

Barreau des Rues



After the great success of the Stuff a Bag activity in Boston and in the true spirit of Saint Nicholas we will be stuffing bags on Friday 6 December 2024 for Barreau des Rues, a social action by Parisian lawyers to help the most vulnerable and detainees. More information on the organization of Barreau des Rues can be found here: www.barreaudesrues.org

There is a longread on Wikipedia on the background of Saint Nicholas (Patron Day 6 December), which can be found in the link here. ([Saint Nicholas - Wikipedia](#)), European Folklore tradition ([Saint Nicholas \(European folklore\) - Wikipedia](#)) and the Dutch tradition ([Sinterklaas - Wikipedia](#)). Below a summary of the Wikipedia articles about the most important things you need to know about Saint Nicholas.

Saint Nicholas

Saint Nicholas of Myra^[a] (traditionally 15 March 270 – 6 December 343),^{[3][4][b]} also known as **Nicholas of Bari**, was an [early Christian](#) bishop of [Greek descent](#) from the maritime city of [Patara](#) in [Anatolia](#) (in modern-day [Antalya Province, Turkey](#)) during the time of the [Roman Empire](#).^{[7][8]} Because of the many miracles attributed to his [intercession](#), he is also known as **Nicholas the Wonderworker**.^[c] Saint Nicholas is the [patron saint](#) of sailors, merchants, archers, repentant thieves, children, brewers, pawnbrokers, toymakers, unmarried people, and students in various cities and countries around Europe. His reputation evolved among the pious, as was common for [early Christian saints](#), and his legendary habit of secret gift-giving gave rise to the folklore of [Santa Claus](#) ("Saint Nick") through [Sinterklaas](#).

Generosity and travels



The dowry for the three virgins (Gentile da Fabriano, c. 1425, [Pinacoteca Vaticana](#), Rome)

After his parents died from an epidemic, Nicholas is said to have distributed their wealth to the poor.^{[23][30]} In his most famous exploit,^[31] which is first attested in Michael the Archimandrite's *Life of Saint Nicholas*, Nicholas heard of a devout man who had once been wealthy but had lost all of his money due to the "plotting and envy of Satan."^{[23][32]} The man could not afford proper [dowries](#) for his three daughters.^{[32][23][30][d]} This meant that they would remain unmarried and probably, in absence of any other possible employment, be forced to become prostitutes.^{[23][30][32]} Hearing of the girls' plight, Nicholas decided to help them, but, being too modest to help the family in public (or to save them the humiliation of accepting charity), he went to the house under the cover of night and threw a [purse](#) filled with gold coins through the window opening into the house.^{[23][30]} The father immediately arranged a marriage for his first daughter, and after her wedding, Nicholas threw a second bag of gold through the same window late at night.^{[23][30][34]}

According to Michael the Archimandrite's account, after the second daughter was married, the father stayed awake for at least two "nights" and caught Saint Nicholas in the same act of charity toward the third daughter.^{[23][30][35]} The father fell on his knees, thanking him, and Nicholas ordered him not to tell anyone about the gifts.^{[23][30][35]} The scene of Nicholas's secret gift-giving is one of the most popular scenes in Christian devotional art, appearing in icons and frescoes from across Europe. Although depictions vary depending on time and place,^[36] Nicholas is often shown wearing a [cow](#) while the daughters are typically shown in bed, dressed in their nightclothes. Many renderings contain a [cypress](#) tree or a cross-shaped [cupola](#).^[36]

The historicity of this incident is disputed.^[23] Adam C. English argues for a historical kernel to the legend, noting the story's early attestation as well as the fact that no similar stories were told about any other Christian saints.^[37] Jona Lendering, who also argues for the story's authenticity, notes that a similar story is told in Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, in which Apollonius gives money to an impoverished father but posits that Michael the Archimandrite's account is markedly different.^[23] Philostratus does not mention the fate of the daughters and, in his story, Apollonius's generosity is purely motivated out of sympathy for the father; in Michael the Archimandrite's account, however, Saint Nicholas is instead expressly stated to be motivated by a desire to save the daughters from being sold into prostitution.^[23] He argues that this desire to help women is most characteristic of fourth-century Christianity, due to the prominent role women played in the early Christian movement, rather than Greco-Roman paganism or the Christianity of Michael the

