، وكم هيرودوس موجود في العالم ، فالملك هيرودوس قتل الأطفال فقط أما اليوم فهناك من هم أشرس من الملك هيرودوس ، فهم يقتلون الأطفال والشيوخ والنساء والأولاد والفتيان والفتيات ، ويدمّرون المنازل على رؤوس سكانها ، ودور العبادة على رؤوس المصلّين .

ما أرحمك يا هيرودوس الذي قتل أطفال بيت لحم أمام هيرودوسيين هذه الأيام .

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# وَعَادَ إِلَى وَطَنِهِ

بعد موت هيرودوس وإستلام إبنه السلطة ، ظهر ملاك الرب ثانية على يوسف النجار قائلاً : ارجع ، اترك مصر وعد إلى أوراشليم . وعادَ الطفل يسوع مع يوسف النجار وأمه مريم إلى الناصرة ، إلى وطنه ، إلى جذوره بعد أربع سنوات .

ونحن كمغتربين نتساءل : متى نعود إلى أوطاننا ، ومتى يُسمح لنا بالعودة وإذا عدنا هل نخطف؟ هل نُسجن؟ هل نُضرب ؟ هل نُقتل؟ هل يصدر بحقنا مذكرات توقيف إلتباساً بالإسم أم نعود لنصلب ونُتهم بالعمالة لاننا شتمنا فلان ، أو ضد رأي هذا الزعيم أو ضد تصرفات هذا الحزب أو هذا التيار. متى سنعود إلى وطننا إلى حيث أبصرنا النور إلى الأرض التي تحمل رفاة الوالدين والأشقاء ؟ أم سنبقى تائهين على الكرة الأرضية غرباء في وطن غريب ، وغرباء في وطننا وغير مُرحّب بنا؟

متى نعود إلى أوطاننا ... أم سنبقى ننتظر موت هيرودوس للعودة..!!؟؟



## Returning to his Home Country...

Upon the death of king Herod, his son took power. The Angel of the Lord appeared once again on Joseph Saying "leave Egypt and go back to Jerusalem".

Joseph and Mary returned with the child Jesus after 4 years to their homeland, to their roots "The Nazareth".

We as immigrants, wonder when we will go back to our home country. If we do so, are we going to be kidnapped, go to jail, beaten, or be killed for no reason? Are we going to be accused of treason because we cursed somebody or are against the opinion of one of the leaders, or against a political party?

When!!! When we will go back to our home, to our roots where our parents and siblings are buried. Or are we going to stay lost in this globe, and will remain strangers.

When shall we return to our homeland...

Or should we have to wait for the death of Herod!!!



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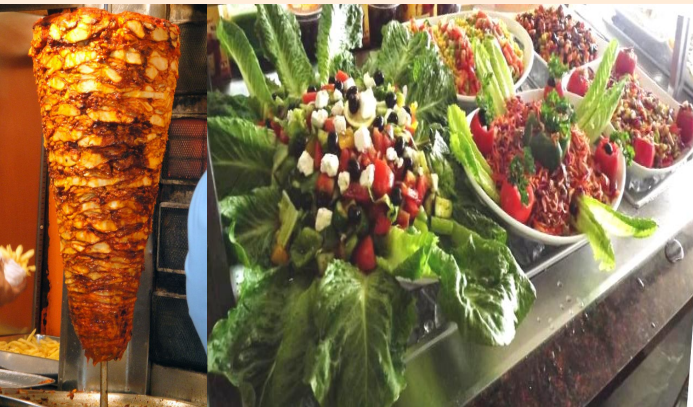
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# في لبنان وُلِدَ الْمَسِيحُ In Lebanon "Christ" was born

It may surprise and wonder the reader how "Christ" was born in Lebanon and not in Bethlehem!?

"Yes", Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but the Christ was born in Lebanon, specifically in the southern town called "Cana of Galilee".

Jesus of Nazareth attended a wedding ceremony in the village of Cana in southern Lebanon, with his mother Mary, and his first few disciples.

