

Anna Iacovou

# Ayios Vasilis does not believe in fairy tales



## | The Fourth Wise Man

Warm thanks to **ATHOS/CHILDREN'S BOOKS** publications for providing the illustrations and to Maria Papaefstathiou for designing the booklet

The cover illustration and the illustration on page 5 are by Anna Dervisi from the book '*Ayios Vasilis and the Teacher*'

The illustrations on pages 2 and 3 are by Christina Douligeri from the book '*They were children once – Old Hadjigeorgis*'



For more information visit the website:  
[www.stamoulis.gr](http://www.stamoulis.gr)

# The Fourth Wise Man



Misha held his mother's hand as they walked down the street. He was wearing gloves and could not feel the warmth of her hand. It was very cold that evening with the snow swirling wildly all around. Suddenly, the church appeared before them, outlined faintly in the mist.

From the church door a long line of people unfolded silently before Misha's eyes and reached as far as his feet.

– Stop here, Misha, smiled his mother as she leaned down to him. We will stand in line and slowly we will move forward and go inside the church to worship the gifts of the Magi.

– Will we have to wait long? asked the boy

– It will be like a short trip! A journey to baby Jesus in the manger', replied his mother.

– I'm cold, muttered the boy and his breath turned into white mist that blended with the fog.

– So you mustn't wait another moment, said his mother. Start your journey straight away. All you have to do is follow the three Wise Men on their camels.

– The three Wise Men? said the boy in surprise.

– You will be travelling with them in the desert; you won't feel the cold there.

– But how will I follow then? asked Misha.

– On a camel, replied his mother. Surely there must be caravans of camels in your imagination.

Misha nodded his head slowly and gazed into the snowy mist.

– No... no, no, he muttered a moment later. This is not mist



made by snow, it is a sand storm. If I'm not careful, I will lose sight of my caravan.

The three camels ahead of him were making slow progress against the desert wind.

– It is the Wise Men, said Misha; the Magi on their way to Bethlehem. And I am following them. There's the star that is guiding us on our way. It is glimmering faintly in the storm.

Then he grabbed enthusiastically at the camel's reins with his little fists and let himself be carried along by the camel's gentle swaying walk. He raised his handkerchief and covered his face, leaving only a little opening over his eyes so that he could see.

The journey went on for hours. And Misha became a pilgrim. He travelled through unknown lands and met strange people with unfamiliar clothes, speaking unfamiliar languages, with different sounds and music.

Misha did not stop following the Magi. He followed the bright star that was guiding them on their way.

And then Misha began to feel a sweet warmth. A warmth that wrapped itself around him. Perhaps it was the warmth of the desert, or perhaps the warmth that gives comfort to the weary

body of the traveller, or perhaps it was the warmth of the cave as they went inside to worship baby Jesus.

– The gifts, said the Magi. Let us take the gifts in our hands and place them at the feet of the baby Jesus when we kneel before him.

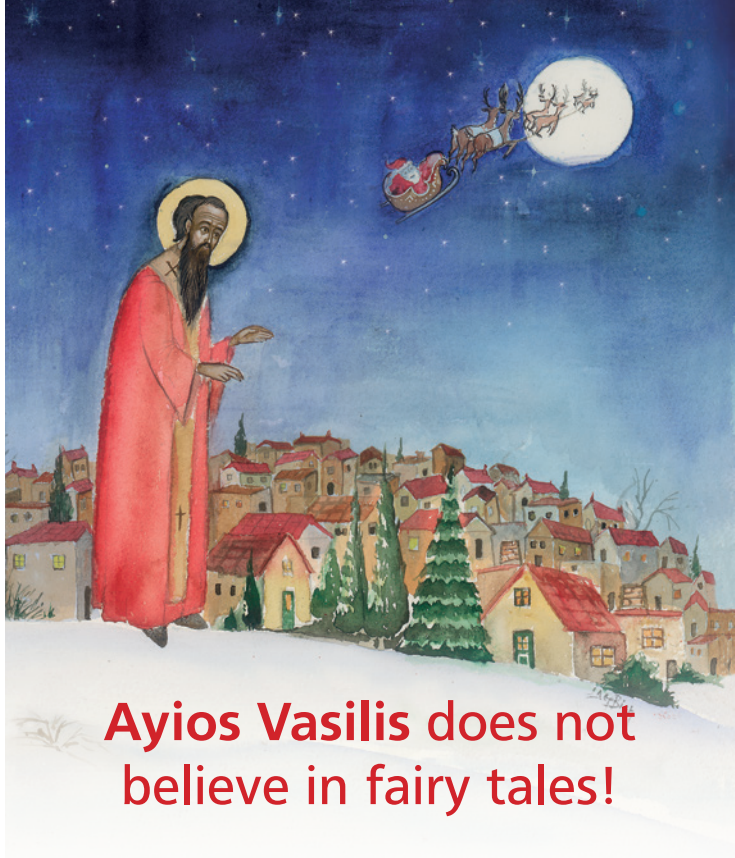
Melchior picked up his gold– embroidered saddle– bag and from it he took out a richly carved box with twenty– eight small bars of gold hidden deep inside.

