

## December 6 - St Nicholas



Father Christmas is as old as Europe. Once he was Woden, lashing his rein-deer through the darkness of northern midwinter. Then he encountered the Church, and She transformed him into a saint, the much-loved Nicholas, Bishop of Myra (in south-west Turkey) in the fourth century. St Nicholas became the patron saint of children, and was given 6 December as his day.

Since the 6th century St Nicholas has been venerated in both East and West, though virtually nothing is known of his life. Some believe he may have been one of the fathers at the Council of Nicea (325), imprisoned during the Emperor Diocletian's persecution.

According to legend, Nicholas was an extremely generous man. He revived three schoolboys murdered by an innkeeper in a tub of pickles. He rescued three young women from prostitution by giving their poverty-stricken father three bags of gold. (Hence the use of three gold balls as the pawnbroker's signs.)

Perhaps it was on account of S Nicholas' generosity that in recent centuries children began to write little notes sometime before 6 December, to tell him about the toys they specially wanted. These notes were then left on the windowsill at night - or else on a ledge in the chimney.

But St Nicholas Day chanced to lie in the magnetic field of a much more potent festival.... and after awhile his activities were moved towards Christmas. Then in Bavaria the children still left their notes on the window sill, but they addressed them to Liebes Christkind - Krishinkle as they knew him - and the saint's part in the matter was simply to deliver the letters in heaven.

The most popular result of the cult of St Nicholas has been the institution of Santa Claus. He is based on Nicholas' patronage of children and the custom in the Low Countries of giving presents on his feast. Santa Claus has reached his zenith in America, where the Dutch Protestants of New Amsterdam (New York) united to it Nordic folklore legends of a magician who both punished naughty children and rewarded good ones with presents.

## December 25 - Christmas Day

Christmas – according to the Gospel of St Matthew

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.