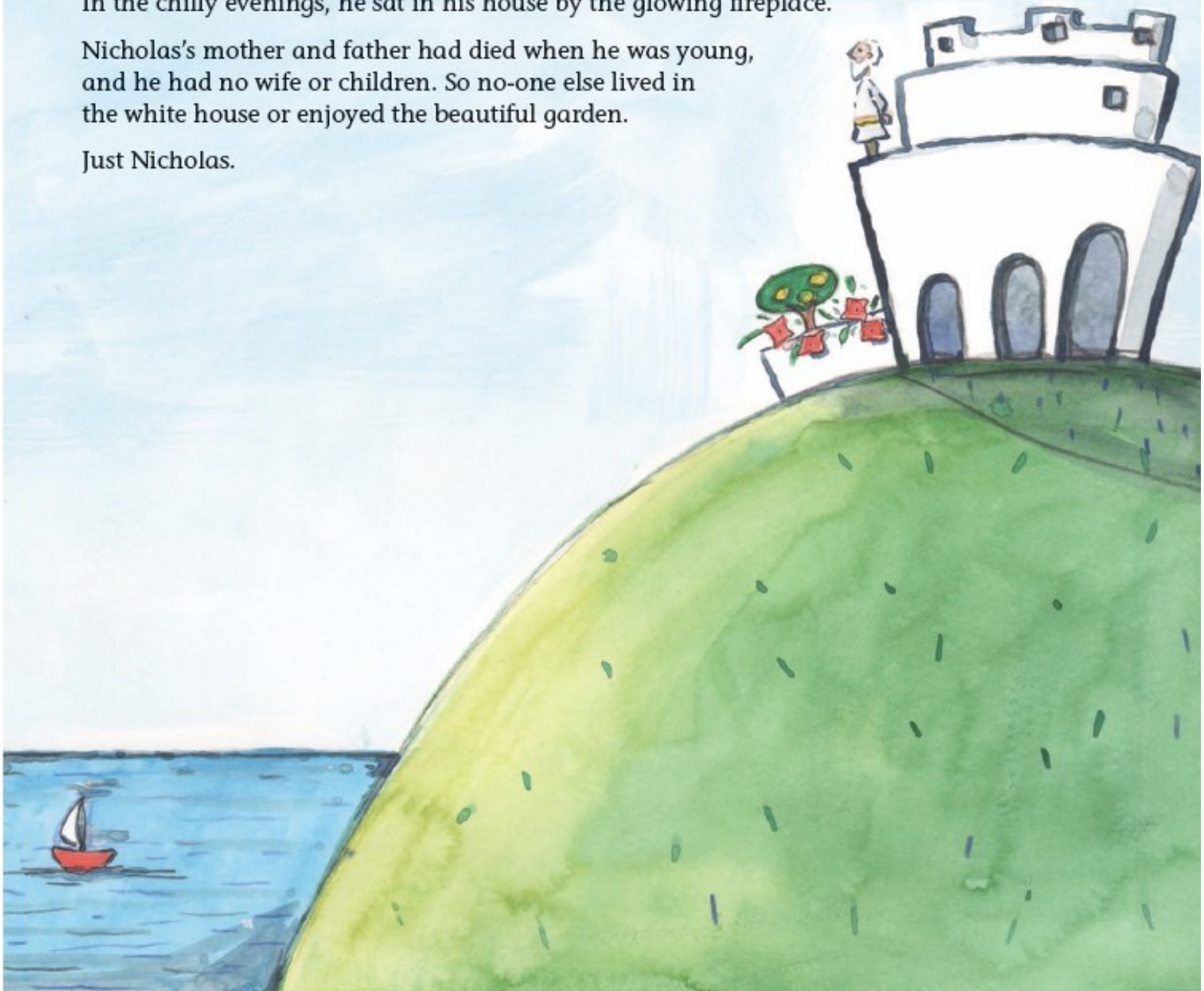


Nicholas lived long ago in a big white house on a green hill by the blue sea. In the garden behind his house he grew orange flowers and trees with juicy yellow fruit.

On warm afternoons, Nicholas walked in the cool shade of his fruit trees. In the chilly evenings, he sat in his house by the glowing fireplace.

Nicholas's mother and father had died when he was young, and he had no wife or children. So no-one else lived in the white house or enjoyed the beautiful garden.

