

St. Nicholas

I hope you have a joyful St. Nicholas Day. Yes, the real Nicholas. He was a Bishop in Myra, Turkey, who was involved in the debates over the Trinity, fighting, supposedly literally, for the divinity of Jesus Christ. If you want to sort out the fake Santas just ask them a trinitarian theological question. Nick was also known for his act of kindness toward sailors, virgins and children, especially poor children, basically he stood for and with the powerless in society. The latter developed into a variety of traditions of gift giving. In some countries December 6, or the eve on the night of the 5th, is the time for gifts for children. In some of these places the children leave shoes outside the doors for St. Nicholas to fill. As these stories were transplanted to other cultures St. Nicholas gained indigenous features. Eventually the bishop, with a beard and in red clothing in the Eastern Christian tradition, started wearing winter clothes and ended up in the far north. Other names based on Saint Nicholas were added, such as Sinter Claus, Santa Claus, Father Christmas, and St. Nick. Much of the current description of Santa Claus was finalized in the 19th Century's "Night Before Christmas" and the 20th Century's Coke ads...younger folks, ask your parents.

The traditions of Nicholas are an interesting combination of faith and love in action. His kindness to the powerless in his society is a helpful correction to the mass media frenzy of our societal holiday season. A focus on giving, not receiving, is always helpful. Besides that, his date of commemoration is exactly one month before the end of the Christmas season with the Day of Epiphany, Visit of the Magi, on January 6. For me, this is the time I turn on my outside lights and begin my preparations for the coming holiday, while still keeping my Advent watch with anticipation.

So if you find this helpful, put out your Santa figures, turn on your lights and remember a man known for faith and caring. Follow his example. HO! HO! HO! - indeed!

Blessings,

Bill