

The Life of Saint Nicholas

Bishop of Myra in Lycia

The future Saint Nicholas was the son of eminent and wealthy parents, Theofanis and Nona of Patara which was located in the Roman Province of Lycia in southwest Asia Minor (now Turkey). He learned the way of the spiritual life from his uncle, also named Nicholas, who was the Bishop of Patara.

After his parents died, Nicholas inherited great wealth, but being a devout and pious man he was not corrupted by these riches and gave generously to those in need, keeping nothing for himself. More than this, he was able by the grace of God to detach himself from the burdens and cares of this world and its material existence to become one of the great champions of Christ Whose Kingdom is not of this world.

Nicholas entered the Monastery of New Sion, which had been founded by his uncle, and he was tonsured as a monastic there. As a priest in Patara he was known for his charity, despite the fact that he carefully hid his charitable works, fulfilling the words of the Lord: *“Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing (Matthew 6:3).”*

Although he desired to dedicate himself to a life of prayer, solitude, and silence as a monastic, he was chosen, by God’s wondrous providence, to be Archbishop of the nearby city of Myra, located in the same Province of Lycia. Merciful, wise, and fearless, Saint Nicholas was a true shepherd to his flock, and a bold defender of justice. On two occasions, he saved three men from undeserved sentences of death. Merciful, truthful, and a lover of justice, he walked among the people as an angel of God. Even during his lifetime, the people considered him a saint and invoked his aid in difficulties and in every kind of distress.

Saint Nicholas was known to be a very humble and generous man, and as a Bishop he was always concerned for both the temporal welfare as well as the spiritual well-being of his flock.

Saint Nicholas was imprisoned during the persecution of Christians by the Emperor Diocletian during the early fourth century, and suffered greatly for being an example of faithfulness to our Lord. Nonetheless even in prison he instructed the people in the Law of God.

Saint Nicholas was present at the First Ecumenical Council in Nicaea, which took place between May 20 and July 25 in AD 325. Although his name is not found on surviving documents from that council, other references indicate that he contributed much to the discussions. In recognition of these, the Emperor Justinian erected a magnificent cathedral in Constantinople in memory of Saint Nicholas.

A light shone from his face as it did from the face of Moses, and he, by his presence alone, brought comfort, peace, and good will among men. In old age he became ill for a