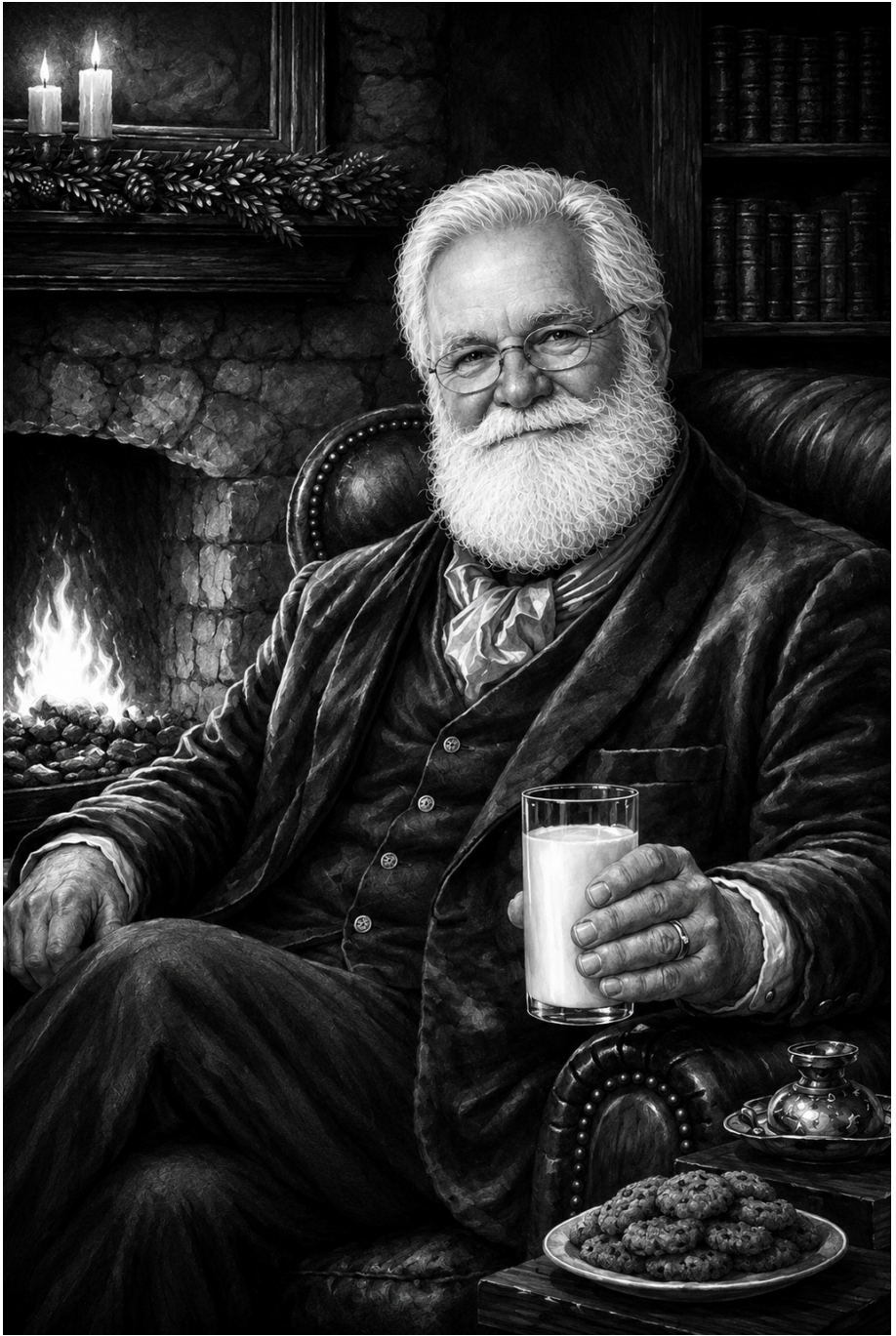




Welcome!

A Word From Santa

Hello, my friend. Santa is glad you came.

Many people say that what Santa does is magic.

That's an easy answer—but not a very good one.

Santa thinks you deserve a better one.

There are many things in this world that seem like magic at first... until someone takes the time to understand them.

Santa's work is a little like that.

This is the story of how it all began.

It answers many of the questions children—and adults—have asked over the years:

“How did you get to the North Pole?” “Where did you meet Mrs. Claus?” “The elves?” “The reindeer?” “How do you get everything done in one night?”

