



**A Sermon for The Second Sunday of Advent  
December 8, 2024**



**Joe Bridges  
Guest Lay Preacher**

**New Life Episcopal Church, Uniontown, OH**

**Click Here for today's Readings:  
[Third Sunday of Advent – The Episcopal Church](#)**

## St Nicholas Sermon

To God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen

Now that we are two weeks into Advent and that ubiquitous holiday music accompanies our every shopping move, we're expected to get our homes festooned with ribbons and lights. We will soon see Santa images and listen to presentations of "the night before Christmas" to be reminded of the jolly old, bearded gift giver who slips in during the night to leave anonymous gifts. Ever wondered why, this tradition is so associated with this season and our good feelings of generosity?

And how about the tradition of hanging stockings by the fireplace ready for little gifts of fruits, candy and other nice things, often put there on the Eve of Christmas?

The true story of Santa Claus and those stockings we love to dig into on Christmas. These traditions began with an early Christian named Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara in Asia Minor.

At the time the area was Greek and is now part of the southern coast of Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young.

Nicholas was very devout, obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," He used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and eventually was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships

Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who ruthlessly persecuted Christians, Bishop Nicholas suffered for his faith, was exiled and imprisoned.

The prisons were so full of bishops, priests, and deacons, there was no room for the real criminals—murderers, thieves and robbers.

After his release, Nicholas attended the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. He died December 6, AD 343 in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church, where a unique relic, called manna, formed in his grave. This liquid substance, said to have healing powers, fostered the growth of devotion to Nicholas.

The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration, December 6th St., that we celebrate this day.

Through the centuries many real stories and many more legends have been told of St. Nicholas' life and deeds. These accounts help us understand his extraordinary character and why he is so beloved and revered as protector and helper of those in need.

One story tells of a poor man with three daughters. In those days a young woman's father had to offer prospective husbands something of value—a dowry. The larger the dowry, the better the chance that a young woman would find a good husband. Without a dowry, a woman was unlikely to marry, but, without dowries, were girls therefore destined to be sold into slavery. Mysteriously, on three different occasions, a bag of gold appeared in their home, providing the needed dowries. The bags of gold, tossed through an open window, are said to have landed in stockings or shoes left before the fire to dry.

This led to the custom of children hanging stockings or putting out shoes, eagerly awaiting gifts from Saint Nicholas. Sometimes the story is told with gold balls instead of bags of gold. That is why three gold balls, sometimes represented as oranges, are one of the symbols for St. Nicholas. And so St. Nicholas is a gift-giver.

One of the oldest stories showing St. Nicholas as a protector of children takes place long after his death. The townspeople of Myra were celebrating the good saint on the eve of his feast day when a band of Arab pirates from Crete came into the district. They stole treasures from the Church of Saint Nicholas to take away as booty.

As they were leaving town, they also snatched a young boy, Basilios, to make into a slave. The emir, or ruler, selected Basilios to be his personal cupbearer, not knowing the language, Basilios would not understand what the king said to those around him.

So, for the next year Basilios waited on the king, bringing his wine in a beautiful golden cup. For Basilios' parents, devastated at the loss of their only child, the year passed slowly, filled with grief.

As the next St. Nicholas' feast day approached, Basilios' mother would not join in the festivity, as it was now for her a day of tragedy. However, she was persuaded to have a simple observance at home—with quiet prayers for Basilios' safekeeping.

Meanwhile, as Basilios was fulfilling his tasks serving the emir, he was suddenly whisked up and away. St. Nicholas appeared to the terrified boy, blessed him, and set him down at his home back in Myra. Imagine the joy and wonderment when Basilios amazingly appeared before his parents, still

holding the king's golden cup. This is the first story told of St. Nicholas protecting children—which became his primary role in the West.

Several stories tell of Nicholas and the sea. When he was young, Nicholas sought the holy by making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. There as he walked where Jesus walked, he sought to more deeply experience Jesus' life, passion, and resurrection.

Returning by sea, a mighty storm threatened to wreck the ship. Nicholas calmly prayed. The terrified sailors were amazed when the wind and waves suddenly calmed, sparing them all. And so St. Nicholas is the became patron of sailors and voyagers.

Other stories tell of Bishop Nicholas saving his people from famine, sparing the lives of those innocently accused, and much more. He did many kind and generous deeds in secret, expecting nothing in return. Within a century of his death he was celebrated as a saint. Today he is venerated in the East as wonder, or miracle worker and in the West as patron of a great variety of persons-children, mariners, bankers, pawn-brokers, scholars, orphans, laborers, travelers, merchants, judges, paupers, marriageable maidens, students, children, sailors, victims of judicial mistakes, captives, perfumers, even thieves and murderers! He is known as the friend and protector of all in trouble or need.

Nicholas' tomb in Myra became a popular place of pilgrimage. But because of the many wars and attacks in the region, some Christians were concerned that access to the tomb might become difficult. For both the religious and commercial advantages of a major pilgrimage site, the Italian cities of Venice and Bari vied to get the Nicholas relics. In the spring of 1087, sailors from Bari succeeded in carrying away the bones, bringing them to Bari, a seaport on the southeast coast of Italy. An impressive church was built over St. Nicholas' crypt and many faithful travelers journeyed to honor the saint who had rescued children, prisoners, sailors, famine victims, and many others through his compassion, generosity, and the countless miracles attributed to his intercession. The Nicholas shrine in Bari was one of medieval Europe's great pilgrimage centers and Nicholas became known as "Saint in Bari." To this day pilgrims and tourists visit Bari's great Basilica di San Nicola.

Through the centuries St. Nicholas has continued to be venerated by Catholics and Orthodox and honored by Protestants. By his example of generosity to those in need, especially children, St. Nicholas continues to be a model for the compassionate life.

Saint Nicholas' image and his legend expanded throughout Europe and in Scandinavia and Germany, his reputation and generosity were emulated in Kris Kringle and Zinter Klaus. Many immigrants to the United States brought this anonymous generosity tradition with them. And so, there began another image with the name of Santa Claus, encouraged by many merchants and publishers. Even so, the generosity and protection of those in need has carried on to the present day.

We here at New Life, know the tradition of giving with anonymity and generosity as we help families during the Christmas season, and provide school supplies to local elementary school students, as well as items to local food banks and ministries. Even some of you have provided gifts, funds and food throughout the year with no interest in recognition.

So, when you put up those Stockings by the fireplace, watch for gifts placed therein as a sign of the generosity of giving taught to us through God's gift of the Christ child to mankind, that Saint Nicholas modeled hundreds of years ago. It can happen again this year. Just watch for the signs in your own household and beyond. AMEN