



## **HAPPY ST. NICHOLAS DAY! WESOŁYCH MIKOŁAJEK!**

**6th December**

St. Nicholas, whose feast day is celebrated on December 6, is well known as the true inspiration for the beloved Christmas figure of Santa Claus. Little is known about the historical Nicholas, who in the fourth century CE was the bishop of Myra, a Greek city in what is now Turkey. However, there are many stories and legends that explain his reputation as a just and righteous man, a benevolent giver of gifts, and a miracle worker.

---

Saints were usually associated with miracles. These are often apocryphal tales, often with a strong supernatural element. Santa Claus has a selection of great miracles that are told as part of his story.

One of the most popular legends about Nicholas is also that the saint, who is said to have come from a wealthy family, secretly helped a poor man with three daughters. The father could not provide proper dowries for the girls to marry, and without husbands to support them, they might have been forced to turn to prostitution.

Learning about the situation, Nicholas secretly slipped a bag of gold coins through the family's window while they were sleeping. He later left a second bag of coins, and likewise, for the third daughter, at which point, the legend says, the father, who had waited up all night, "caught" Nicholas red-handed in his gift-giving. But Nicholas made him promise to keep the secret. The story is likely the explanation for why the modern Christmas character of Santa Clause brings his gifts for children under the cover of night.



Girolamo Macchietti (1535–1592) The National Gallery, London

Many people know that St. Nicholas is the patron saint of children, but they may not know why he has that title. There is a grisly legend which says that during a famine in Myra, three young boys were lured into a butcher's shop, where they were killed and then brined in a wooden barrel with the intention of being sold as "ham." The good bishop worked a miracle, bringing the pickled children back to life and saving them from a gruesome fate. This story became the subject of many portrayals of Nicholas in art, especially during the Middle Ages. Some people believe depictions of Bishop Nicholas with the three boys led to his reputation as a protector of children.



Three Legends of Saint Nicholas c.1500–1520  
Gerard David (c.1460–1523)  
National Galleries of Scotland

One of many miracles attributed to St. Nicholas happened at sea, as he travelled aboard a boat to the Holy Land. Nicholas is a patron saint of sailors and travellers because he calmed the stormy waters that threatened their lives.



St Nicholas of Bari banishing the Storm 1433–1435  
Bicci di Lorenzo (1373–1452)  
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

His patronage of the falsely accused can be attributed to an early story about his rescue of three innocent men moments before their execution. It is said that St. Nicholas, then bishop of Myra, boldly pushed away the executioner's sword, released the men from their chains, and angrily reprimanded a juror who had taken a bribe to find them guilty.

St. Nicholas is a unifying figure among Catholics and Orthodox Christians, since both groups venerate the saint. But he is incredibly important in the Russian Orthodox Church, where he is known as St. Nicholas the Wonderworker for the many miracles attributed to him both during and after life. To the Orthodox, Nicholas is principally honoured for his qualities as a holy bishop and good shepherd of his people.

In their weekly liturgical cycle, which dedicates different days of the week to Jesus Christ and other saints, only three are specifically named: Mary, the Mother of God, John the Forerunner (known to Catholics as John the Baptist), and St. Nicholas.



Icon of St Nicholas 15th C–16th C

**Nicholas did not leave behind any theological writings, but when he was made a bishop, he is credited with saying, that “this dignity and this office demand different usage, in order that one should live no longer for oneself but for others.”**

Most people know that Nicholas' feast day is celebrated on Dec. 6, the day he died in the year 343, but for East Slavs, as well as the people of Bari, Italy, May 9 is also an important day of celebration.

**Sources:**

*Patron dnia: Święty Mikołaj, biskup.* <https://naszdzienik.pl>

*Mikołaj Święty Żywot, dzieło i cuda wielkiego biskupa z Miry.* <https://www.znak.com.pl>

*6 grudnia- Wspomnienie św. Mikołaja, biskupa.* <https://misericors.org>

**Photos:** Public domain

**Written by:**



Danuta Piotrowska

**Translated by:** MZ