They ran out of wine early. In that culture, such a miscalculation would have been a great humiliation for the bride and groom. Mary turned to Jesus and said, "They have no more wine." "Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby were six stone jars filled with water used for ceremonial. Jesus told the servants to fill the jars with water. He ordered them to take it to the master of the banquet, who was in charge of food and drink. The master was unaware of Jesus' turning the water in the jars into wine. By this miraculous sign, Jesus revealed his glory as the Son of God. How amazing is the Middle East where all the prophets and messengers were born. It is the "Holy Land". Instead, this land became the land of martyrization, where we kill in the name of religion and quarrel over the identity of God. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing".

قد يَستغرب القارئ ويتساءل كيف وُلِدَ المسيح في لبنان وهو قد وُلِدَ في بَيْت لحم .

نعم وُلِدَ الطفل يسوع في بَيْت لحم ، أمّا الْمَسِيح فقد وُلِدَ في لبنان وبالتحديد في البلدة الجنوبية التي تُدعى قانا الجليل .

في هذه البلدة ظهرت الأعجوبة الأولى في حياة المسيح حيث كان مَدْعُو إلى حفل زفاف وخلال الحفل نفذ الخمر ، فنظرت مريم العذراء إلى السيد المسيح قائلة : لم يبقَ لديهم خمر .

فقال لها : ما لي ولك يا امرأة ، لم تأتني ساعتى بعد!!

فنظرت السيدة العذراء إلى الخدم قائلة : افعلوا ما يقوله لكم .

وكانت أعجوبته الأولى في لبنان في قانا الجليل حيث حوّل الماء إلى خمر ، وهكذا وُلِدَ المسيح في لبنان بالأعجوبة الأولى ومن قانا الجليل انطلقت مسيرة الأعاجيب مع السيد المسيح .

ما هذا الشَّرْق الذي وُلِدَ فيه جميع الأنبياء والرّسل ، إنه أرض القداسة ، فقد تحوّل إلى أرض الشهادة أمة على أمة ، طائفة على طائفة ، نُقُتِلَ بإسم الدين ومُختلفين على هويّة الله ...

وسُبْحان الحيّ الباقي في الحيّ .



the King's Palace as the symbol of the birth of Christ. And the tree was kind of Cypress or pine. Since year 1605 they began spreading this tradition every year for Christmas. Even they say that the Queen Victoria's husband put a Christmas tree in the palace during Christmas.

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Legend:** In the Pharaonic era and when the Queen was looking for her husband Osiris, ISIS, found him on the shores of Lebanon. Ash-tarout Queen of Lebanon gave her the Ark of Osiris and the tree was around it. After that this kind of tree was used in Roman Festivals and Christmas.

**The 4<sup>th</sup> Legend:** The Romans used the Poinsettia plants as part of birthday decorations of the Sun. This plant grows during Christmas. Its leaves are longing to symbolize Christ. And its fruits Wreath Red to symbolize his blood.

**The 5<sup>th</sup> Legend:** During the escape of the Holy family from Herod's Soldiers. One of the trees stretched its trunks to protect the Holy family. So god blessed her to be always green and symbol of eternity.

**The 6<sup>th</sup> Legends:** As usual in some pagan tribes that worshiped God (Thor) Faun and Thunder that adorn trees and one of the tribes involved, the victim of her sons. In 727, Pope was sent to Bonnavasios promising it one they reside under a tree and they had one son, Princes of raboteau they slaughter him as a victim of inspired, attacked and rescued the son Prince from their hands and stop addressing which that God is the God of peace and kindness and love and then cut that tree and moved to a house he offers to become later usually code for their Jesus then moved those extraordinary to England and France, America and all countries of the world.

*All this endows the Christmas tree, in harmony with the crib, with the religious and Christian significance of salvation that the Son of God brought to the whole world by his humble birth.*

**CHRISTMAS TREE IS THE TREE OF LIFE, LOVE & PEACE**

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# ***The Christmas Tree***

## ***Legends***

## ***Traditions***

## ***History***

Many legends and old traditions concerning the Christmas tree date back to very ancient times, but historical documentation of its origins as the tree we know and decorate today only appeared in recent centuries.

