

FACT  
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# Saint Nicholas

## Background information for teachers (KS1 and 2)



The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas, who was born about 271 A.D. in an area that is now on the southern coast of Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was young. Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships.

Under the Roman Emperor Diocletian, who persecuted Christians, Bishop Nicholas suffered for his faith, was exiled and imprisoned. He died on December 6<sup>th</sup> A.D. 343 in Myra and was buried in his cathedral church. His bones were later stolen by Italian merchants and taken to Italy. The anniversary of his death became a day of celebration, St. Nicholas day.

Through the centuries many stories and legends have been told of St. Nicholas' life and work. They were first told while he was living, as sailors were already claiming him as their patron saint. As the stories were told and retold and carried by sailors from port to port, imaginative and sometimes miraculous details were added. The details can vary, but they do reveal St. Nicholas' character. He was a man who loved God and cared for people. He was ready to help in any way he could; he truly loved his neighbour as himself. Bishop Nicholas put Jesus Christ at the centre of his life and his ministry.

Today many countries celebrate the feast of St. Nicholas on December 6<sup>th</sup>. In some areas he arrives in the middle of November and moves about the country, visiting schools and homes to find out if children have been good. He often arrives in the night and finds carrots and hay for his horse along with children's wish lists. Small treats are left in clogs or stockings so the children will know he has come. In some countries, it is the feast of Saint Nicholas, not Christmas Day, when children receive presents. In the Netherlands, parties may be held on St. Nicholas Eve, December 5<sup>th</sup> and presents are given anonymously with accompanying poems. The emphasis on this day is to have as much fun as possible.



### Personal details

**Name:** Nicholas of Myra (also known as Nicholas of Bari)

**Popular Names:** Sinterklaas and Santa Claus

**Feast Day:** December 6th (but traditionally celebrated on the evening of December 5th)

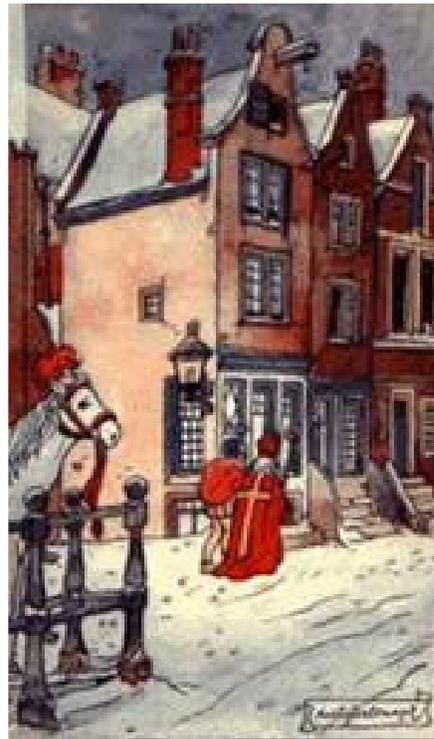
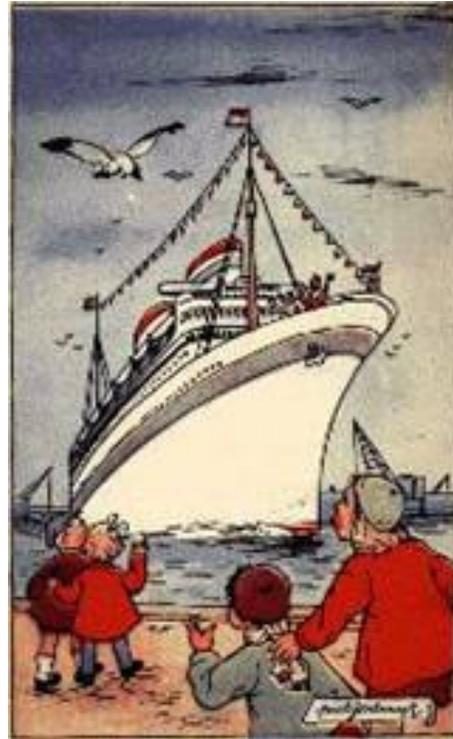
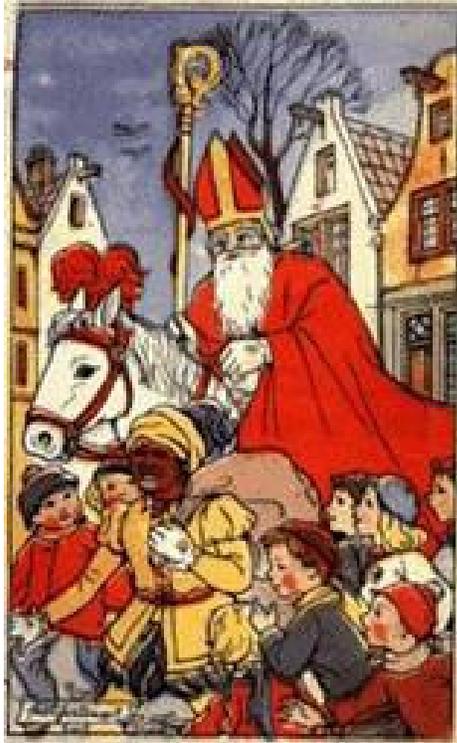
**Clothing:** a bishop's outfit composed of a red stole over a white cassock, a long red cape with golden embroidery, a mitre-shaped red hat with gold trim and applique cross, a long golden shepherd's staff, gloves and quite a few jewelled rings.

