

Nicholas of Myra

- He was a real historical figure who lived in modern-day Turkey (270-343).
- He was a bishop, aka pastor and church leader, in Patara, where Paul and Luke changed ships on their way to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1).
- Most of his life is unknown and completely surrounded by legends.
- We do know several facts about his early life.
- He was born to wealthy parents, was a devout and faithful Christian, and was known for his generosity.

Probably True Legends

- He was most likely jailed and tortured for his faith during the Diocletian Persecution.
- He died on December 6th, which is celebrated as his feast day.
- His generosity was mostly anonymous, and he did not want to be recognized in the manner most Romans would be.
- There are multiple versions of the story of a father with three daughters who could not afford a dowry for them. They would going to be forced into prostitution into generous gifts provided for them.
- He either threw money down the chimney or threw it in an open window.
- He gave money to orphaned children, allegedly by placing it in their shoes.

My Favorite Legend

- He definitely attended the Council of Nicaea in 325.
- He was allegedly singled out by the emperor and honored.
- This council was primarily to deal with Arianism, a rising heresy.
- Arianism taught that Jesus was god, but He was a created being and creature.
- Arius and his theology was examined during this council.
- The legend goes that during Arius' testimony, Nicholas was so angered on behalf of the truth that he rose and slapped Arius in the face.
- This is probably not true, but I want it to be.

Later Legends

- Over the centuries, more stories of Saint Nicholas begin to develop.
- This is especially true as the cult of saints becomes more popular.
- One story involves him calming a storm and saving a ship.
- Another time, he allegedly brought three children back to life.
- He once chopped down a tree that was possessed by a demon.

Transition into Santa

- As the most popular saint, his legend slowly developed into Santa Claus.
- This is especially true as Medieval Christianity began to Christianize pagan holiday traditions.
- The Dutch character Sinterklass, who gave children gifts in their shoes.
- American Santa Claus develops more after the 1823 poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas."

Christian Generosity

- "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7
- Our faith is proved by giving - James 2:16, Matthew 25:31-46
- The church sacrifices its own things to give to the needy - Acts 2:42-45.
- Our giving should be weekly and proportional to our income - 1 Cor 16:2
- Christian poverty often results in greater generosity - 2 Cor 8:1-3
- We must not neglect giving - Hebrews 13:16
- Our giving should be secret and not for the praise of man - Matthew 6:1-4

Takeaways

- Christian generosity should not look like the generosity of unbelievers.
- Christian generosity should image the gospel of Jesus, who sacrificed and gave to those who were undeserving and wasteful.
- Christian generosity is required of every believer, regardless of income status.
- Our giving should be cheerful but regular.
- Christians should not have to be compelled to give, and we shouldn't force it.