Archimandrite's time in the ninth century, by which point the position of women had drastically declined.^[23]

Other reputed miracles



Illustration of Saint Nicholas resurrecting the three butchered children from the [Grandes Heures d'Anne de Bretagne](#) (created between 1503 and 1508)

One story tells how during a terrible famine, a malicious butcher lured three little children into his house, where he killed them, placing their remains in a barrel to cure, planning to sell them off as ham.^{[30][57]} Nicholas, visiting the region to care for the hungry, saw through the butcher's lies and resurrected the pickled children by making the [sign of the cross](#).^{[30][58]} Jona Lendering opines that the story is "without any historical value".^[43] Adam C. English notes that the story of the resurrection of the pickled children is a late medieval addition to the legendary biography of Saint Nicholas and that it is not found in any of his earliest *Lives*.^[37] Although this story seems bizarre and horrifying to modern audiences, it was tremendously popular throughout the [Late Middle Ages](#) and the [early modern period](#), and widely beloved by ordinary folk.^{[58][30][43]} It is depicted in stained glass windows, wood panel paintings, tapestries, and frescoes. Eventually, the scene became so widely reproduced that, rather than showing the whole scene, artists began to merely depict Saint Nicholas with three naked children and a wooden barrel at his feet.^[58]

According to English, eventually, people who had forgotten or never learned the story began misinterpreting representations of it. That Saint Nicholas was shown with children led people to conclude he was the patron saint of children; meanwhile, the fact that he was shown with a barrel led people to conclude that he was the patron saint of brewers.^[59]

According to another story, during a great famine that Myra experienced in 311–312, a ship was in the port at anchor, loaded with wheat for the emperor in Constantinople. Nicholas invited the sailors to unload a part of the wheat to help in the time of need. The sailors at first disliked the request, because the wheat had to be weighed accurately and delivered to the emperor. Only when Nicholas promised them that they would not suffer any loss for their consideration did the sailors agree. When they arrived later in the capital, they made a surprising find: the weight of the load had not changed, although the wheat removed in Myra was enough for two full years and could even be used for sowing.^[60]

Veneration and celebrations

Further information: [Saint Nicholas Day](#)

Among Greeks and Italians he is a favorite of sailors, [fishermen](#), ships and sailing. As a result, and over time, he has become the patron saint of several cities which maintain [harbours](#). In centuries of Greek [folklore](#), Nicholas was seen as "The Lord of the Sea", often described by modern Greek scholars as a kind of Christianized version of [Poseidon](#). In modern Greece, he is still easily among the most recognizable saints and 6 December finds many cities celebrating their patron saint. He is also the patron saint of all of Greece and particularly of the [Hellenic Navy](#).^[100]



Eastern Orthodox [Saint Nicholas Cathedral](#) in [Kuopio, Finland](#)

In the [Eastern Orthodox](#) Church, Saint Nicholas's memory is celebrated on almost every Thursday of the year (together with the [Apostles](#)) with special hymns to him which are found in the liturgical book known as the [Octoechos](#).^[101] Soon after the transfer of Saint Nicholas's relics from Myra to Bari, an East Slavic version of his [Life](#) and an account of the transfer of his relics were written by a contemporary to this event.^[102]

Devotional [akathists](#) and [canons](#) have been composed in his honour, and are frequently chanted by the faithful as they ask for his [intercession](#). He is mentioned in the [Liturgy of Preparation](#) during the [Divine Liturgy](#) (Eastern Orthodox [Eucharist](#)) and during the [All-Night Vigil](#). Many Orthodox churches will have his [icon](#), even if they are not named after him. In [Oriental Orthodoxy](#), the [Coptic Church](#) observes the Departure of St. Nicholas on 10 Kiahk, or 10 Tahṣāś in Ethiopia, which corresponds to the Julian Calendar's 6 December and Gregorian Calendar's 19 December.^{[103][104]}

Nicholas had a reputation for secret gift-giving, such as putting coins in the shoes of those who left them out for him, a practice celebrated on his [feast day](#), 6 December. For those who still observe the [Julian calendar](#) the celebration currently takes place

thirteen days later than it happens in the [Gregorian calendar](#) and [Revised Julian calendar](#).^[105]

In [Serbia](#), the most common [Slava](#) (annual ceremony and veneration of family's patron saint) is Saint Nicholas' day celebrated on 19 December.