**Year of Birth:** 271 A.D.

**Birth Place:** Patara, Turkey (a port town)

**Residence:** Spain

In the Netherlands they celebrate Sinterklaas



**For teachers**

**Key Stage 1**

- **Use pictures on the whiteboard to tell the story about The Real Santa**
- **Use the storyboard to change the order and allow different groups to tell the story in the correct order**
- **Use the music and words to learn a St. Nicholas song**
- **Find activities for KS1 to use from the website:**  
<http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=482>
- **Use the pictures from Sinterklaas to talk about how St. Nicholas is celebrated in The Netherlands**

**Key Stage 2**

- **Tell the story of St. Nicholas to the class**
- **Using the powerpoint, talk about the key points**
- **Put pupils in the hot seat as St. Nicholas, Sinterklaas, children in the Netherlands etc**
- **Use the Task cards with appropriate pupils**
- **Make a display using the Task cards and completed activities**
- **Learn a St. Nicholas hymn or song**

**Activities for Key Stage 2  
CD material**



**Task 1 Which story will you choose?**

Use the weblink to find a story or legend about St. Nicholas. Put it in your own words for the class display board.

Stories:

[www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=155#POEMS](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=155#POEMS)



**Task 2 Can you find a poem you like?**

Find some poetry from around the world using the website below. Copy some examples to read to the class.

Poetry:

[www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=155#POEMS](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=155#POEMS)



**Task 3  
Can you choose a play for the class?**

Use the weblink to find a play about St. Nicholas. Choose a play and plan how your group can use it in class.

Plays: [www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=139](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=139)



**Task 4 Which customs can you find?**

Use the weblink to find some St. Nicholas customs in The Netherlands and America.

Around the world:

[www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=76](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=76)



**Task 5  
Which symbols are linked to St. Nicholas?**

Find the symbols linked with St. Nicholas. Copy them and explain what they mean.

Symbols:

<http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=51>



**Task 6  
Can you find a St. Nicholas icon?**

Use the website below to find 4 St. Nicholas icons. Copy the image and find out one piece of information about each icon.

Icons:

[http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=398&category\\_sakey=383](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=398&category_sakey=383)

Activities for Key Stage 2



**Task 7 Can you find the special food eaten at Sinterklaas in the Netherlands?**

Find out about the special foods that are eaten at St. Nicholas by using the website below. Prepare an information sheet for display.

[www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk/about\\_the/holidays\\_and/the\\_feast\\_of\\_saint/sinterklaas\\_recipes#](http://www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk/about_the/holidays_and/the_feast_of_saint/sinterklaas_recipes#)



**Task 8 Do you enjoy music?**

Using the websites below find music from a famous St. Nicholas song and learn a St. Nicholas hymn

[www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=505](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=505)

[www.sinterklaasje.nl/liedjes.html](http://www.sinterklaasje.nl/liedjes.html)



**Task 9 Can you finish the crossword?**

Use this weblink to print the St. Nicholas crossword.

