

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Dear Parents,

Hi! My name is Annie and I am happy to say that I was named Christmas on the Prairie's official greeter! I know I will never be able to replace Zeon who was the parish dog at Annunciation Byzantine Catholic Church in Homer Glen, but I am excited to invite you again to this very special event. After getting to see how much all the children enjoyed attending Christmas on the Prairie, I now know why Zeon loved this event and why The Feast of St. Nicholas was one of his most favorite feast days! This is an important feast day in the Byzantine Church and one that is celebrated by children all around the world. Many of you may know the tradition of leaving a shoe outside the door and during the night St. Nicholas stops by to fill the shoe with goodies if you were good or coal if you were bad. I am happy to report that St. Nicholas left me some tasty treats and another new ball because he knows how much I like to play fetch!! However, did you ever wonder where this tradition came from? Or who this St. Nicholas person was?

On **Saturday, December 12th,** the humans at Annunciation are hosting an event called **Christmas on the Prairie**. This free event that is open to the public will combine the life and tradition of St. Nicholas with the life of the earlier settlers on the pristine Illinois prairie. Starting at **2:00pm** there will be demonstrations on the life of the earlier settlers under a heated tent. Learn how these people celebrated Christmas when the gifts were simple and did not need electricity. You can even make your own nature-inspired Christmas crafts, learn how to dip a candle, or see how they completed everyday tasks like spinning wool or churning butter.

If you are up for an adventure, you can take a walk through the award-winning prairie and see the beauty that nature provides even during the winter months. Along the marked path you will encounter some very special people who will tell you the true story of St. Nicholas, the real person behind the legend we now know as Santa Claus. Just in case you get a little cold or weary on your journey, there will be a warming station with hot apple cider and cookies to keep you going.

If you are curious about what a Byzantine Catholic Church is, you are welcome to step into the church and discover some of the riches of the Eastern Lung of the Catholic Church. Inside you will see the ancient art of the church in icons painted floor-to-ceiling, depicting the life of Christ. You will also be able to experience a form of the Eastern prayer in chant and song.

Now for everyone's favorite part of the day! At **4:30pm**, the children will gather and await the arrival of St. Nicholas himself! He always arrives on his horse-drawn carriage and then he lets us take rides around the property on his carriage while he meets with the children in the church. When St. Nicholas departs at **6:00pm** we will gather in the church to pray Vespers (the night prayer of the church).

I hope that you can join us for this special St. Nicholas celebration! It is sure to be a memorable day filled with adventure, excitement, and wonder. You are welcome to join us for the whole afternoon or just come for a little while. Either way I am sure you will be glad you did, because then you will know why this has become MY most favorite feast day as well!

Hope to see you at **Christmas on the Prairie**! *(I will be the cute one in the red sweater)*

Annie