There is no doubt, however, that legends and traditions show the convergence of many customs, some born outside the Christian culture and others strictly Christian. We will consider here some of the most important ones that were forerunners of the Christmas tree.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> legend:** Once a snake was dwelling in the tree, Shamokhil was sitting under the tree with his lover. The snake attacked them and the lady was killed. At that time shsamokhil burn the tree. The villagers' came to celebrate the holiday near the tree to benefit from its light.

**The 2<sup>nd</sup> legend:** Univas introduced Christianity to Germany and asked people to cut a small tree and take it to





### **When did you become a Bishop?**

I was ordained an auxiliary bishop on July 6, 1989. Because of the war in Lebanon, Patriarch Maximos V Hakim delegated Archbishop Joseph Tawil to ordain me bishop with Archbishop Michel Hakim of Canada, and Archbishop Peter Rai of Mexico and Venezuela. In 2011, I was elected the Bishop of the Melkite Greek Catholic Eparchy of Newton (the headquarters of the Melkite Church in the United States).

### **How many Eastern Catholic churches are in the USA?**

The Eastern Catholic Churches in the USA represent the following traditions: Armenian, Syriac, Maronite, Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara, Chaldean, Melkite, Ruthenian, Romanian, Ukrainian, Coptic, and Ethiopian. The total of 670 parishes and missions with 615,000 people. My Eparchy, the Melkites in the USA has 43 communities with 30,000 people.

### **Are there a lot of people from the community interested in becoming priests?**

We only have two or three so far. I ask that if anyone from the community feels that he has a spiritual call to give us a call. Vocations to priesthood are very limited. As they are in most churches. Next September I will have 3 seminarians studying for priesthood.

### **Are you ever going to see the Christian holidays united?**

Much dialogue has taken place about Catholics and Orthodox celebrating common feasts together, particularly Easter. However, we still pray for this to happen.

### **Why are you visiting Houston?**

A group of Melkite families requested Fr. Elias

Rafaj to celebrate the Melkite services for them since he is a Byzantine priest, his parish of St. John Chrysostom and the Melkites share a common Liturgy – We are both Byzantine. So I gave permission for this outreach to Melkites to begin in the Houston area. I am here to visit these Melkite families and encourage their participation in their proper Byzantine tradition with the hope of eventually establishing a mission and a future parish, if this is God's will.

### **Being around Christmas time:**

### **If you were Santa Claus what will you offer as a gift to the Catholic Church?**

We celebrate Christ in the flesh at Christmas. My gift to all Catholics would be to recognize him as the prince of peace and work toward creating peace in our world.

Especially for all the eastern churches in the Middle East. Jesus Christ was born in the Middle East so we pray that also love and peace will be born in the Middle East too.

### **What would you offer the world?**

As we start the holiday season I wish the world to allow the children to rule the world. Since children don't know about wars & manipulation because they represent innocence and love. I offer the world the smile of a child that is full of love and peace.

### **What is your message for Christmas this year?**

May the manifestation of God in the flesh – His birth, encounter in the temple, and His baptism in the Jordan, shine brightly on each and everyone. May we all find Christ in these events and allow Him to be "reborn" in us so that we can all be ambassadors of peace and justice to all.





**The Most Reverend  
Bishop Nicholas J. Samra**  
Bishop of the Melkite Greek  
Catholic Eparchy of Newton  
U.S.A

**We Pray for the Unification  
of the Glorious Feasts**

**We wish Peace to all  
parts of the world**

His Honor Bishop Nicholas Samra is working on spreading the eastern Catholic Church with its tradition, throughout the United States. He is on a mission to preserve its presence. He is working to help and serve the Catholic community that originates from the Middle East. Lebanon Times Magazine had the privilege to interview his honor while he was visiting Houston, Texas. He brought love and peace with him.

**Who is Bishop Nicholas Samra, and where were you born?**

Bishop Nicholas Samra is the Eparchial Bishop of Newton, the Melkite Eparchy or Diocese in the USA. The Melkite Church in the USA has forty three communities – parishes and missions in twenty states. There are many other communities of Melkites around the USA that need to be formed into parishes.

