

Light of the East

Our Holy Father and Wonderworker, Saint Nicholas

December 6

Epiphany of Our Lord Byzantine Catholic Church, Roswell, Georgia



Saint Nicholas left neither theological works nor other writings but is venerated as the personification of a shepherd who protects and intercedes. When he was raised to the dignity of bishop he said, "The office demands a different type of conduct, so that one may live no longer for oneself but for others." This "life for others" is his characteristic feature and is manifested by his solicitude for the flock of Christ: his care for their preservation, their protection from the elements, from human injustice and from heresies.

Nicholas was born in Asia Minor in the middle of the third century. From the day of his birth he revealed to people the light of his future glory as a sainted wonderworker. His mother, after giving birth, was immediately healed from illness and the newborn infant, while still in the baptismal font, stood on his feet three hours, without support from anyone, to honor the Most Holy Trinity. He was ordained to the holy priesthood and displayed great kindness and charity towards the flock and the afflicted.

Like all of those who earn the name "Wonder-Worker," Saint Nicholas lived a life of great charity. He used his inherited wealth to relieve all who were in need: poor families, widows and orphans. For his deep love of children, Saint Nicholas is especially revered as patron and protector of God's little ones. He was the personification of Christian love and affection and is honored by all the Christian world.

A poor man had three daughters but could not afford a proper dowry for them. This meant that they would remain unmarried and probably, in absence of any other possible employment, would follow a path of slavery and spiritual destruction. Nicholas went to the house under the cover of night and threw three purses filled with gold coins through the window. Saint Nicholas reminded the father not to thank him, but rather that he should thank God alone who had brought grace to his house.

Once three men were unjustly condemned to death by the Governor. The saint boldly went up to the executioner and took his sword, already suspended over the heads of the condemned. The Governor, who was denounced by Saint Nicholas for his wrong doing, repented and begged for forgiveness. On another occasion, he was on pilgrimage to the holy places at Jerusalem. A great storm arose and threatened the ship. Saint Nicholas saw the devil get on the ship, intending to sink it and kill all the passengers. Praying to God, he calmed the waves ensuring a safe journey to all.



Despite his great gentleness of spirit and purity of heart, St Nicholas was a zealous and ardent warrior of the Church of Christ. Fighting evil spirits, the saint made the rounds of the pagan temples and shrines in the city of Myra, shattering the idols and turning the temples to dust.

In the year 325 Saint Nicholas was a participant in the First Ecumenical Council. This Council proclaimed the Nicene Symbol of Faith, and he stood up against the heretic Arius. During one of the most heated moments of the Council, Saint Nicholas, fired with zeal for the Lord, walked across the room to Arius, who denied the divinity of Christ, assailed the heretic with his words and slapped him in the face for his false teaching which threatened Christian souls. For this reason, he was deprived of his episcopal rank and placed under guard. But several of the holy Fathers had a vision and saw the Lord Himself and the Mother of God return to Nicholas the Gospel and omophorion. The Fathers of the Council agreed then to restore the saint to his episcopal office. He continued to bring peace and blessings to the faithful, to sow the word of Truth and uproot heresy, to nourish his flock with sound doctrine and to provide food for their bodies.

Having reached old age, St Nicholas peacefully fell asleep in the Lord. His venerable relics were preserved incorrupt in the cathedral church of Myra and flowed with curative myrrh, from which many received healing. In the year 1087, his relics were transferred to the Italian city of Bari, where they currently rest. Even to this very day, his bones continue to exude the “Manna” just as they had done in Myra. Each year the precious myrrh is formally extracted from the tomb; it is then mixed with holy oil for distribution to the churches. The pious use of the manna is a source of hope and health for those who trustingly abandon themselves to God and true devotion to the Saint of Myra, beseeching his intercession and special protection as a spiritual help for us in the midst of our human frailties.

The name of the great saint of God, the hierarch and wonderworker Nicholas, a speedy helper and suppliant for all hastening to him, the personification of Christian love and affection is famed in every corner of the earth. As such he is honored by the all of Christendom, both East and West. There is, perhaps, not a single city in the Christian world without a church or altar dedicated to him.

As Byzantine Catholics, the honor and commemoration of saints such as Saint Nicholas is a very important part of our spiritual life. These heroes of the faith inspire us and give us wonderful examples of how we should dedicate ourselves to our faith in God and become more Christ-like. Keeping their memory alive helps to remember that, according to our faith, the saints still live on in the heavenly realm. We have a mystical communion with them through Christ, and the power of God is present in their memory just as it was in their godly lives. Following Christ faithfully, Saint Nicholas endures as the purest manifestation of authority and leadership in the Church — a living rule of faith, practicing humility, abstinence and voluntary poverty as an example to his flock. For all of us Saint Nicholas is a "canon of faith and an image of goodness and kindness."



***O Bishop Nicholas, you have divinely taught all things well,
And now wearing your unfading crown, you intercede for our souls.***

Vespers of the Feast of Saint Nicholas