In [Monaco](#), the [Cathedral of Our Lady Immaculate](#) was built from 1874 on the site of St Nicholas's church, founded in 1252. A children's Mass is still held on 6 December in the cathedral.



Saint Nicholas depicted in a 14th-century English [book of hours](#)

In late [medieval England](#), on Saint Nicholas Day parishes held [Christmastide "boy bishop"](#) celebrations. As part of this celebration, youths performed the functions of priests and bishops, and exercised rule over their elders. Today, Saint Nicholas is still celebrated as a great gift-giver in several Western European and Central European countries. In medieval times, Christian [nuns](#) in Belgium and France began to deposit baskets of food and clothes anonymously at the doorsteps of the needy, which gave rise to the practice of gift giving on Saint Nicholas Day.^[106] According to another source, on 6 December every sailor or ex-sailor of the [Low Countries](#) (which at that time was virtually all of the male population) would descend to the harbour towns to participate in a church celebration for their patron saint. On the way back they would stop at one of the various *Nicholas fairs* to buy some hard-to-come-by goods, gifts for their loved ones and invariably some little presents for their children. While the real gifts would only be presented at Christmas, the little presents for the children were given right away, courtesy of Saint Nicholas. This and his miracle of him resurrecting the three butchered children made Saint Nicholas a patron saint of children and later students as well.^[107] The custom of giving gifts on Saint Nicholas Day is popular in various parts of Christendom, with a popular tradition including children placing their shoes in the [foyer](#) for Saint Nicholas to deliver presents therein.^[108]

[Santa Claus](#) evolved from Dutch traditions regarding Saint Nicholas ([Sinterklaas](#)). When the Dutch established the colony of [New Amsterdam](#), they brought the legend and traditions of Sinterklaas with them.^[109] Howard G. Hageman, of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, maintains that the tradition of celebrating Sinterklaas in New York existed in the early settlements of the [Hudson Valley](#), although by the early nineteenth century had fallen by the way.^[110] [St. Nicholas Park](#), located at the intersection of St. Nicholas Avenue and 127th Street, in an area originally settled by Dutch farmers, is named for St. Nicholas of Myra.^[111]

Nicholas is honored in the [calendar of saints](#) of the [Lutheran Churches](#), as well as in [Church of England](#) and in the [Episcopal Church](#) on 6 December.^{[112][113][114]}

Saint Nicholas (European folklore)

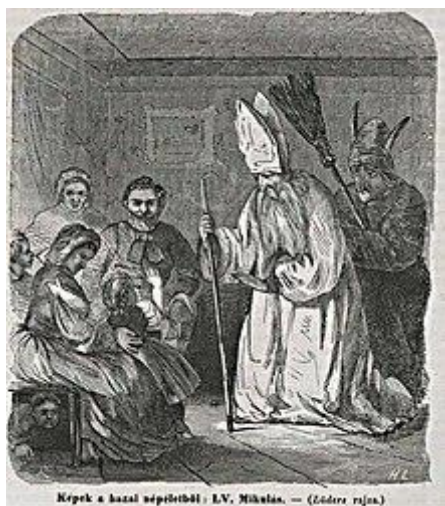
This article is about the gift-bearing figure in European folklore. For the fourth-century Christian saint, see [Saint Nicholas](#). For other uses, see [Saint Nicholas \(disambiguation\)](#).

Saint Nicholas is a legendary figure in [European folklore](#) based on the [Greek](#) early Christian bishop [Nicholas of Myra](#), patron saint of children.

On [Saint Nicholas Day](#), children wait for Saint Nicholas to come and put a present under their pillow or in a boot on their windowsill, provided that the children were good during the year. Children who behaved badly may expect to find a twig or a piece of coal under their pillows. In the [Netherlands](#) (see [Sinterklaas](#)), Dutch children put out a shoe filled with hay and a carrot for Saint Nicholas' horse.^{[1][2]}

