



## Building Faith in the Family

### WEEK 2: THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE

Today and throughout this week, light the first and second candles on your Advent wreath. The second candle is the Bethlehem Candle, a symbol of love and peace that came to earth in a tiny town at Christmas. As you light the candles, read or sing the words of Phillips Brooks's beautiful carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." Think about the amazing truth in the last lines of the first verse:

O little town of Bethlehem/ how still we see thee lie;  
above thy deep and dreamless sleep/ the silent stars go by.  
Yet in thy dark streets shineth/ the everlasting light;  
the hopes and fears of all the years/ are met in thee tonight.

### St. Nicholas Day—Sunday, December 6

To American children, St. Nicholas is just another name for Santa Claus. In much of Europe, though, he is a thin man in bishop's robes who distributes gifts on December 6.

St Nicholas was real. He was born in the Third Century and became Bishop of Myra—now part of Turkey—and he was known for his compassion and generosity. One legend about him tells of a poor family with three daughters. So poor were they that the oldest, who had no dowry, was to be sold into slavery. One night, Nicholas secretly dropped a bag of gold coins through their window—dowry so the girl could be married and saved from slavery. In the same way, he provided for the other two daughters. But as he delivered the third bag, he was seen. The story quickly spread. Ever since, children eagerly await gifts from the saint on December 6.

On St. Nicholas Eve, many European children set out shoes to be filled with treats by the saint. Here in America, some families prepare gift bags with treats and Nicholas cookies, and then—like the saint himself—secretly deliver these to neighbors, friends, or family members. Try it yourself for a wonderful early taste of Christmas giving!



### St. Nicholas Cookies (recipe adapted from *To Dance with God* by Gertrud Mueller Nelson)

- 1 cup butter or hard margarine
- 2 cups brown or white sugar
- 4 eggs
- 3/4 tsp salt
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 4 cups flour
- 2 tsp cinnamon
- 1 tsp allspice
- 1 tsp nutmeg
- 1 tsp ginger
- 1/2 tsp cloves



Cream butter and sugar. Add remaining ingredients and mix well, adding enough flour to form a very stiff dough. Refrigerate until chilled and stiff. For larger cookies, roll out dough on lightly floured surface to 1/4" thick. Use cookie cutters (gingerbread man?) or a knife to cut out a very simple bishop figure (see above). Place on a lightly greased baking sheet. Then use bits of dough to decorate the robe and add a beard (a garlic press or sieve helps). Tiny balls of dough make eyes and buttons; press a thin, curved snake on as a staff. Bake at 350° F for 12-15 minutes, or until golden brown. When cookies are cool, if you'd like, add colored icing for finishing touches.