Santa suspects you will understand more than you think.

And if, by the time you reach the end, you still choose to call it magic... well...

Santa won't argue.

—Santa Claus

One: The Secret Begins

Nicholas was born into a wealthy and devout Christian family. Orphaned at an early age, he was raised by his uncle, a bishop of the Church.

Rather than a blessing, Nicholas came to see his inheritance as a burden.

He saw how his neighbors struggled to survive, and he felt the weight of their suffering.

He devoted his life to easing that burden.

He entered the priesthood, where his gifts were quickly recognized.

When the bishop died, no one was surprised when Nicholas was chosen to succeed him.

In the town lived a merchant who had once been wealthy, but had lost everything and could barely feed his three daughters.

In those days, a father secured his daughter's future by arranging a good marriage—and such a marriage required a dowry.

The man despaired of ever marrying his daughters. He saw only hardship and shame ahead for his family.

When Nicholas learned of their situation, he offered to provide the dowries.

But their father refused his help.

Late one moonless night, Nicholas slipped through the streets to the man's home. He was determined. "If he will not accept it from my hands, he will surely accept it from Heaven."

As he neared the house, he saw that the sisters had hung their stockings by the window to dry.

Moving quickly and quietly, he stepped to the window. Six stockings hung in a row.

Three sisters. Three dowries.

He placed a small bag of gold into three of them.

It was not long before Nicholas was called to perform three wedding ceremonies.

The father spoke of how an angel had provided for his daughters in the night.



Three sisters: three dowries

Nicholas saw that he could help other families in the same way—and in doing so, relieve not only their burdens, but his own.

He began to walk the streets at night, slipping a gold coin or two through open windows, hoping they would fall into waiting shoes or drying socks.

When a coin struck the floor and rang out, he slipped into the shadows of a nearby alley.

As encouraged as he was by the results, Nicholas soon realized that while his gold filled empty bellies, many children still lived drab lives. They had little joy. Gold would not change that. Nicholas began spending his spare hours with a knife and a scrap of wood. He would chip away until a rough horse or boat took shape in his hands.

They were simple things, but in a child's hands, they could become something more. He began leaving these small toys alongside the gold. Often, they were the only things a child could claim as his own.

At first, it felt almost like a game. He took quiet satisfaction in helping others—and in escaping notice.

But rumors began to spread.

Some claimed a ghost—or an angel—walked the streets at night. Others suspected a wealthy benefactor. In time suspicion turned toward Nicholas.

Nicholas had already learned a hard lesson from the father of the three sisters. A gift given openly might relieve one burden, but it often created another.

It left behind a sense of indebtedness—and sometimes shame.

Nicholas came to understand that for a gift to remain a blessing, it must be given in secret—one hand not knowing what the other was doing.

Nicholas found others like himself—people from all walks of life.



They were simple things; but in the hands of a child...

They were people he could trust, who understood the value of giving in secret.

In his mind, they became something more—a quiet brotherhood, bound by a shared purpose.

He thought of them as the Society of the Secret Hand.

As the rumors grew, they edged closer to the truth.

If it were discovered that a bishop of the church was the secret benefactor, the work itself would be endangered.

If the secret were known, every blessing could become a burden for those whose homes he had visited.

Nicholas understood that to protect the work, he would have to disappear. But how?

He would need his inheritance to continue the work, but he could not travel with coffers full of gold. It would draw suspicion—and make him a target for thieves.

The Society of the Secret Hand had grown, as each member found others who shared its purpose. It had spread quietly across Europe and into the lands beyond. And then Nicholas saw a way forward.

Nicholas divided his fortune, entrusting portions of it to members in many places for safekeeping. In this way, a hidden network took shape. When the need arose, he could seek out a home or meeting place marked with a sign known only to them.

He would show his ring—or trace the mark—and be recognized. And what was needed would be placed in his hands.

Early on the morning of December 6, 343, Nicholas was ready at last. He walked away from his estate, carrying little more than the clothes on his back. Once more, he used the cover of darkness—and disappeared.

It was unusual for the good bishop not to be seen in the streets during the day. His absence was noticed.

When the townsfolk entered his estate, they found it empty. Some said the sea he loved had claimed him. Others said he had been taken into the hills by wild animals.

One thing was certain: Bishop Nicholas of Myra was no more.



He did not know what lay ahead