

SAINT NICHOLAS, PATRON OF HIDDEN KINDNESS

Which Came First, *Santa or the Dinosaurs?*

201-891-1122

Join us!



Father Stephen Fichter
Pastor

Advent Reflection with Father Carlos
December 6 at 7:30 PM | Church

Christmas Choir Concert
December 11 at 7:30 PM | Church

Bonfire and Christmas Caroling
December 19 at 7:00 PM | Back field

700 Wyckoff Avenue | www.saintelizabeths.org

SAINT ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY

EUCCHARIST	SERVICE	TENDERNESS

A ROMAN CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY

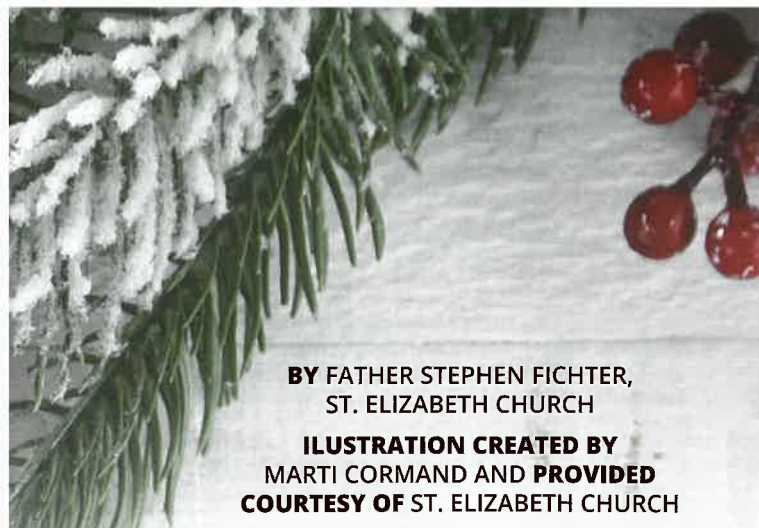
Christmas Eve Mass

4:00 pm | 5:30 pm | 7:30 pm | 10:30 pm
Pageant at 7 pm and Caroling at 10 pm

Christmas Day Mass

9:00 am | 10:30 am | 12 noon

In Church | Live Stream | Facebook Live



**BY FATHER STEPHEN FICHTER,
ST. ELIZABETH CHURCH**

**ILLUSTRATION CREATED BY
MARTI CORMAND AND PROVIDED
COURTESY OF ST. ELIZABETH CHURCH**

As I sat down to write this article for the Christmas season, I enjoyed a little walk down memory lane and reminisced about the first sermon I gave on the great Saint Nicholas as a newly ordained priest 21 years ago. I meticulously prepared this homily about Santa Claus for the children of my parish. I knew that I would be skating on thin ice with them as they ranged in age from 5 to 10, that awkward transitional period in life when belief in Santa starts to wobble. I wanted them to know the real Santa.

After we proclaimed the Gospel to the entire congregation, I called the children up to the steps of the sanctuary. They were about 45 kids at that particular Mass. I sat on a chair with all of them around me sitting on the floor, some clearly more fidgety than others. Christmas was still a few weeks away and our liturgical calendar for December 6 called for the celebration of Saint Nicholas, aka Santa Claus.

