

THE STORY OF SAINT NICK



Νικόλαος ὁ
Θαυματοργός

Nicholas the
Wonderworker

SAINT NICHOLAS is best known as one of the names of the folk legend Santa Claus. However, Santa Claus has a long history that begins with a bishop from Turkey in the 4th century known as Saint Nicholas. At that time Turkey was a part of the Greek empire and Greek was the language they spoke. To write Saint Nicholas's name in a way that he could have read it, it would be written Ἅγιος Νικόλαος, and pronounced *Hagios Nikólaos*.

Not much is known about the life of Saint Nicholas, but he was born near the town of Myra in Turkey, and raised by his uncle who was a bishop as well. His uncle taught him how to read and write and raised him to be a part of the Catholic church. Most of the deeds done by Nicholas that led the church to make him a saint are only known to us now through folk legends. There are many stories of him giving money in secret to the poor and saving the weak and vulnerable from cruel treatment. One of the oldest legends about Saint Nick – and one that may very well be true – is the story of the poor man's three daughters.



Near the town of Myra there was an aging man with three lovely daughters, all nearing the age that they would become married. In the old days, before a woman could be married, the father of the bride had to pay the husband's family a *dowry*; a gift of money to show that he could help support the new couple. This was the tradition and if the dowry could not be paid, no matter how much the man and woman might have been in love, the husband's family could not allow the marriage. This presented a problem for the old man because he was very poor. He could barely afford to feed his family and certainly couldn't afford to pay an expensive dowry. If the man couldn't find money for his daughters to marry then their only option would be to leave their home to work under cruel conditions in a large city far away. The father wouldn't be able to support them much longer and there was no one else to care for them or any work for them to do in the town.

The three daughters were all one year apart, the oldest being 18. She had fallen in love, and the father, desperate and hoping that he could somehow make enough money, had promised a dowry to the man's family. Saint Nicholas – or rather Bishop



Russian Painting of Saint Nicholas

Nicholas, at the time – had been aware of the family’s problems and wanted to help. The night before the wedding the father had gone to bed heartbroken, still not having the money he promised and knowing what his daughter would have to go through. Not wanting to embarrass the man by giving him money in public, and not wishing to be thanked, Saint Nicholas crept to the family’s window in the middle of the night and dropped a purse of gold into their home to be used as the dowry.

Nicholas did this every year for each daughter when it was her time to be married. For the third daughter, the old man waited all night by the window to try to catch whoever it was leaving him money and to thank them. Nicholas expected this and crept onto their roof instead, dropping the purse of gold down the chimney. It is said the daughter’s stocking had been drying by the fireplace, and when she woke up on her wedding day, heartbroken since nothing arrived at the window, she began dressing herself to leave for the city. While putting on her stocking she felt something with her foot at the bottom of it. She reached in and pulled it out, and there was the dowry, waiting for her.



Why do you think Saint Nicholas went through so much trouble not to be seen by the family?

What are the parts of this story that you think helped shape the character of Santa Claus today?