It is believed that Saint Nicholas arrives to celebrate his day, [December 6](#) ([December 19](#) according to the [Julian calendar](#)), and leaves before [Christmas](#). This tradition is well known and celebrated in [Austria](#), [Belgium](#), [Croatia](#) ([Croatian](#): *Sveti Nikola*), the [Czech Republic](#) ([Czech](#): *Svatý Mikuláš*), north-east [France](#) ([French](#): *Saint Nicolas*), western and southern [Germany](#) ([German](#): *Sankt Nikolaus*), [Hungary](#) ([Hungarian](#): *Mikulás*), [Luxembourg](#), the [Netherlands](#) ([Dutch](#): *Sinterklaas*), [Poland](#) ([Polish](#): *Święty Mikołaj*), [Romania](#) ([Romanian](#): *Moș Nicolae*), [Serbia](#) ([Serbian](#): Свети Никола, *Sveti Nikola*), [Slovakia](#) ([Slovak](#): *Svätý Mikuláš*), [Slovenia](#) ([Slovene](#): *Sveti Miklavž*), and [Ukraine](#) ([Ukrainian](#): Святий Миколай, *Sviatyi Mykolaï*).

Treats



An 1865 illustration of the Hungarian Saint Nicholas (*Mikulás*) and a *Krampusz*, a fearful and devilish creature, a mean elf

In Austria, Czechia, southern Germany, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine, Saint Nicholas often comes with two assistants (see [companions of Saint Nicholas](#)): a good [angel](#) who gives out presents to good children and a devil or a half-goat, half-demon monster in some legends^[3] ([Krampus](#) or [Knecht Ruprecht](#) in Austria and Germany). The latter scares bad children into being good.^{[4][5]}

On Saint Nicholas Day, they come to the houses where small children live and give them some presents or leave them in shoes that have been left out overnight. While nice children receive various fruits, candies and toys, naughty children can expect nothing more than a wooden switch, several pieces of coal or a carrot or potatoes left by a devil.

Treats are traditionally [sweets](#), [chocolate](#), [candy](#) and different [nuts](#), or [szaloncukor](#) in Hungary and Slovakia. In modern times, chocolate Saint Nicholas figures are most common. In Austria, Hungary and Romania, to get the presents, the boots must be polished, because Saint Nicholas does not fill boots that are not shiny enough.

Although presents are usually given to children by parents, it is not uncommon in some countries for adults to place small surprises into the boots of other adults or to hand them a small wrapped present that day.^[6] In Hungary, this tradition is known as *megajándékoz valakit valamivel*: “gift somebody with something”.^[7]

Virgács

The virgács is a [switch](#) resembling a small broom, made with twigs or branches from a bush or willow tree, often painted gold. They are sold on the streets in Hungary before Saint Nicholas Day.^[8]

Sinterklaas

Sinterklaas (Dutch: [ˌsɪntərˈklaːs]) or **Sint-Nicolaas** (Dutch: [sɪnt ˈnikoːlaːs][ⓘ]) is a legendary figure based on [Saint Nicholas](#), patron saint of children. Other Dutch names for the figure include *De Sint* ("The Saint"), *De Goede Sint* ("The Good Saint") and *De Goedheiligman* ("The Good Holy Man"). Many descendants and cognates of "Sinterklaas" or "Saint Nicholas" in other languages are also used in the Low Countries, nearby regions, and former Dutch colonies.^[note 1]

The feast of Sinterklaas celebrates the [name day of Saint Nicholas](#) on 6 December. The feast is celebrated annually with the giving of gifts on St. Nicholas' Eve (5 December) in the Netherlands and on the morning of 6 December, Saint Nicholas Day, Belgium, Luxembourg, western Germany, northern France (French Flanders, Lorraine, Alsace and Artois), Romania, Poland and Hungary. The tradition is also celebrated in some territories of the former Dutch Empire, including Aruba.

Sinterklaas is one of the sources of the popular Christmas icon of [Santa Claus](#) (Santa=Sinter, Claus=Klaas).^{[1][2]}

Sinterklaas is based on the historical figure of Saint Nicholas (270–343), a Greek bishop of [Myra](#) in present-day Turkey. He is depicted as an elderly, stately and serious man with white hair and a long, full beard. He wears a long red cape or [chasuble](#) over a traditional white bishop's [alb](#) and a sometimes-red [stole](#), dons a red [mitre](#) and ruby ring, and holds a gold-coloured [crosier](#), a long ceremonial shepherd's staff with a fancy curled top.^[3]

