



HOLLAND'S MISSING CHRISTMAS

How one boy solved a village's problem

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NOTE TO THE TEACHER

One of Ripley's *Believe It or Not* items states, "There was no Christmas in Holland in 1582." Further research in *Man and Time* by J. B. Priestly reveals that at the Council of Trent which met in 1545, Pope Gregory XIII introduced the "Gregorian Calendar," annulling ten days—October 5 to 15.

Protestant countries resisted. (Without question Holland was one.) England held out until 1752 when eleven days had to be adjusted. A few countries did not change until after World War I.

In Holland (as well as some other countries), Christmas Day is purely a religious holiday, devoted to church attendance and social visiting. No gifts are exchanged on that day.

However, St. Nicholas Day is observed on December 5. In Holland the children put out their klompens to receive the

gifts St. Nicholas may bring. Hay and carrots are often placed inside the klompens for the beautiful white horse upon which St. Nicholas is said to ride.

Many of the stories told about St. Nicholas are mythical, yet based on some fact. St. Nicholas was archbishop of Myra when a young man. He died in the year 326, on December 6. He is known all over Europe for his good deeds done throughout the entire year. In America he has become the fat, jolly old man who comes only once a year with gifts. In Holland, there is no danger of St. Nicholas's crowding out the Lord Jesus on Christmas Day since it and St. Nicholas Day are entirely separate celebrations.

Display each illustration where indicated in text, laying volume aside when the story line continues beyond the picture.



Show Illustration #1

Klomp! Klomp! Klomp! went Peter's klompens (wooden shoes) as he hurried along the narrow street in the tiny village of Holland. It was cold and Peter hurried as fast as his pair of ten-year-old legs could go. He wanted to visit Grandmother and Grandfather before he went home. Peter's blond hair stood out straight, blown from under his woolen cap by the wind. The warm scarf around his neck seemed to be following him, held out by the howling gusts.



Show Illustration #2

Peter waved to a friend who was watching from a windmill close by. *It must be fun, Peter thought, living in a round windmill house. I could start in the kitchen, run in a circle, and soon I'd be right back in the kitchen again!*



Show Illustration #3

Peter stopped in front of the bakery of Hans the Baker. He pressed his cold nose against the even colder windowpane. *It will soon be St. Nicholas Day, he thought. When I put my klompens out for St. Nicholas to fill, I hope he'll put one of those big, big cookies beside them. Or,*

perhaps he'll bring me one of those cookies made to look like himself. Or perhaps—just perhaps—he will bring me one of each. I must be sure to be very, very good. St. Nicholas Day will soon be here. Peter began counting the days until St. Nicholas Day on December 5. He had to count all of his fingers twice.

Peter wondered about St. Nicholas. *How does he manage to travel so far in just one night? Don't his feet get tangled in his long red cape and white robe as he rides his white horse? St. Nicholas must get cold riding all night long. Does that long white hair, flowing from under his high pointed cap, keep him warm? Peter wondered. Surely his beard must be a help, at least.*

When Peter came to the kerk (church) with its tall steeple, he began to think of Christmas Day. Just 20 days after St. Nicholas Day comes Christmas Day. For many hundreds of years the kerk had stood beside the canal, and every Christmas Day all the people of the tiny village went there to hear the dominie (minister) preach a Christmas sermon. Peter had heard the Christmas lesson many times. But somehow Christmas Day (December 25) did not seem nearly as important to him as St. Nicholas Day (December 5). Oh, he liked to hear the Christmas music. He liked to go visiting for two days. And surely he liked the good food he always got when he went visiting! But to Peter, St. Nicholas seemed more important, because that was the day he got presents.

Peter knew that Christmas was the celebration of the birth of Jesus. But he had never been told that the Lord Jesus had to be born in order to die so that he, Peter, might be saved from sin and its wages—death. So the service in the church was of little interest to Peter, for he had never been born again.

Peter turned away from the kerk when he heard voices and saw people of the village gathering in front of the town hall.