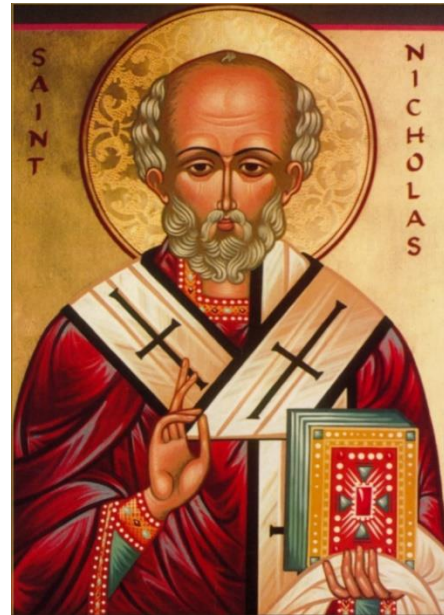


Saint Nicholas (Info largely from the St. Nicholas Centre)



- ❖ Also known as "Nikolaos of Myra," he was born during the third century in the village of Patara. At the time, the area was part of the Eastern Roman Empire (what would become the Byzantine Empire) and the community primarily spoke Greek. Today the region is part of Turkey.
 - There are no contemporary sources for details about Nicholas' life.
- ❖ His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships.
- ❖ Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who ruthlessly persecuted Christians, Bishop Nicholas suffered for his faith, was exiled and imprisoned.

- ❖ After his release, some accounts have Nicholas attending the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. The Council of Nicaea formulated the **Nicene Creed** which continues to be prayed by Roman Catholics at Sunday Mass to this day.
- ❖ Nicholas **December 6, AD 343** in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church, where a unique relic, called manna, formed in his grave. This liquid substance, said to have healing powers, fostered the growth of devotion to Nicholas.
- ❖ The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration: St. Nicholas Day. (December 19 on the Julian Calendar).
- ❖ Nicholas' tomb in Myra became a popular place of pilgrimage. However, when the region became part of the Ottoman Empire, Christians were concerned that access to the tomb might become difficult.
- ❖ For both the religious and commercial advantages of a major pilgrimage site, the Italian cities of Venice and Bari vied to get the Nicholas relics. In the spring of 1087, sailors from Bari succeeded in spirited away the bones, bringing them to Bari, a seaport on the southeast coast of Italy. An impressive church was built over St. Nicholas' crypt and many faithful journeyed to honor the saint who had rescued children, prisoners, sailors, famine victims, and many others through his compassion, generosity, and the countless miracles attributed to his intercession.

Council of Nicaea

First Ecumenical Council, AD 325; called to preserve unity of the church which was threatened by competing claims about the nature of Jesus Christ

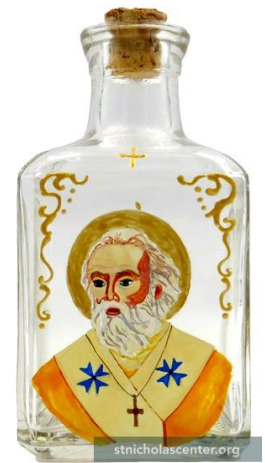
Relic

Something remaining as a memorial to a saint, often part of the body or clothing

Manna is pure water formed in the tomb of the Saint; it formed in the tomb in Myra and has continued to do so in Bari, Italy



❖ At Myra "the venerable body of the bishop, embalmed as it was in the good ointments of virtue exuded a sweet-smelling myrrh, which kept it from corruption and proved a health-giving remedy against sickness to the glory of him who had glorified Jesus Christ, our true God." The translation of the relics did not interrupt this phenomenon, and the "manna of St. Nicholas" is said to flow to this day. It was one of the great attractions that drew pilgrims to his tomb from all parts of Europe.¹



- ❖ Devotion to St. Nicholas has been present in the West long before his relics were brought to Italy, but their transfer greatly increased his veneration among the people, and miracles were as freely attributed to his intercession in Europe as they had been in Asia.² He became the patron saint of: children, coopers, sailors, unmarried women, perfumers, fishermen, merchants, broadcasters, the falsely accused, repentant thieves, brewers, pharmacists, archers, pawnbrokers, Galway, Russia, Greece, Lorraine and Duchy of Lorraine.
- ❖ The Nicholas shrine in Bari was one of medieval Europe's great pilgrimage centers and Nicholas became known as "Saint in Bari." To this day pilgrims and tourists visit Bari's great Basilica di San Nicola.
- ❖ Through the centuries St. Nicholas has continued to be venerated by Catholics and Orthodox and honored by Protestants. By his example of generosity to those in need, especially children, St. Nicholas continues to be a model for the compassionate life.
- ❖ Widely celebrated in Europe, St. Nicholas' feast day, December 6th, kept alive the stories of his goodness and generosity. In Germany and Poland, boys dressed as bishops begged alms for the poor—and sometimes for themselves! In the Netherlands and Belgium, St. Nicholas arrived on a steamship from Spain to ride a white horse on his gift-giving rounds. December 6th is still the main day for gift giving and merrymaking in much of Europe. For example, in the Netherlands St. Nicholas is celebrated on the 5th, the eve of the day, by sharing candies (thrown in the door), chocolate initial letters, small gifts, and riddles. Dutch children leave carrots and hay in their shoes for the saint's horse, hoping St. Nicholas will exchange them for small gifts.

¹ St. Nicholas. www.catholic.org, accessed on November 26th, 2015

² Ibid

Random facts:

- ❖ The Roman Catholic Church claims that the candy cane is representative of St. Nicholas' crozier (the bishop's staff).
- ❖ Rather than shoes, some families choose to leave Christmas socks filled with coins for the children. This is in honor of the most famous story of St. Nicholas, in which he left gold in the stockings three daughters had hung to dry. Their father didn't have enough money to secure weddings for them, so St. Nicholas left the gold while they were all asleep.³
- ❖ He was reputed to have given marriage dowries of gold to three girls whom poverty would otherwise have forced into lives of prostitution and to have restored to life three children who had been chopped up by a butcher and put in a tub of brine.⁴
- ❖ After the Reformation, devotion to Nicholas disappeared in all the Protestant countries of Europe except Holland, where his legend persisted as Sinterklaas (a Dutch variant of the name St. Nicholas).⁵
- ❖ Nicholas's popularity was greatest of all in Russia, where he and St Andrew were joint national patrons. There was not a church that did not have some sort of shrine in honor of St Nicholas. So many Russian pilgrims came to Bari in Czarist times that the Russian government maintained a church, a hospital, and a hospice there.⁶

³ Flanders, N. (2018, January 14). Celebrating St. Nicholas. Catholic Digest. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.catholicdigest.com/amp/faith/advent/celebrating-st-nicholas/>

⁴ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. "St. Nicholas." Encyclopedia Britannica, December 12, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Saint-Nicholas>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Smith, P. B. (2021, March 2). Saint Nicholas of Myra. Anglican Military Ordinariate. Retrieved December 15, 2022, from <https://www.anglican.ca/amo/bishop-council/st-nicholas-of-myra/>