I was born in Paterson, NJ, on August 15, 1944, the son of George Samra and Elizabeth Balady. Family's origin is Aleppo, Syria.

**When did you become a priest?**

After eight years of philosophical and theological education at St. Basil Melkite Seminary (Methuen, MA) and St. John Seminary (Boston, MA) I was ordained a priest on May 10, 1970 by Archbishop Joseph Tawil



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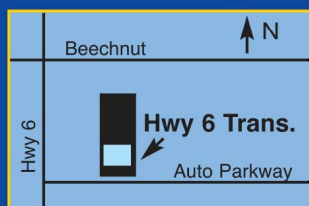
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## ما دور الثعبان وشجرة الراعي وملكة لبنان في شجرة الميلاد

### القصة السادسة :

كانت العادة لدى بعض القبائل الوثنية التي تعبد الآلهة تور إله الغابات والرعد ، أن تزيّن الأشجار ثم تقوم أحد القبائل المشاركة بالاحتفال في تقديم ضحية بشرية من أبنائها . وفي عام 727 أوفد إليهم البابا يونيفاسيوس مبشراً فشاهدهم يقيمون احتفالاً تحت إحدى الأشجار وقد ربطوا ابن أحد الامراء وهموا بذبحه كضحية للآلهة تور ، فهاجمهم وأنقذ ابن الأمير ووقف فيهم خطيباً مبيناً لهم أن الإله الحي هو إله السلام والرفق والمحبة الذي جاء ليخلص العالم . ثم قام في قطع تلك الشجرة ونقلها إلى أحد المنازل وقام في تزيينها لتصبح فيما بعد عادة ورمزاً لاحتفالهم بعيد الميلاد . وانتقلت هذه العادة بعد ذلك من ألمانيا إلى فرنسا وإنكلترا ثم أميركا وانتشرت في العالم .

يُقال بأنه كان هناك ثعبان يسكن على شجرة ، فلما كان شيموخيل القروي يضاجع عشيقته هجم عليه الثعبان فهرب تاركاً عشيقته ، فلدغها الثعبان وماتت ، فجاء شيموخيل وأحرق الشجرة في المساء . فجاء أهل القرية ليحتفلوا قرب الشجرة كي يستفيدوا من نورها .

### أما القصة الثانية فتقول :

يونيفاس وهو الذي أدخل المسيحية إلى ألمانيا ، وطلب من الشعب أن يقطعوا شجرة صغيرة يحملوها إلى قصر الملك تعبيراً عن ميلاد المسيح ، والشجرة من نوع السرو أو الصنوبر ، ثم بدأت في الإنتشار عام 1605 حتى أن زوج الملكة فيكتوريا وضع شجرة الميلاد في القصر .

### أما الرواية الثالثة :

بأنه في عهد الفرعونية ، وعندما كانت الملكة أيزيس تبحث عن زوجها أوزوريس فوجدته على شواطئ لبنان ، فقامت عشتروت ملكة لبنان بإهدائها تابوت أوزوريس وقد أحاطت به شجرة ، وظهرت هذه الشجرة في أعياد الرومان ثم في أعياد الميلاد .

### أما القصة الرابعة :

فقد استخدم الرومان شجرة شرابية الراعي كجزء من زينة عيد ميلاد الشمس التي لا تقهر مع تحديد عيد ميلاد الرب يوم 25 كانون الأول وأصبحت جزءاً من زينة الميلاد ، وتم اعتبار أوراقها ذات الشوك رمزاً لإكليل المسيح ، وثمرها الأحمر رمزاً لدمه .

### القصة الخامسة تقول :

بأنه أثناء هروب العائلة المقدسة من جنود هيرودوس ، إحدى الشجرات مددت أغصانها وأخفت العائلة فكأفأها الرب بجعلها دائمة الخضاء ورمزاً للخلود .







# اضحك مع بابا نويل

فما إن دخلها حتى وجد الشعب الفلسطيني يردد قائلاً : إذا اختفى الشرق الأوسط عن الخريطة تختفي الخيانة في العالم ؟ فصعد مجدداً إلى عربته صارخاً : انطلق يا غزلان فأنا عائد إلى القطب الشمالي .

