

THINK ABOUT IT ... Matching

1. St. Nicholas was Archbishop of ____ a. relics
2. St. Nicholas' parents were named Theophanes and ____ b. myrrh
3. St. Nicholas' uncle was Bishop ____ of Patara c. travelers
4. St. Nicholas gave charity ____ d. Myra
5. Because of the many miracles that he brought about or that occurred when people asked for his help, St. Nicholas is called a ____ e. intercession
6. When we ask a saint to pray to God for us, the Church calls this asking for the saint's ____ f. Nonna
7. Every good thing is a gift from ____ g. Nicholas
8. St. Nicholas is venerated as a protector of ____ h. secretly
9. The "incorrupt" body of a saint is called ____ i. God
10. Sweet smelling oil that flows from a saint's relics or from a wonderworking icon is ____ j. wonderworker

Is Saint Nicholas "Santa Claus"? Yes, and no. "Santa" does mean "Saint" and "Claus" is an abbreviation for the name "Nicholas." The modern description of St. Nicholas as Santa Claus comes from a poem for children by Clement Moore, "A Visit from St. Nicholas." Santa Claus is the same as Saint Nicholas in his generosity and his love for children. But Santa's home at the North Pole is far away from Asia Minor (Saint Nicholas' home), and the description of Santa Claus' clothing, his flying sleigh and reindeer are the fairy tale part of the poem. The part that is true is that St. Nicholas, an Archbishop of the Church, loved people and helped them by giving gifts in secret. His generosity inspired authors to write fables about him. A fable is an imaginary story written for the purpose of teaching a moral. The moral of the poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas" is to illustrate St. Nicholas' spirit of giving.

Saint Nicholas of Myra



Old Icon of St. Nicholas

Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker

St. Nicholas, the Wonderworker, was Archbishop of Myra in Lycia (located on the south coast of the Asia Minor peninsula). He was born in the nearby city of Patara. Nicholas' parents were named Theophanes and Nonna. They had no children, so they prayed to God to grant them a son. When he was born, they made a **vow** (a promise) to dedicate him to God, in gratitude for answered prayers.

His uncle, who was also named Nicholas, was the Bishop of Patara. He noticed that even as a child Nicholas loved to be in church, and that at night he prayed and read Scripture (the Bible) and holy books. When asked questions about the faith, he answered like an **Elder** (an older, wise person, who is usually a monk or priest). This caused amazement and respect of everyone around him. So his uncle, the Bishop, ordained him a Reader, and then he was soon ordained a Priest.

St. Nicholas helped anyone who came to him for help, and he gave all his inheritance to the poor. He always gave charity secretly because he knew that **every good thing is actually a gift from God.**

In Patara there was a man who was once rich but who became very poor. The man had three daughters. One was at the age to marry, but he could not afford a wedding. He could not even afford to buy food. St. Nicholas learned about the man and his daughters. He rode his horse by the man's house one night and **secretly** threw a sack of gold through the window. Tradition says that the money landed in one of the daughter's empty shoes. With the money the man provided a wedding for his daughter. St. Nicholas then also gave money to help the other two daughters, saving the family. (This story is the basis for the tradition of hanging stockings or leaving an empty shoe for St. Nicholas to fill with goodies.)

St. Nicholas is venerated as a **protector of travelers**. One time, he decided to go on a pilgrimage by ship to the Holy Land (Jerusalem), but he had a vision of the devil getting on the ship, intending to sink it and kill all the passengers. But when the terrible storm arose, St. Nicholas calmed the waves of the sea by his prayers.

When Nicholas came back to Patara, he entered a monastery and wanted to live alone in the desert, away from the world, as a monk. But God spoke to him and told him: "Return to the world, and glorify My Name there." So he left Patara and went to Myra in Lycia.

Then Archbishop John, the old archbishop of Myra, died. Usually bishops are chosen by other bishops at a meeting of the group of bishops that is called a Council. However, one of the bishops of the Council said that the new archbishop should be revealed by God, not chosen by men. An elder bishop had seen a vision of an angel of God who told him that the one who came to the church that night and was first to enter should be made archbishop, and that he would be named Nicholas. The bishop went to the church at night to wait. St. Nicholas, who was the first to arrive at church, was stopped by the bishop. "What is your name, child?" he asked. St. Nicholas replied, "My name is Nicholas, Master, and I am your servant."

As an Archbishop, St. Nicholas was well known for his gentleness, kindness and love for people. During a time of persecution of Christians, St. Nicholas was put in prison together with other Christians for refusing to worship idols. While in prison he helped the other Christians and prayed that God would give them courage, as many of them were killed, becoming martyrs. God preserved St. Nicholas unharmed. When Saint Constantine became the new Emperor, St. Nicholas was restored as Archbishop. He returned to his diocese and brought peace and blessings to the people there.

Even during his life time, St. Nicholas worked many miracles. Through his prayers, the city of Myra was rescued from a terrible famine. More than once, he saved people from drowning in shipwrecks, and he obtained release for many innocent persons who had been unjustly thrown in prison or taken captive during wars.

After his death, St. Nicholas' relics (his body) "was preserved incorrupt." That is the Church's way of saying that his body did not decay. It is a sign that someone was a saint. Instead, myrrh (a sweet smelling oil) flowed from his relics, and many persons were cured of sickness by it.

The name of St. Nicholas of Myra is known throughout the world. There are many famous cathedrals, monasteries and churches consecrated in his name in Russia, Greece, Serbia, the United States, and many other countries.

Many miracles have occurred when people have prayed before his icon and asked St. Nicholas to intercede (pray to God for them) during times of war, sickness, and personal difficulties. The Church calls such saints and their icons "wonderworking."