

Messenger: "Fr. Turner, Fr. Turner, this is for you. (Holds letter aloft.) Some old man just stopped by in his sleigh and said to give this to you right away."

Letter: "Dear Father Turner, Sorry to get this to you so late, but I've had a busy day. I've been making a list, checking it twice, and decided to give you some presents after all. Each one is a puzzle. See if you can guess what they mean. Be sure to open them in order. Sincerely, S. Claus. P. S. Please excuse the smudges on this paper. I've been stuffing lumps of coal into the stockings of the Kansas City Chiefs."

Paul: "OK, kids, shall we get the presents? Who's got number 1? Let's open it first. Lights! That's easy. They're for the Christmas tree. Let's see what Santa says about them."

Letter: "The lights are for the Christmas tree, but they mean something more. In winter the nights are long and people turn on more lights. These lights are a symbol of Christ. When our lives are darkest, we find light in Christ."

Paul: "That Santa is pretty clever. What's in the second box? Holly! I know what that means. Holly is short for Hollywood where they make movies about Christmas."

Letter: "Holly is also a symbol of Christ. It grows a berry which turns bright red. Its leaves look smooth but have prickly thorns. The thorns and the berry remind us of the crown of thorns and the blood of Jesus when he died on the cross. The greens and reds of Christmas are signs of the life and death of Jesus."

Paul: "I didn't know that, did you know that? Let's see the third gift. Pears! I know! A partridge in a pear tree!"

Letter: "The pears are a reminder of the song, 'The Twelve Days of Christmas.' The pear tree reminds us of the tree of Adam and Eve where sin began. And the partridge, you might guess, is another symbol of Christ. If partridge hunters are out, the mother partridge pretends to be hurt as a decoy to protect her children, just as Christ died but rose again to protect us from sin."

Paul: "Where does he get this stuff? This is pretty good! What's in number 4? Pickles! Pickles? What do pickles have to do with Christmas? Let me see those. Wait a minute, these are kosher!"

Letter: "You'll never guess this one. In some parts of the world there's a popular story about three young boys. A man kidnapped them and threw them into a big barrel of picklejuice. The mothers cried because they didn't know where their children were. Then the bishop of the town came to visit, heard the story, and prayed. God told him where the boys were and the bishop saved the day. The name of the bishop was St. Nicholas, whom most people know today as Santa Claus."

Paul: "OK, one more. Let's see what we've got. Candy! A lot of candy!"

Letter: "Candy is a sign of the sweetness of this season. People feel good eating candy, and they feel good when they love. Candy is for sharing. When we share we imitate Christ. You should know what to do with this, Father Paul. And have a merry Christmas!"

Paul: "After communion we'll play a game, and I'll share."

*Xmas 24.xii.88*