## رسائل استلمها بابا نويل خارجة عن المؤلف :

### الرسالة الأولى:

عزيزي بابا نويل ، ارجوك اعطيني ثروة كارلوس سليم ولو ليومين .

### الرسالة الثانية:

بابا نويل أنا متجه إلى الكازينو سأراهن على الرقم 7 ، اجعل الكثة تتوقف على هذا الرقم .

### الرسالة الثالثة:

يا بابا نويل دخيلك قل لصديقي أن يسافر لمدة سنة كي أهتم بزوجته .. وعلمك كفاية ..

### الرسالة الرابعة:

يا بابا نويل علمني كيف أستطيع تزوير توقيع بعض رجال الأعمال .

### الرسالة الخامسة:

يا بابا نويل حقق حلمي من خلال إنتصار التيار العوني في الإنتخابات القادمة .

### الرسالة السادسة:

يا بابا نويل حقق حلمي بإنتصار القوات اللبنانية في الإنتخابات القادمة .

### الرسالة السابعة:

يا بابا نويل انصر الطائفة الشيعية .

### الرسالة الثامنة:

يا بابا نويل انصر الطائفة السنية .

### الرسالة التاسعة:

يا بابا نويل انصر الطائفة الدرزية .

## أما الرسالة العاشرة فهي لليبانون تايمز :

يا بابا نويل خذ جميع الذين يتاجرون بالطائفية وبالوطن .. وريحنا .

مجلة ليبانون تايمز رافقت بابا نويل في رحلته إلى بعض الدول وقرأت بعض الرسائل التي تسلمها وجاءت بالتعليقات التالية :

## المحطة الأولى لبابا نويل كانت في لبنان :

مسكين ثيابه تمزقت بين 8 و14 آذار كل فريق يريد بابا نويل له . حمل هدية لوليد جنبلاط ولكن لم يستطع لقاءه أو تقديمها له لأن جنبلاط كل دقيقة في مكان ما وبابا نويل حاول اللحاق به ولكن تورمت قدميه قبل أن يلقاه لأن جنبلاط تنقلاته سريعة .

قدم هدية للنائب جيلبرت زوين ولكن حتى الآن لم يتلق كلمة شكر واحدة لأنها لا نتكلم وهذا مبدأها في الحياة .

العماد ميشال عون اشترط لإستقبال بابا نويل أن يصلي مرة أبانا ومرة السلام في كنيسة مار مخايل في الشياح .

النائب د. عمار حوري اعترف لبابا نويل بأنه نال نصيبه من غضب أهل الفقيد أثناء تقديم التعازي لهم لأنهم ظنوا بأنه يضحك فوق رأس الميت (ملاحظة لأن الإبتسام لا تفارقه ) .

الرئيس نجيب ميقاتي تلقى هدية من بابا نويل عرض للعمل مع فريق Laker's لكرة السلة في لوس أنجلوس .

أكثرية اللبنانيين رموا هدايا بابا نويل في وجهه قائلين: ما بدنا لعب بدنا دواليب كوتشوك لقطع الطرقات وإشعالها في الشارع ... إيه روح يا ... أنت واللعبة يا بابا نويل ...

وأخيراً ، وقبل أن يغادر لبنان صرخ بابا نويل : يا عمي شو هالبلد فريق يسألني هل أنت شيعي أم سني؟ وفريق آخر يسألني أنت عوني يما قواتي؟؟... شو هالبلد .. ما في حدا لبناني يا ناس ...

## المحطة الثانية سوريا :

ما إن دخل بابا نويل إلى سوريا حتى انهالت على رأسه البرازق إذا كان من مؤيدي السلطة القذافي فوق رأسه ، وإذا كان مع الجيش الحرّ القذافي ايضاً فوق رأسه . لذا صار يغني طالعة من بيت أبوها نازلة عند الجيران ، يا رب احمي سوريا وشعبها وضع المحبة في قلوبهم ، فأسرع بابا نويل إلى عربته وضرب الغزلان بالكرباج ودخل فلسطين .

