

ST. NICHOLAS

St. Nicholas of Myra (270 - 343 A.D.) was the only child of a wealthy Greek Christian couple living in what is today the country of Turkey. He was a pious child, and upon the death of his parents Nicholas was raised by an uncle who was a bishop. St. Nicholas grew in holiness, was ordained to the priesthood, and eventually consecrated a bishop. He was famous for generosity to the poor, protection of the wronged, zeal against heresy, and performance of miracles. Many famous legends are told of him.

When a poverty-stricken man was to be forced to sell his daughters into slavery, St. Nicholas secretly tossed bags of coins into their home to serve as the girls' dowry, thus enabling them to marry and be provided for. The money was said to have landed in their stockings drying by the fireplace, which is the origin of gifts in children's stockings and shoes at Christmastime.

At the Council of Nicea, Nicholas prevailed against the heretic bishop Arius; he was also instrumental in defending the doctrine of Jesus' divinity and formulating the Nicene Creed. His relics are still preserved in the Basilica of St. Nicholas in Italy. On his feast day they emit a miraculous myrrh, which is distributed around the world.

Many countries have the custom of making him the secret giver of gifts to children on his feast day. In the United States, for example, he is celebrated as "Santa Claus," who distributes gifts to children on Christmas Eve. St.

Nicholas of Myra is the patron saint of many causes, professions, cities, and countries; but he is most notably the patron of children, sailors, prisoners, and maidens seeking to marry. His feast day is December 6th.