Just Nicholas.



But Nicholas was not lonely.

Nicholas loved God. Every day he sat on a bench in his beautiful garden and talked to God. He shared his worries. He thanked God for every good thing.

Nicholas also had many friends in the village.

He often walked down the hill to the sea to visit his friend Plutus, who was a fisherman. Nicholas and Plutus enjoyed talking after they pulled nets of colorful fish from Plutus's boat.



One day, Nicholas saw that his friend looked sad. He put his hand on Plutus's shoulder and asked, "What's wrong, Plutus?"

"Oh, Nicholas", Plutus said. "I'm very worried. I am getting old, and I have no money. What will happen to my three daughters when I am too old to look after them any more?"

Tears filled his eyes.



Nicholas tiptoed down the hill into the sleeping town.  
Something jingled softly in his pocket.



Even though he gave his gifts in secret, stories soon spread about Nicholas. People saw that he loved God, so they gave him a special name: Saint Nicholas.

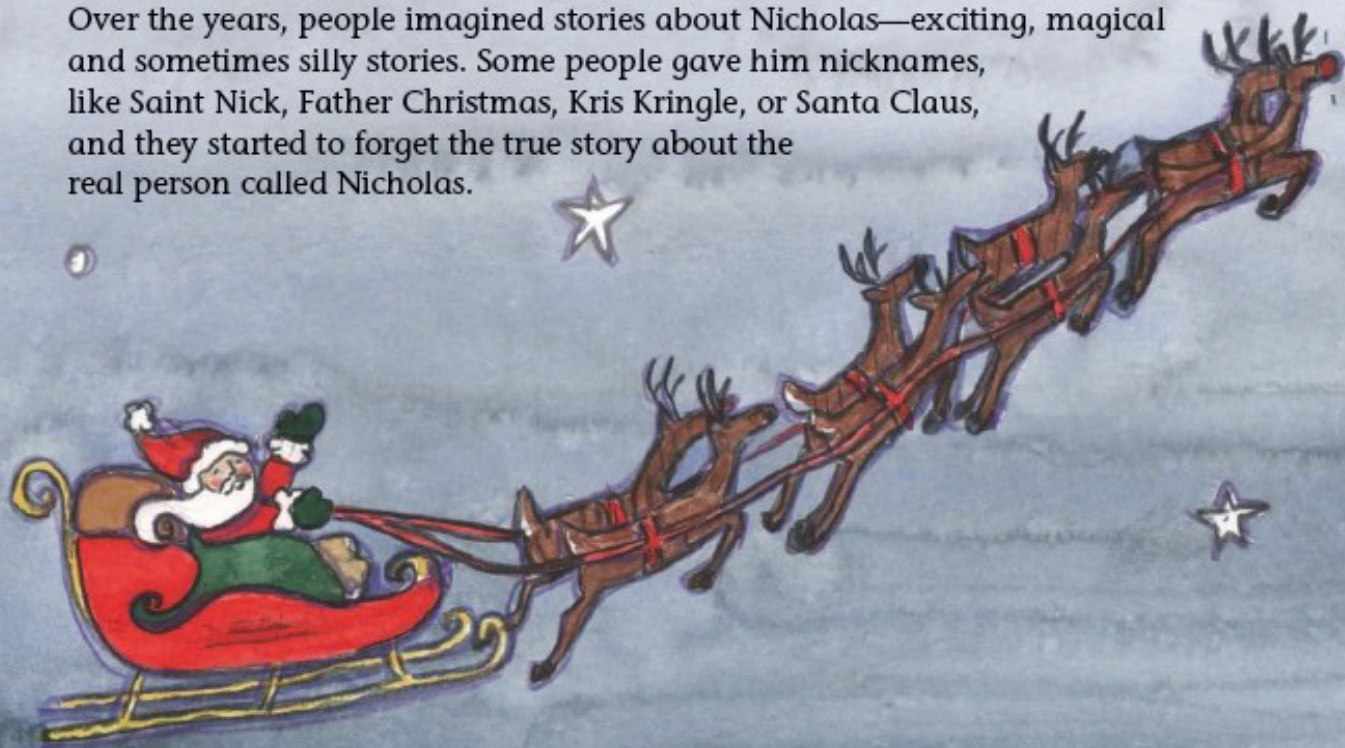
On one cold night every December, parents would tell their children the story of Nicholas. The children heard about Nicholas's generous gifts and how much he loved Jesus. When they went to bed, they left their shoes near the fireplace or near a door or window.