He traditionally rides a [white horse](#). In the Netherlands, the last horse was called *Amerigo*, but he was "pensioned" (i.e., died) in 2019 and replaced with a new horse called *Ozosnel* ("oh so fast"), after a passage in a well-known Sinterklaas

song.^[4] In Belgium, the horse is named *Slecht weer vandaag*, meaning "bad weather today"^[5] or *Mooi weer vandaag* ("nice weather today").^[6]

Sinterklaas carries a big, red book which records whether each child has been good or naughty in the past year.^[7]

Period leading up to Saint Nicholas' Eve



[Kruidnoten](#), small, round [gingerbread](#)-like [cookies](#)

In the weeks between his arrival and 5 December, Sinterklaas visits schools, hospitals, and shopping centres. He is said to ride his white-grey horse over the rooftops at night, delivering gifts through the chimney to the well-behaved children. Traditionally, naughty children risked being caught by Zwarte Piet ("soot-smudge Pete"), who carried a jute bag and willow cane for that purpose.^[26]

Before going to bed, children each leave a single shoe next to the fireplace chimney of the coal-fired stove or fireplace (or in modern times close to the [central heating radiator](#), or a door). They leave the shoe with a carrot or some hay in it and a bowl of water nearby "for Sinterklaas' horse", and the children sing a Sinterklaas song. The next day they find some candy or a small present in their shoes.

Typical Sinterklaas treats traditionally include [mandarin oranges](#), [pepernoten](#), [speculaas](#) (sometimes filled with [almond paste](#)), [banketletter](#) (pastry filled with almond paste) or a [chocolate letter](#) (the first letter of the child's name made out of chocolate), [chocolate coins](#), [suikerbeest](#) (animal-shaped figures made of [sugary confection](#)), and [marzipan](#) figures. Newer treats include gingerbread biscuits and a figurine of Sinterklaas made of chocolate and wrapped in coloured aluminium foil.



A [chocolate letter](#), typical Sinterklaas candy in the Netherlands

Saint Nicholas' Eve and Saint Nicholas' Day

In the Netherlands, Saint Nicholas' Eve, 5 December, became the chief occasion for gift-giving during the winter holiday season. The evening is called *Sinterklaasavond* ("Sinterklaas evening") or *Pakjesavond* ("gifts evening", or literally "packages evening").

On the evening of 5 December, parents, family, friends or acquaintances pretend to act on behalf of "Sinterklaas", or his helpers, and fool the children into thinking that "Sinterklaas" has really given them presents. This may be done through a note that is "found", explaining where the presents are hidden, as though Zwarte Piet visited them and left a [burlap](#) sack of presents with them. Sometimes a neighbour will knock on the door (pretending to be a Zwarte Piet) and leave the sack outside for the children to retrieve; this varies per family. When the presents arrive, the living room is decked out with them, much as on Christmas Day in English-speaking countries. On 6 December "Sinterklaas" departs without any ado, and all festivities are over.

In the Southern Netherlands and Belgium, most children have to wait until the morning of 6 December to receive their gifts, and Sinterklaas is seen as a festivity almost exclusively for children. The shoes are filled with a poem or wish list for Sinterklaas and carrots, hay or sugar cubes for the horse on the evening of the fifth and in Belgium often a bottle of beer for Zwarte Piet and a cup of coffee for Sinterklaas are placed next to them. Also in some areas, when it is time for children to give up their [pacifier](#), they place it into his or her shoe ("safekeeping by Sinterklaas") and it is replaced with chocolate the next morning.

The present is often creatively disguised by being packaged in a humorous, unusual or personalised way. This is called a *surprise* (from the French).^{[27][28]}

Poems from Sinterklaas usually accompany gifts, bearing a personal message for the receiver. It is usually a humorous poem which often teases the recipient for well-known bad habits or other character deficiencies.

In recent years, influenced by North-American media and the Anglo-Saxon Christmas tradition, when the children reach the age where they get told "the big secret of Sinterklaas", some people will shift to Christmas Eve or Christmas Day for the present giving. Older children in Dutch families where the children are too old to believe in Sinterklaas any more, also often celebrate Christmas with presents instead of *pakjesavond*. Instead of such gifts being brought by Sinterklaas, family members ordinarily draw names for an event comparable to [Secret Santa](#). Because of the popularity of his "older cousin" Sinterklaas, Santa Claus is however not commonly seen in the Netherlands and Belgium.