

# SAINT NICHOLAS

Feast day December 6.

Patron Saint of Children and sailors, unmarried girls, merchants, and pawnbrokers.

It is believed that St. Nicholas was born to wealthy Christian parents around AD 280 in Patara, near Myra, in what we today call Turkey. His parents were devout Christians, and when Nicholas was born, they ensured that he was a practising believer in Christ.

When still a young boy, a plague struck his city, killing his parents, and his inheritance made him wealthy.

As a young man, he travelled to Palestine and Egypt. On returning to Lycia, he is remembered for giving away most of his inheritance, which developed a reputation for him as kind, generous, and pious. This good reputation resulted in him being chosen as Archbishop of Myra when he was in his early 20s.

During his service as Archbishop, the Roman Emperor Diocletian began to persecute Christians, which his successor, Galerius, carried on for around eight years. It is believed that Nicholas was imprisoned and likely tortured for his faith. Following the death of Galerius, Constantine, the first Christian emperor, declared Christianity a legal religion.

Constantine also recognized the need for unity among Christians, so in 325 A.D. he summoned bishops from all over the empire to meet in Nicea and discuss critical doctrinal issues. It is believed that Nicholas attended this council, and it was here that the famous Nicene Creed was developed.

There are many stories about Nicholas' life emphasising his kindness and generosity. One of these was a story about his help to three sisters. Their father did not have enough money to pay dowries, so they remained unmarried. Their father was thinking about selling them into slavery, but as each one gained a suitor, St. Nicholas went to the house on three separate nights, leaving a bag of gold for each dowery. The three gold balls hanging outside pawnbroker's shops symbolise these three bags of gold.

In many countries, December 6<sup>TH</sup> is still observed as St. Nicholas Day, but in others, it is associated with Christmas, a holiday celebrating giving and coinciding with the birth of Jesus Christ, the greatest giver of all time.

In honour of St. Nicholas, Christians celebrate his feast day by giving presents, which has evolved to be part of today's Christmas festivities. Some of these presents include the names Santa Claus and Kriss Kringle.

The name Santa Claus evolved from St. Nicholas' Dutch nickname, Sinter Klaas, a shortened form of Sint Nikolaas (Dutch for Saint Nicholas). In Germany, parents were encouraged to teach their children that it was Jesus Christ who gave presents and KRISS KRINGLE is the English form of the German name for CHRIST CHILD. In America, Kriss Kringle was used with the name SANTA CLAUS as well as FATHER CHRISTMAS.

Today, the image of Santa Claus has evolved into a chubby elderly man, having a white beard and red suit; creating a more friendly image assuring children that he is a friend.

After his death on December 6, the tradition of gift-giving began in his honour and has since spread around the world. What a wonderful legacy. However, we must never forget that he was a man who had devoted his life to serving God by showing his love of God and all people and inspiring them to do the same.