Caspar opened his cloak and revealed a silver case filled with sweet– scented frankincense.

Balthasar unfolded his silken handkerchief and took out a silver container filled with myrrh.

Then Misha stretched out his warm hands and as he knelt down to worship the baby Jesus, he placed his two little gloves next to the gifts of the Magi. ■





## Ayios Vasilis does not believe in fairy tales!

**T**he journalist was nervous, that was clear to see. Her lips trembled as she tried to speak...

– What did you say, my dear? Ayios Vasilios asked, as he gazed at her from inside his icon.

The journalist inhaled deeply and took in a large helping of oxygen– filled courage from the surrounding air to give her the strength to ask her first question.

– Do you believe in fairy tales?

– ‘Fairy tales’, replied Ayios Vasilios in surprise. I don’t believe in fairy tales, but I do like to hear them. When I was little, my grandmother, Makrina, used to tell me lots of beautiful stories.

– So what do you think of the story about Ayios Vasilios or Santa Claus? stuttered the journalist timidly.

The saint smiled.

– I think that it is a story that children really love, he said.

– Startled, the journalist asked ‘But doesn’t that bother you?’  
– Why should it bother me?  
– Because the children confuse you with Santa Claus. When they hear your name they picture a short fat old man in a red suit, with shiny boots, a red hat, riding on a sleigh drawn by flying reindeer, elves, presents...

– The fairy tale, you mean, said the Saint, cutting her off in mid-flow. What else would you expect a small child to think of first? Children’s lives and dreams are full of such stories.

– And doesn’t that make you angry?

– Not at all. Children know that the real Ayios Vasilios is not so impressive. They know that he is a priest, dressed in robes and a monk’s hood, and that he loves them and asks Jesus to keep all children safe from bad things.

– And the presents?

– What presents? I don’t give presents. I give coins! And if the children are lucky they will be the ones to find the coin in my special cake, the vasilopitta, when it is cut at midnight on New Year’s Eve, at the moment when the old year gives way to the new. Do you know how anxiously they await their slice and how happy they are if they find a coin hidden in that slice?

– So there is no competition between Ayios Vasilios and Santa Claus?

– How can there be competition with a fairy tale and an imaginary saint?

The journalist smiled happily and felt that her interview had been a great success. As she stooped to kiss the Saint’s hand, she whispered...

– Your blessing, Ayie Vasilie.

– Christ’s blessing be upon you, my child, said the Saint and stood still, blessing her from inside the frame of his icon. ■

## The Holy Gifts

The Holy Gifts are preserved with great care on Mount Athos, distributed among a number of reliquaries with only a small part exhibited for worship or transported outside Mount Athos for holy water rites. Three or four years ago, in Limassol we had the great blessing of having some of these holy relics displayed for worship at the Metropolitan Church of Panayia Pantanassa, and in January 2014 they travelled to Russia for ten days.



The following symbolisms linked to Jesus were given to the Gifts of the Magi: frankincense representing God and myrrh for Him who would be sacrificed for the sake of mankind.

Gold is in the form of twenty eight carved blocks of various shapes and sizes, measuring approximately 5 x 7 cm, with a different design on each block.

Frankincense and myrrh are preserved in the form of sixty-two more or less spherical beads the size of a small olive.

The Holy Gifts were delivered to Mount Athos after the fall of Constantinople, by Maro, the Christian wife of Sultan Murat II and stepmother of Mohammed II.

## Vasilopitta



The preparation of the vasilopitta with a coin hidden inside – a blessing from Ayios Vasilios on the first day of the New Year, in memory of another miraculous story dating from the 4th century AD. Happy New Year filled with Love, Health and Happiness!