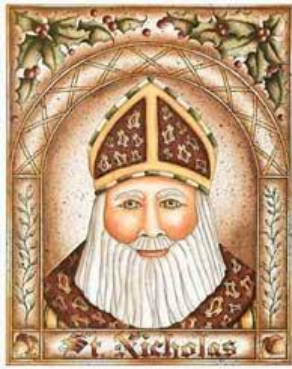


## All that you might want to know about St. Nicholas, the real bishop and saint that inspired Santa Claus



St.  
Nicholas

by Susan Seals

The true story of Santa Claus begins with St. Nicholas, who was born during the third century in Patara, a village in what is now Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young.

Obedying 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 of Bishop 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. The prisons were so full of bishops, priests, and deacons, there was no room for the real criminals—murderers, thieves and robbers. After his release, Nicholas attended the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. He died December 6, AD 343 in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church.

How did the persecuted Christian, good St. Nicholas, evolve into a roly-poly red-suited American symbol for merry holiday festivity and commercial activity? New York City, Washington Irving, Norman Rockwell and Coca Cola all had a part in the evolution. Visit the St. Nicholas Center at [www.stnicholascenter.org](http://www.stnicholascenter.org) for the full story

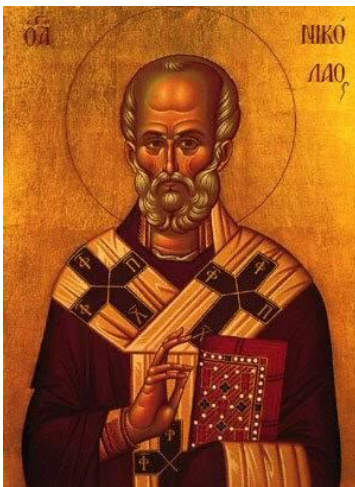
Through the centuries many stories and legends have been told of St. Nicholas' deeds and miracles. These accounts help us understand his extraordinary character and why he is so beloved and revered as protector and helper of those in need.

One story about St. Nicholas tells of a poor man with three daughters. In those days a young woman's father had to offer prospective husbands something of value. If the dowry was large, the young woman could find a better husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to marry. This poor man's daughters, without dowries, were therefore destined to be sold into slavery. Mysteriously, on three different occasions, a bag of gold appeared in their home-providing the needed dowries. The bags of gold, tossed through an open window, are said to have landed in stockings or shoes left before the

fire to dry. This led to the custom of children hanging stockings or putting out shoes, eagerly awaiting gifts from Saint Nicholas.

In other stories St. Nicholas worked miracles to save a boy from slavery, saved three theology students on a journey, calmed the sea to save a ship, and saved a city from famine. St. Nicolas did many kind and generous deeds in secret, expecting nothing in return

## Celebrating St. Nicholas Day at home



Many families choose to celebrate St. Nicholas day. He is a real saint. The date of the holy day is well before the mad rush of Christmas. It is a chance to create a spiritual time in the Advent season.

At home a simple celebration creates a moment to teach about the real meaning of Christmas and a saint that inspires our faith. It provides an opportunity to tell the story of St. Nicholas, a man of faith whose goodness and generosity grew out of his love for God. It enriches our understanding of Santa Claus by showing the real historical person who inspired the familiar legend and traditions.

So tell a story of St. Nicholas' generous example of giving in secret to those in need. Then encourage your children to identify a kindly "St. Nicholas deed" to do for someone else. For example, have your children fill their shoes with pieces of carrot or bits of hay for St. Nicholas white horse or donkey. Or, require them to do an unexpected good deed around the house. Place shoes outside bedroom doors or on the hearth. Then see that a candy treat (a candy cane represents St. Nicholas') or a chocolate gold coin and simple, maybe spiritual, gifts appear in the shoes on the morning of December 6th.

Stories, poems and activities that teach about St. Nicholas are available at the St. Nicolas Center web site. For more information on St. Nicolas there is a very well designed site about the saint and the many customs based on his life: [www.stnicholascenter.org](http://www.stnicholascenter.org)