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The Baker's Dozen: A Saint Nicholas Tale (15th Anniversary Edition, With Bonus Cookie Recipe And Pattern For St. Nicholas Christmas Cookies)



Synopsis

Van Amsterdam the baker was well known for his honesty as well as for his fine Saint Nicholas cookies. He always gave his customers exactly what they paid for -- not more and not less. So, he was not about to give in when a mysterious old woman comes to him on Saint Nicholas Day and insists that a dozen is thirteen! The woman's curse puts an end to the baker's business, and he believes it would take Saint Nicholas to help him. But if he receives that help, will it be exactly what he imagined? Find out in this inspiring legend from Dutch colonial New York about the birth of an honored American custom.

TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS -- A READER'S THEATER SCRIPT OF THIS BOOK IS AVAILABLE IN AARON'S BOOK "FOLKTALES ON STAGE," OR FREE ON AARON'S WEB SITE.

Aaron Shepard is the award-winning author of "The Baker's Dozen," "The Sea King's Daughter," "The Monkey King," and many more children's books. His stories have appeared often in Cricket magazine, while his Web site is known internationally as a prime resource for folktales, storytelling, and reader's theater. Once a professional storyteller, Aaron specializes in lively retellings of folktales and other traditional literature, which have won him honors from the American Library Association, the New York Public Library, the Bank Street College of Education, the National Council for the Social Studies, and the American Folklore Society.

Wendy Edelson has applied her award-winning skills to a wide range of illustration projects, including picture books, pet portraits, posters, puzzles, and fabric design. Her clients have included Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, the Seattle Aquarium, the Pacific Northwest Ballet, the U.S. Postal Service, and the American Library Association.

Book Information

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Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: Kindergarten - 7

Customer Reviews

This is a gorgeously illustrated book that teaches a wonderful lesson about the spirit of generosity. Who can condemn the baker who is perfectly fair? St. Nicholas, cloaked as an old woman -- who shows him that by giving more of his own possessions, he will in turn receive greater rewards. This is a great way to teach young children about the the joy of giving, and about the life of St. Nicholas. The "truth" about Santa is that there WAS a saint who gave to the poor, filled stockings and dropped gold coins down chimneys at night -- this book could launch older kids on a study of the real saint's life and how Santa traditions arose. My six year old boys aren't ready for that part yet, but they love the story of the baker, and this year we're going to try to bake gingerbread cookies to resemble the baker's St. Nicholas cookies on St. Nicholas Day. (Some clever marketer ought to package this book with a cookie cutter and recipe, because the cookies are beautiful!)

This story tells how the term "a baker's dozen" (13, not 12) may have come to be. Here, a very honest baker always makes sure he gives each customer exactly what he pays for, no more and no less. One day, an old woman comes and demands a dozen cookies. The baker gives her twelve cookies. No, she emphasizes, a dozen is THIRTEEN. He refuses to give in, and she leaves disgruntled--and leaves him with bad luck. Later, the baker has a nightmare about being so miserly and in reality the townsfolk stop coming to his shop. Eventually the spirit of St. Nicholas helps him learn the joys of giving more than is expected. I think this is the only story about St. Nicholas Day that I've come across (at least, in picture book form) and since we celebrated that as kids, I was delighted to discover it (thanks, Abigail!) The story is well-told and the illustrations are just marvelous. I especially love the first pages that show the sweet Dutch colonial village. I appreciated many aspects of this story, and the overall message of generosity and giving more than is expected is a good one. However, I was a bit troubled by how it played out. I personally did not see anything wrong with the baker wanting to be fair regarding giving all customers exactly what they pay for. It did not seem to me that the old lady was particularly needy or destitute, just pushy, so why she should receive special treatment when other customers did not (or that the baker, simply because he had other cookies, had to give them away vs. reserving them for other paying customers or his own family) didn't really come across. The baker didn't really seem to commit any wrongdoing, in

my opinion, and I felt the punishment was a bit harsh. Of course, the ultimate message is a good one but I felt it could have been delivered a bit better. Still, that is just my personal take and I am not docking any stars because I do think it was a well told story and beautifully illustrated.

This is a delightful story to read to your children during Advent, particularly around the Feast of St. Nicholas on December 6. I think this book is a nice change of pace for children who are already aware of who St. Nicholas is and his history as a bishop. This story is set in Albany, New York, probably in the 18th or 19th century. We just know that it was before modern times and certainly before the days of the super grocery stores! The story centers on the baker, Van Amsterdam, a good baker and honest businessman who gives his customers exactly what they pay for, "not more and not less." Although that is very legal and very fair, it's not exactly fun is it? In the long run it also proves to be bad for business when a mysterious old woman enters the bakery and asks for 13 St. Nicholas Cookies and insists that 13 makes a dozen. When Van Amsterdam reiterates his motto and only gives her 12 cookies the old lady curses him as she leaves with the words, "Fall again, mount again, learn how to count again!" After that Van Amsterdam's business falls off and his baking suffers. A dream of the good saint and his generosity turn Van Amsterdam's heart around and changes his business practices. In the end he learns that a few freebies are actually good for business, and for his own heart! The illustrations are colorful and interesting. My kids loved to look at the detail in them. This is another nice book to read during the Advent season!

This was a lesson on giving and kindness. It is also a tale of the "baker's dozen," which is thirteen. Interesting, but I'm not certain it is a good tale for young children. A bit on the scary side for them, and the lesson learned was driven by punishment and bad fortune ... until the baker decides to be more generous and add that thirteenth donut. There are other stories and lessons that are better for young children.

I portray Bishop Nicholas of Myra, the 4th century bishop of what is now Turkey. A local library asked Saint Nicholas to spend a day reading to the elementary school children of Tri-Village Schools in New Madison, Ohio. The librarian, Ann Riegler-Coursey, did some research for books with Bishop Nicholas as the central character, books suitable to the children's ages. The Baker's Dozen: a Saint Nicholas Tale was one of the most delightful and lesson-bearing books chosen. I knew that the good Bishop would want to have it in his library for future engagements.

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