While the children slept, their parents filled the shoes with treats to find in the morning. They called this Saint Nicholas Day.



Many people also thought of Saint Nicholas at Christmas time, when they gave gifts to each other to remember God's greatest gift of all: the birth of the baby Jesus.

Over the years, people imagined stories about Nicholas—exciting, magical and sometimes silly stories. Some people gave him nicknames, like Saint Nick, Father Christmas, Kris Kringle, or Santa Claus, and they started to forget the true story about the real person called Nicholas.





## TO PARENTS



Our aim is for this book to serve as a child-friendly voice of truth in the midst of a Santa-saturated Christmas experience.

Here are some questions to explore with your children as you read *Just Nicholas* and make it part of your Christmas tradition.

### **Is this story really true?**

Although the author and illustrator have used their creativity to bring new life to specific sensory details, and the exact chronology and conversations are imagined, all of the events in the story are based in historical texts.

### **Does that mean Nicholas was a real person?**

It does! Nicholas was born in the late third century in what is now Turkey. He was wealthy and his parents died when he was very young. He became a well-known Christian leader in Myra, a coastal town, in the fourth century. People knew and remembered Nicholas for his generous care of those in need.

### **Was there a real man named Plutus who had three daughters?**

The tale of the three daughters, though considered legend by some, has more historical credibility than any other story told about Nicholas. In the story, Nicholas's generous gifts to the daughters also reflect the early Christian church's revolutionary care and concern for women in a culture that traditionally treated them as inferior. Although the real name of the girls' father is unknown, the name Plutus would have been a fairly common one in the region, which was under Greek rule and influence during Nicholas's time.

### **What is Saint Nicholas Day?**

Depending on the country, Saint Nicholas Day is celebrated on either December 6th or 19th, the anniversary of the death of Nicholas of Myra. This holiday celebrates the life of Nicholas by reenacting the story of the three daughters. Children around the world put out their empty shoes the night before Saint Nicholas Day, and parents fill the shoes with special treats for the children to discover in the morning.



## Are there other ways in which families can celebrate Saint Nicholas Day?

When you are celebrating a man who gave generously and selflessly, the possibilities are endless! For example:

- Write and send someone a kind note.
- Leave a treat at your neighbor's door.
- Choose a toy to share with or give to someone else.
- Save or raise money to give to an organization that helps people when they need it, either in your local area or internationally, such as Samaritan's Purse ([www.samaritanspurse.org](http://www.samaritanspurse.org)) or the Advent Conspiracy ([www.adventconspiracy.org](http://www.adventconspiracy.org)).



## Does this mean that Nicholas became Santa Claus?

Yes and no. Santa Claus is a character and not a real person. The story of Santa Claus is a legend, or a story that began with an actual event and then evolved into a myth or fictional account. In this case, the actual event was the life of Nicholas.

There are some important differences between Nicholas and Santa Claus. Nicholas gave to people out of love for God and others. He gave sacrificially from his own possessions to meet the needs of those around him. The stories we tell about Santa Claus say that he gives only to those who are 'good' or 'nice', and that his gifts are magically created every year. The story of Nicholas reminds us that God gives based not on what we deserve but on his overflowing love for us.

## Is the story Nicholas learned from his parents true?

Absolutely! The original story is found in the Bible, in the four Gospels by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These are shorter books within the Bible that give an account of Jesus's life on earth. There are also many wonderful illustrated books that retell this story for children. For toddlers and preschoolers, *Read Aloud Bible Stories* by Ella K Lindvall and H Kent Puckett and *The Beginner's Bible* by Kelly Pulley are simple and delightful. For older children, check out *The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones, *The Gospel Story Bible* by Martin Machowski, and *The Big Picture Story Bible* by David Helm.

## How and when should parents teach their children the truth about Santa?

There is no 'right' answer to this question. *Just Nicholas* gives parents the opportunity to tell children the truth about Santa Claus from the very beginning, without condemning popular culture or spoiling the 'magic' of Christmas.

