

ham. Saint Nicholas, visiting the region to care for the hungry, not only saw through the butcher's horrific crime, but also resurrected the three boys from the barrel by his prayers.

However, in his most famous exploit, a poor man had three daughters but could not afford a proper dowry for them. This meant that they would remain unmarried and probably, in absence of any other possible employment, would have to become prostitutes. Hearing of the poor man's plight, Nicholas decided to help him but being too modest to help a man in public (or to save the man the humiliation of accepting charity), he went to his house under the cover of night and threw three purses (one for each daughter) filled with gold coins through the window opening into the man's house.

During a great famine that the Bishop of Myra experienced, a ship was in the port at anchor, which was loaded with wheat for the Emperor in Byzantium. He invited the sailors to unload a part of the wheat to help in time of need. The sailors at first disliked the request, because the wheat had to be weighed accurately and delivered to the Emperor. Only when Nicholas promised them that they would not take any financial damage for their consideration, the sailors agreed. When they arrived later in the capital, they made a surprising find. The weight of the load had not changed. The removed wheat in Myra was even enough for two full years and could even be used for sowing.

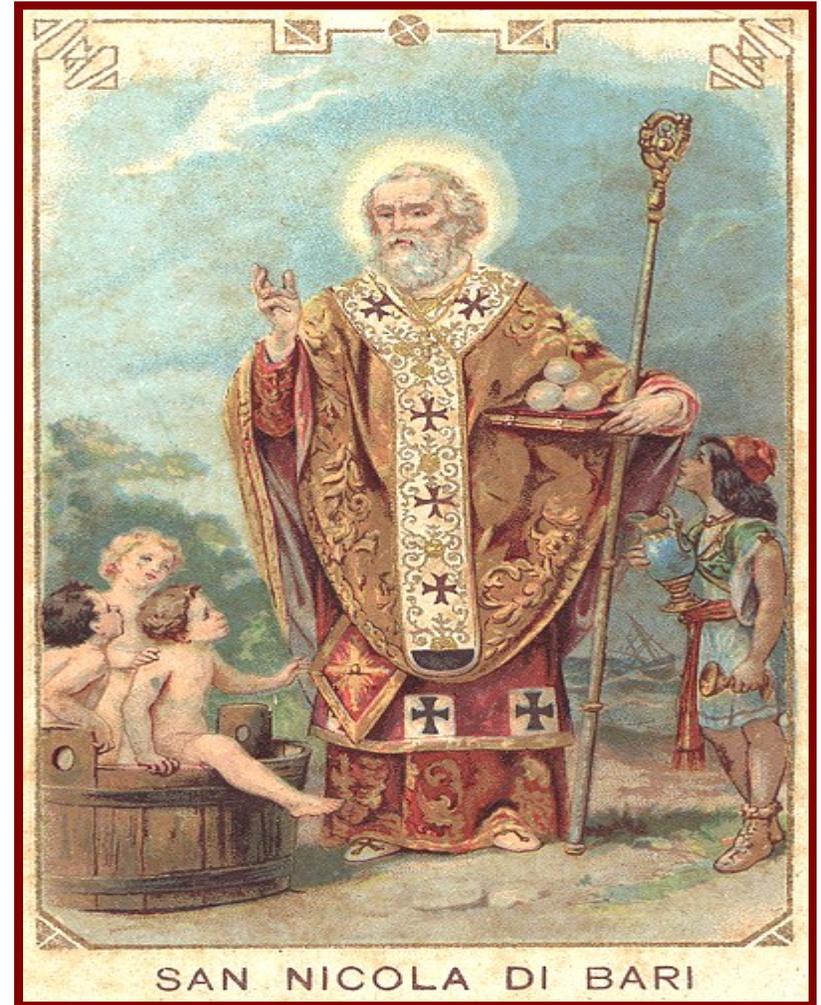
Where as the devotional importance of relics caused the remains of most saints to be divided and spread over numerous churches, Saint Nicholas is unique in that most of his bones are preserved in his crypt in Bari. In the late 1950's during a restoration of the chapel, the archdiocese of Bari allowed a team of scientists to photograph and measure the contents of the crypt grave. In the summer of 2005, the report was sent to a forensic laboratory in England. The review of the data revealed that the historical saint Nicholas was barely five feet in height and had a broken nose.

