

## **Saint Nicholas**

### **Feast Day December 6**

Children all over the world know him and love him.

In Germany, he's Kriss Kringle. In France, he's Pere Noel. British children call him Father Christmas. Of course, you know him as Santa Claus.

He's got another name, you know. It's an ancient one that goes back hundreds of years. It's one of the very first names people called him: St. Nicholas.

Children tell lots of fun stories about Santa Claus, Pere Noel, or Kriss Kringle. All of these stories remind us of how much we're loved and of how happy we are when we give. The earliest stories we know were told about St. Nicholas, the bishop of Myra.

Hundreds of years ago, Nicholas lived in a seaside town named Myra, which is in the country we now call Turkey. Ever since he was a small child, Nicholas loved God more than anything. He studied hard, prayed often, and followed Jesus by helping the poor.

The people of Myra loved Nicholas so much that when their old bishop died, they immediately elected Nicholas to replace him. He served them well for a long time.

Nicholas was loved for one reason. He loved. He loved God and God's people so much that he would do anything for them.

Here is a story about Nicholas that has been passed down through many generations.

There was a man living in Myra who was very poor. This man had no wife, but he had three grown daughters who lived with him

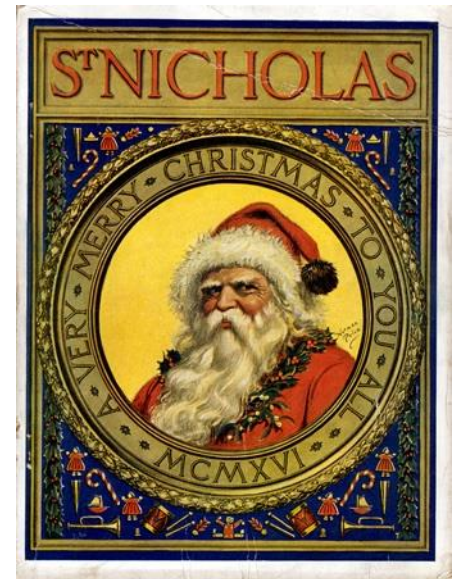
In those days, when a young woman got married, she had to bring money or property with her into the marriage. This is called a dowry. If a woman didn't have a dowry, she would never marry.

This man was so poor that he had no money for his daughters' dowries. And he didn't have enough money to support them either. He had, he believed, only one choice: to sell his daughters into slavery. Nicholas heard about this terrible situation. Late one night, Nicholas crept to the man's home and threw something through the window. It was a bag of gold—enough to pay the dowry for his oldest daughter.

The man was overjoyed, and his daughter was too. She married, but her father was still left with a problem. Two, to be exact. What about the two younger daughters? Sadly, he prepared to send them away.

Nicholas returned one night and again threw a bag of gold through the window. The father rejoiced. But he wondered who was helping him and why.

Of course, Nicholas didn't want the man to know. He knew that it's best to help others without letting them know we're helping them. If we help others in this way, we help because we truly want to and not because people will praise us for it.



But the father was determined. He had one daughter left and no money for a dowry. He certainly hoped he would be helped again, especially because he wanted to find out who was doing it. So he locked the windows and watched out the door.

Nicholas still wanted to help, but he didn't want to be seen. So, in the back of the house, far from the father's sight, he dropped the bag of gold for the third daughter right down the chimney

Other stories are told about Nicholas. It's said that God worked through Nicholas's prayers to raise children from the dead—some who had been killed in a fire and another child who had drowned. All of these stories tell us the same thing about St. Nicholas. He lived for God, which means that he lived for love. If people were in need and he was able to help, St. Nicholas gave them hope and strength. St. Nicholas never paused for a minute to wonder what he should receive in return for his help. He only thought about what he could give to those who needed him.

Stories about St. Nicholas spread from his home in Turkey up to Russia, where he is still a very popular saint. Through the centuries, people passed on stories of him across the most northern parts of Europe, then to Germany, France, and England, and finally to the United States. The children in every country gave St. Nicholas a name in their own language, and ours is Santa Claus.

Christmas is a fun, exciting time, isn't it? It's fun because of all the time we get to spend with our families. It's fun because we do a lot of celebrating. It's fun because we get to think, sing, and pray about Jesus, who was born into the world to save us.

Christmas is also fun because we get to give. We can show our family and friends how much we love them by giving them special gifts that we make or buy.

We give because we're thankful. We're thankful for friendship and love and for all the people who take care of us. We're thankful to God for giving us life.

St. Nicholas was thankful too, and that's why at Christmastime we try to be just like him. He was so grateful for the life God had given him that he just couldn't stop giving joy and hope to others—no matter how far he had to travel or how many roofs he had to climb!

*St. Nicholas showed his gratitude for God's gifts by giving to others. What gifts can your family share with those in need?*

