

History of St. Nicholas

300 AD to 343 AD

Nicholas was born in the small village of Patara in what is now Turkey in the year 300 AD. His parents were devout Christians. They died when Nicholas was very young, leaving him with a great deal of money and a strong commitment to help others. He embarked on a ministry of helping the sick and suffering with his wealth, dedicating his life to the Church. In time the Church made him a Bishop, the Bishop of Myra.



There are many stories and good works attributed to Nicholas. While traveling in Greece, one story goes, he had a dream in which he saw three young students who had been murdered and stuffed into a pickling barrel. When he awoke, he called the innkeeper and together they prayed to God to protect the boys. The three boys were restored to life and health. For this the Church made him the protector of students and all children.

Another time he traveled to the Holy Land by crossing the Mediterranean Sea. A great wind came upon them and they all thought they were going to drown. He prayed, "Just as the waters of the Galilee were calmed by your words, command these waters to be still and know the wonder of God." And the waters fell silent. As a result, the Church, made him the protector of sailors and all people who travel on seas.

The most famous story is of young girls who lived in such terrible poverty that their father was unable to support them. When it was time for them to be married, the poor father did not have dowries to give to prospective husbands and, so, as was the custom of that time, the father prepared to sell his daughters into slavery.

Overhearing their plight, Nicholas threw a bag of gold for each daughter into their bedroom window in the middle of the night. The girls were rescued from a life of slavery and thus was born Nicholas' association with three bags of gold. For this the Church made him the protector of all young girls and of young brides.

He stayed in the Holy Land for some time and lived in a cave that is preserved as a place of pilgrimage in the church named for him in Beit Jala, near Bethlehem. Many Palestinian Christians see him as their patron saint.

Today Beit Jala suffers from isolation and fear and the Christian population is dwindling. Celebrating St Nicholas is a sign of hope to Christians in Palestine. Christians everywhere can benefit from celebrating this great saint, the true Santa Claus, in our churches and homes. The Rev. Canon Jim Rosenthal has visited Beit Jala many times and leads the St Nicholas Society.

For more information, contact Anne Lynn at the American Friends of the Episcopal Diocese of Jerusalem at aklynn@afedj.org or 203-655-3575. Please send your donations to AFEDJ, 25 Old King's Hwy. No., Suite 13, Darien, CT 06820