\*(excerpted from: [www.catholic.org](http://www.catholic.org))

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## **Saint Nicholas**

**Feast Day: December 6**



**Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker  
(Santa Claus)**

## Saint Nicholas of Myra

\*Saint Nicholas (270– 6 December 343), was a historic 4th-century saint and Greek Bishop of Myra (Demre, in Lycia, part of modern-day Turkey). Because of the many miracles attributed to his intercession, he is known as Nikolas the Wonderworker. He had a reputation for secret gift-giving, such as putting coins in the shoes of those who left them out for him, and thus became the model for Santa Claus, whose modern name comes from the Dutch Sinterklass. His reputation evolved among the faithful, as was common for early Christian saints. In 1087, his relics were furtively translated to Bari, in southeastern Italy; for this reason, he is also known as Nikolas of Bari. His feast day is 6 December.

The historical Saint Nicholas is remembered and revered among Catholic and Orthodox Christians. He is also honored by various Anglican and Lutheran churches. Saint Nicholas is the patron saint of sailors, merchants, archers, thieves, children, and students from many countries. He was also a patron of the Varangian Guard of the Byzantine emperors, who protected his relics in Bari.

Nicholas was born a Greek in Asia Minor during the third century in the Greek city of Patara which was a port on the Mediterranean Sea and was located in Myra, Lycia, a Greek province of Asia Minor, at a time when the region was Greek in its heritage, culture and outlook and was part of the Roman province of Asia. He was the only son of wealthy Christian parents named Epiphanus and Johanna according to some accounts and Theophanes and Nonna according to others. He was very religious from an early age and according to legend, Nicholas was said to have rigorously observed the canonical fasts of Wednesday and Fridays. His wealthy parents died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young and he was raised by his uncle --also named Nicholas-- who was the bishop of Patara. He tonsured the young Nicholas as a reader, and later as presbyter (priest). Nicholas also spent a stint at a monastery named Holy Sion, which had been founded by his uncle.

On 26 August 1071 Romanus IV, Emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire (reigned 1068-1071), faced Sultan Alp Arslan of the Seljuk Turks

(reigned 1059-1072) in the battle of Manzikert. The battle ended in a humiliating defeat and capture for Romanus. As a result the Empire temporarily lost control over most of Asia Minor to the invading Seljuk Turks. The Byzantines would regain its control over Asia Minor during the reign of Alexius I Comnenus (reigned 1081-1118). But early in his reign Myra was overtaken by the Islamic invaders. Taking advantage of the confusion, sailors from Bari in Apulia seized the remains of the saint from his burial church in Myra, over the objection of the Orthodox monks. Returning to Bari, they brought the remains with them and cared for them. The remains arrived on 9 May 1087. There are numerous variations of this account. In some versions those taking the relics are characterized as thieves or pirates, in others they are said to have taken them in response to a vision wherein Saint Nicholas himself appeared and commanded that his relics be moved in order to preserve them from the impending Muslim conquest.

It is said that in Myra the relics of Saint Nicholas each year exuded a clear watery liquid which smells like rose water, called manna (or myrrh), which is believed by the faithful to possess miraculous powers. After the relics were brought to Bari, they continued to do so, much to the joy of the new owners. Even up to the present day, a flask of manna is extracted from the tomb of Saint Nicholas every year on 6 December (the Saint's feast day) by the clergy of the basilica. The myrrh is collected from a sarcophagus which is located in the basilica vault and could be obtained in the shop nearby.

On 28 December 2009, the Turkish Government announced that it would be formally requesting the return of Saint Nicholas's bones to Turkey from the Italian government. Turkish authorities have cited that his remains were illegally removed from Turkey.

Another legend tells how a terrible famine struck the island and a malicious butcher lured three little children into his house, where he slaughtered and butchered them, placing their remains in a barrel to cure, planning to sell them off as