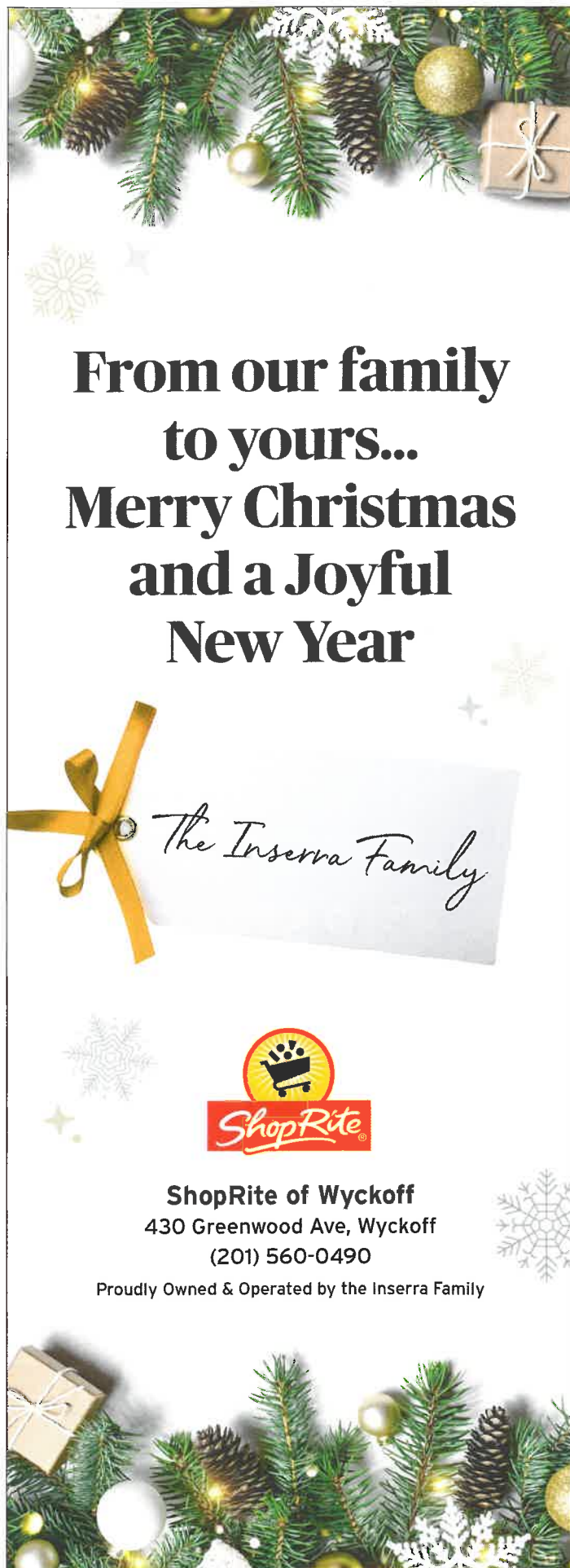
I find preaching to children one of the most enjoyable experiences of my priesthood. I love how receptive and curious they are. They ask the best questions because they're not worried about what other people will think about them.

I launched into my homily hoping they would follow my explanation of how Saint Nicholas was a bishop martyr from Turkey in the fourth century and how his depiction throughout centuries of hagiographic art eventually evolved into the jolly old man with a red outfit and a white beard. (The pointy hat is really a bishop's mitre, etc.) I was going along well for a few minutes explaining the story of the poor man who didn't have enough money to pay for the dowry of his three daughters. Just as I was explaining how Bishop Nicholas came to the rescue by secretly placing money in their stockings that hung by the fire, a little girl named Maddie raised her hand to ask a question. I told her sweetly but clearly that I would not be taking questions. I knew not to skate on thin ice.

A minute or so later, she raised her hand again. Without breaking my train of thought, I indicated lovingly but firmly that there won't be any questions today. A third and fourth time her hand goes up. She was so patient but persistent. Finally, at the end of my discourse, and seeing that her hand was raised once more I said, "Ok, Maddie. Now I will take your question, but this will be the only one because we must continue with the rest of Mass."


She takes the mic I gave to her and says, "Father, you said that Santa Claus lived many years ago. Right? And that he died

CONTINUED ►



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to yours...
Merry Christmas
and a Joyful
New Year**

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many years ago. Right?" I thought, "Oh, boy. I am going to be in big trouble if she keeps going in the direction I think she's headed." Gulping, I say yes to both questions. And then she asks, "So, I want to know did he live before or after the dinosaurs?" The congregation roared with laughter as they could see my relief. Emphatically I said, "Oh, Santa definitely lived after the dinosaurs!"

Saint Nicholas, the patron saint of hidden kindness, is indeed very much alive for all eternity as are the millions of other saints in Heaven. He reminds us that it is best to remain anonymous when we give. The most generous people I've known have never wanted any recognition. May all our secret efforts as adults this year be to make this Christmas a joy to all the children in our lives! One day they'll know that we are Santa's helpers, but for now, may they just know he lived after the dinosaurs!



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