## المحطة الثالثة فلسطين:



In Austria, he became known as 'Christkind', the spirit of Christ's generosity. He had other names around the world but few of them are used any longer. When Austrians brought Christkind to America, the name was secularized and became Kris Kringle.

Different aspects of the combined legend were represented in Santa Claus. Santa brought toys to kids and was a immortal being who symbolized Christmas. His appearance was rather vague at this point and different groups pictured him different ways. But the one definite, consistent element was the white beard.

Santa/Kris Kringle was sometimes described as a jolly elf, because the Santa legend got mixed with another myth which talks of a magic Elf who comes to your home to deliver gifts. The elfin's image that was popularized by Clement Clark Moore's classic 1823 poem, "A Visit from St. Nick". (Moore also invented the idea of the flying Reindeer.) This elfin image was the prevailing view of Santa for a long time.

In 1881, Harper's Weekly cartoonist Thomas Nast made some famous illustrations of Santa which depicted the jolly fellow as a chubby fellow. He was drawn with a big belly. The text that accompanied the Nast cartoons suggested that Santa and his magic Reindeer lived in the North Pole. Nast also designed his trademark red suit. Up until this point, Santa Claus had usually been drawn as wearing Bishop Robes.

But the definitive, iconic image of Santa Claus as we know him today was created by Coca Cola. In 1931, Coke began a massive publicity campaign using Santa Claus as their gimmick. The ads showed a smiling Santa holding a Coca Cola in his hand. This interpretation of Santa was a rather large man, tall and tubby, with a bushy white beard. He had a bright red outfit lined with white fur.

Many Santa actors were hired by Coke for personal appearances. Department store Santa's started to appear at this time and they adopted the tall, plus-sized version of St Nick. Taller Santa's were easier to find than little people. However, they did cast dwarfs and midgets as Santa's Elf helpers. (Beginning, the legend that Elves made Santa toys.)

This over-sized rendition of Santa was adopted by Macy's who used the large Santa as the anchor of their annual parade. The 1947 film "A Miracle on 34th Street" finally cemented this image.

The name Father Christmas never really caught on in America but the names Santa Claus/Kris Kringle/St. Nicholas are all still well known and used today. The figure of Santa Claus has appeared in every possible medium of entertainment and literature. He is forevermore established as a large, portly, ageless man in a red costume who lives in the North Pole and brings toys (built by Elves) to children on his flying reindeer and sleigh.







life annually. Sailors, migrants and various travelers carried the tale of Bishop Nicholas throughout Europe. His deeds were honored every Dec. 6th in many countries. The Church eventually made him St. Nicholas.

In 1686, Josiah King wrote "The Examination and Trial of Father Christmas" to celebrate Christmas being reinstated as an official holiday. Father Christmas embodied the spirit of good will and joy that Christmas is supposed to represent. Father Christmas was depicted as an old man with a white beard. This could be because he typified the antiquity of the Christian tradition. Another theory is that he was based on Wotton (Or Odin) the All-Father of Scandinavian/Dutch/Germanic mythology. Father Christmas did not bring gifts to children, at this point. He was implicitly immortal, as eternal as Christmas itself. Father Christmas became a symbol of Christmas

over the next 100 years. And since the life of St. Nicholas was also celebrated every December, the two legends somehow began to merge. People began to think of them as one character and so St. Nicholas became Father Christmas.

In the 1700, many Dutch speaking people began to settle in America. They brought with them the legends of St. Nicholas/Father Christmas. They called him *Saint Nikolaas*, but the name got shortened and altered by American writer Washington Irving who wrote the first popular stories about the Saint Nikolas, who Irving renamed "*Sinterklaas*". Americans, hearing this legend for the first time, adopted the story into American culture but they had trouble pronouncing Sinterklaas and so they changed the name to make it easier to say. Saint Nicholas/Father Christmas became Santa Claus in America. Although the name Father Christmas would eventually fade from popular use in America, Santa Claus would not.





# The Real History of Santa Claus

Where did the legend of Santa Claus come from? How did it start? Let's look at the real story behind the myth, beginning with a very real man named Nicholas.

