

## St. Nicholas of Myra

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(Also called NICHOLAS OF BARI).

**Bishop** of **Myra** in Lycia; died 6 December, 345 or 352. Though he is one of the most popular **saints** in the **Greek** as well as the **Latin Church**, there is scarcely anything historically certain about him except that he was **Bishop of Myra** in the fourth century.

Some of the main points in his legend are as follows: He was born at Parara, a city of Lycia in **Asia Minor**; in his youth he made a **pilgrimage** to **Egypt** and Palestine; shortly after his return he became **Bishop of Myra**; cast into **prison** during the **persecution** of **Diocletian**, he was released after the accession of **Constantine**, and was present at the **Council of Nicaea**. In 1087 **Italian** merchants stole his body at **Myra**, bringing it to **Bari** in **Italy**.

The numerous **miracles** St. Nicholas is said to have wrought, both before and after his death, are outgrowths of a long tradition. There is reason to **doubt** his presence at **Nicaea**, since his name is not mentioned in any of the old lists of **bishops** that attended this **council**. His cult in the **Greek Church** is old and especially popular in **Russia**. As early as the sixth century **Emperor Justinian I** built a **church** in his **honour** at **Constantinople**, and his name occurs in the **liturgy** ascribed to **St. Chrysostom**. In **Italy** his cult seems to have begun with the translation of his **relics** to **Bari**, but in **Germany** it began already under **Otto II**, probably because his wife **Theophano** was a **Greclan**. **Bishop Reginald of Eichstaedt** (d. 991) is known to have written a metric, "Vita S. Nicholai." The course of centuries has not lessened his popularity. The following places **honour** him as **patron**: **Greece**, **Russia**, the **Kingdom of Naples**, **Sicily**, **Lorraine**, the **Diocese of Liège**; many cities in **Italy**, **Germany**, **Austria**, and **Belgium**; **Campan** in the **Netherlands**; **Corfu** in **Greece**; **Freiburg** in **Switzerland**; and **Moscow** in **Russia**. He is **patron** of mariners, merchants, bakers, travellers, children, etc. His representations in **art** are as various as his alleged **miracles**. In **Germany**, **Switzerland**, and the **Netherlands**, they have the custom of making him the secret purveyor of gifts to children on 6 December, the day on which the **Church** celebrates his **feast**; in the **United States** and some other countries St. Nicholas has become identified with **Santa Claus** who distributes gifts to children on **Christmas eve**. His **relics** are still preserved in the church of San Nicola in **Bari**; up to the present day an **oily substance**, known as *Manna di S. Nicola*, which is highly valued for its medicinal powers, is said to flow from them.

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### Sources

The traditional legends of St. Nicholas were first collected and written in Greek by Metaphrastes in the tenth century. They are printed in P.G. 116 sq.

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