Merry Christmas
Saint Nick and the Christmas stockings

No traditions are as varied as those associated with St. Nicholas, although the saint has somewhat melted into the person of Santa Claus in the West.

Around the world, there are many stories about St. Nicholas, even many churches that claim his remains.

Most authorities say St. Nicholas was the 4th century bishop of Myra in Turkey. He was very generous and loved children. In 1087, Italian sailors stole his remains and took them to Italy, greatly increasing his popularity in Europe.

St. Nicholas became the patron saint of Russia. In Greece, he is the patron saint of sailors; in France he is the patron of lawyers; and in Belgium the patron of children and travelers. The Feast of St. Nicholas, December 6, has been marked by gift-giving and charity.

The tradition of Christmas stockings comes from stories about St. Nicholas. There are many variations on the story, but this is one version of how St. Nicholas accidently invented Christmas stockings:

A nobleman had lost all his money, leaving his three daughters without dowries, which meant they could never marry.

Nicholas, then a bishop renowned for his charity, heard the story and was moved with pity for the three girls.

He thought of a plan that would help the girls, but keep his identity secret. One night, he put gold coins into three pouches and threw them down the chimney of their home. Luckily, the coins were captured in stockings the girls had hung on the fireplace to dry. And thus began the tradition of treats and goodies in Christmas stockings.

Other stories feature Nicholas throwing the coins through the window but it is curious that Santa Claus is often said to come down a chimney.
Merry Christmas!

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Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) can relieve the heartburn and discomfort of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), as well as heal damage done to the esophagus by stomach acids.

For the best results, be sure to use them correctly. A study in The American Journal of Gastroenterology shows that 61 percent of users do not. Following directions

The researchers interviewed patients taking over-the-counter (OTC) and prescription PPIs. They found that dosing frequency and timing were inconsistent, leading to poor symptom relief. Just 37 percent of OTC users took them correctly; 47 percent took prescribed drugs correctly; and drugs prescribed by a gastroenterologist were taken correctly 71 percent of the time.

Another study shows that only one-third of physicians instructed patients to take the medicine before breakfast. But gastroenterologists did. What PPIs do

PPIs reduce the amount of acid produced in your stomach. Doctors at Johns Hopkins University say that, ideally, they should be taken once a day before the first meal of the day.

OTC PPIs include Prilosec, Prevacid 24HR and Zegerid. Prescription PPIs include Nexium, Prevacid, Protonix and Aci-pHex. Always use the lowest dosage for the shortest time possible.

- Take your pill 20 to 30 minutes before your first meal.
- If prescribed two pills a day, take the second before dinner.
- Don’t skip doses. PPIs are most effective if taken consistently.
- Avoid taking an over-the-counter PPI for more than 14 days, and no more than three series a year, without a doctor’s approval.
- If you’ve taken an OTC for more than 14 days. Ask your doctor if you should see a gastroenterologist for a better diagnosis or treatment.
- It takes up to seven days of continuous use for maximum effect, but some individuals feel better after each pill.
Season’s greetings:

Just over 2,000 years ago a bright star shone in the East, and Christians believe it led, not just wise men, but everyday people to understand the dignity of and brotherhood of humanity.

Whatever your religious views, it is worthwhile to pause to appreciate the dignity of man and the value of peace -- two ideas celebrated by religions throughout the world.

We have so much to appreciate at this time of year: Our families, country, and the fruits of our labors. It is worth taking a moment to be grateful for all these things and rededicate our hearts to kindness, peace, and brotherhood.

*Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and yours!*