The legend began in fourth century Myra in Asia Minor, which today is known as Turkey. Nicholas was a Bishop who was known for his generosity and kindness to children. At least one miracle was attributed to him by the Catholic Church. The most famous story about him is the following...

A father had three daughters. They were so poor; they were likely to lose their home. The three young daughters had decided to turn to prostitution to save their father from financial ruin and retain their home. When Bishop Nicholas found out, he visited their house and left three stockings, each with a piece of gold within. The three gold pieces saved the family from ruin (And also started the

tradition of hanging Christmas stockings and putting gifts in them.)

Later, Bishop Nicholas got into trouble with Emperor Diocletian for saying things which the Emperor preferred were not said. Nicholas didn't approve of many things which occurred under the Emperor and said so. He was exiled from Myra. Nicholas wandered Europe for a time and his reputation had preceded him. He was well received everywhere as a man of integrity and courage. The Pope himself praised Nicholas. Eventually Bishop Nicholas returned to Myra and was quickly arrested. He ultimately died in prison on Dec. 6, 350 AD. Many mourned his





I was their only son and I have two sisters. Since I was a little child my mother kept a book describing every detail about me, like about my first tooth, when I got my first haircut, everything first. And she wrote that from the time I was two years old I wanted to be a priest. That I would play priest, not cowboy not Indian, so they knew. My family was very close to the church.

### **What is your Christmas message this year?**

The message that was pronounced when our savior was born, the message that came from heaven from the angels. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace. Peace throughout the world, but especially in the land where our savior walked in the Middle East, where the first Christians came from. The ones who heard the angels sing .It has to be our eternal Christmas message.

### **How do you describe your visit to Houston and what do you ask from the orthodox community?**

I have been coming to Houston even before I was ordained a deacon. I worked with the young people of our archdioceses beginning of 1975 .I have been coming to Houston for 37 years .I know many of the people here . It is like coming back to family, it is a wonderful community. What I expect from the orthodox people in Houston is what I expect from all our orthodox people in all of the parishes, that they stay faithful to the faith, and that they act as descendants of those first Christians who were converted not by

missionaries, but those who heard the words of Christ out of Christ own mouth and those who converted by his apostles .We have a glorious Christian heritage, the Christians from the middle east.

### **If you were Santa Clause, what do you offer:**

Lebanon: Peace  
Palestine: Justice  
Syria: Love  
Iraq: Stability

### **What does your grace ask from Santa Clause?**

Maybe some Joy and toys for all the poor children, especially for the children that don't have homes.

### **Private questions**

What is your favorite meal? I am a monk now so I don't eat meat. The thing I miss the most is grape leaves

### **When is your birthday? November 26**

Why don't you choose Houston as your hometown instead of Wichita ? The state of Kansas is right in the geographic center of America. By the way, there is a little town in Kansas, which is the geographic center of the United States, the government has a monument there and a little church and the name of this little town is Lebanon Kansas. So I live in Wichita because it is the center of our diocese.





# The Right Reverend Bishop Basil

**Bishop of Wichita and Mid-America,  
of the Antiochian Archdiocese**

**I wish love to Lebanon.  
Peace & love in Syria.  
Justice for Palestine.  
And Stability in Iraq.**

*Interviewed By Julia Nader & Lina A. Jaoude*

**The Honorable Bishop Bassil will allures you with his loving personality. He is an encyclopedia of thoughts and knowledge He Enters your heart without a passport. When he speaks you listen to his words as if the words coming out of a golden mouth. He is the Bishop of speeches. His Holiness's visit to Houston brought together the community around him because of his big heart.**

**Lebanon Times Magazine had the honor to interview his holiness while his visit to Houston:**

**Who is Bishop Basil? When did you become a priest and where are you from?**

My family name in English is Essey and in Arabic is Issa. I was born in a small town near Pittsburgh, PA. My grandparents came from Syria in the turn of the twentieth century. I was ordained a deacon in 1979, became a priest in 1980, and a bishop in 1992. I n 1986 to the middle of 1987, I lived in the Balamand in Lebanon.

**What was your parents' opinion when you decided to become a priest?**