

St. Nicholas

St. Nicholas was born in 271 AD and died around December 6, 342 or 343 AD near the Asia Minor (Turkey) town of Myra. He later became Bishop of Myra. He performed many good deeds and was a friend to the poor and helpless, and upon his death, myths soon sprang up about him all around the Mediterranean Sea. He provided charities to people, in particular children. He was reputed to be able to calm the raging seas, rescue desperate sailors, help the poor and downtrodden, and save children. He was soon named as the patron saint of sailors, and when Myra was overthrown, his bones were transported by sailors to Bari, a port in Italy, where a tomb was built over the grave and became the center of honor for St. Nicholas. From here the legend spread on around to the Atlantic Coast of Europe and the North Sea to become a European holiday tradition regardless of religion.



In the catholic tradition, on the eve before December 6th St. Nicholas comes to the children's houses, accompanied by his servant, *Knecht Ruprecht* (also called *Krampus*). He reads out of *the golden book* all good and bad attributes of the kids and the generally well-behaved children will get small presents (traditionally fruit, nuts, and cookies). But the bad ones receive a birching from Krampus and the really bad apples are taken away in Krampus's big sack. The children in return, either recite a poem, sing a song, or play a musical instrument for Nikolaus.

In protestant regions, on the evening of December 5th, children will put a pair of well cleaned shoes, or a dish in front of the house's front door for Nikolaus to fill with small presents. The next morning, they find some chocolate, oranges, nuts or similar in the shoes.

More information and stories as well as an explanation how the kindly Christian saint, good Bishop Nicholas, become a roly-poly red-suited American symbol for merry holiday festivity and commercial activity can be found on the following webpage: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org>
More information in German: <http://www.nikolaus.nl/>