Crossword:  
[www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=176](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=176)



**Task 10 Can you complete the puzzle?**

Click on the website to choose a puzzle. Use your mouse to drag the pieces to make the picture of St. Nicholas.

[www.stnicholascenter.org/jigsaw\\_puzzles.html](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/jigsaw_puzzles.html)



**Task 11 Which paintings will you choose?**

Use the website to find 4 paintings of St. Nicholas. Copy the image. Find out which art gallery in the world they are in. Look for one piece of information about each painting.

Art:  
[www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=398&category\\_sakey=347](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=398&category_sakey=347)



**Task 12 Can you write a story about St. Nicholas?**

Use the website to find one painting. Copy the image and write a story about the painting you see.

Art:  
[www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=398&category\\_sakey=347](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=398&category_sakey=347)

## Activities for Key Stage 1

**Tell the story, then, using the symbols, rearrange sections for pupils to put in order:**

St. Nicholas lived a long time ago in a country we now call Turkey. His parents died when he was young, so he went to live with his uncle. Nicholas found out that he had plenty of money and because he was a Christian, he decided to use the money to help other people.



Nicholas heard about a man who had three daughters who had lost all his money. In those days, if you didn't have money, your daughters couldn't get married. This money was called a 'dowry'. Without a dowry, the daughters would have to be sold as slaves.



On the night before the eldest girl was to be sold, she washed out her stockings and hung them by the fire. In the morning she found a bag of gold. It was enough for food and plenty for her dowry.

The next morning, another bag with gold was found. Two of the daughters would now be saved.

The next night, the father planned to stay awake to find out who was helping his daughters. He dozed off, but heard a small "clink" as another bag landed in through the window. It was Nicholas, the young man who lived with his uncle!

The man thanked Nicholas, but Nicholas said, "Please, do not thank me—thank God that your prayers have been answered. Do not tell others about me."



Years passed and Nicholas became a priest and he continued to help people. He was eventually chosen to be a bishop. Bishops look after their people as shepherds look after their sheep. That is what Nicholas did. When there wasn't any food, he found wheat; so no one went hungry. He always helped people in trouble. All his life Nicholas showed people how to love God and care for each other.



Many people around the world learned about Nicholas. They wanted to be like him. He is an example of how we should live and that is why he became a saint.

Story Board for Key Stage 1

 <p>St. Nicholas lived in a country called Turkey. He wanted to use his money to help other people.</p>	 <p>Nicholas heard about a family who had no money. The daughters couldn't get married. Without a dowry, the daughters would have to be sold as slaves.</p>
 <p>One morning the eldest girl found a bag of gold. It was enough for food and plenty for her dowry. She could get married!</p>	 <p>The next morning, another bag with gold was found. Two of the daughters would now be saved!</p> <p>The father stayed up to see who was giving them money. It was Nicholas! He told the father not to tell anyone.</p>
 <p>Nicholas became a priest and then he was chosen to be a bishop.</p>	 <p>Bishops look after their people as shepherds look after their sheep. That is what Nicholas did.</p>

## The Real Santa (KS2)

The real Santa lived a long time ago in a place called Asia Minor. It is now the country of Turkey. His name was Nicholas.

Nicholas' parents died when he was just a teenager. His parents left him a lot of money which made him a rich young man. He went to live with his uncle who was a priest.

Nicholas heard about a man who had lost all his money. He had three daughters who were old enough to get married. But in those days young women had to have money in order to get married. This money was a "dowry" and it was used to help the new family get started. If you didn't have dowry money, you didn't get married.

This family was so poor they had nothing left to eat. The daughters were going to be sold as slaves because they couldn't live at home any longer. They were very sad. They wouldn't be able to have families of their own. They would have to be slaves—no longer able to decide where they would live or what they would do.

The night before the oldest daughter was to be sold; she washed her stockings and put them in front of the fire to dry. Then the family went to sleep.

In the morning the daughter saw a lump in her stocking. Reaching in, she found a small, heavy bag. It had gold inside! There was enough to provide food for the family and money for her dowry. Oh, how happy they were!

The next morning, another bag with gold was found. Imagine! Two of the daughters would now be saved.

The next night, the father planned to stay awake to find out who was helping his daughters. He dozed off, but heard a small "clink" as another bag landed in the room. Quickly he jumped up and ran out the door. Who did he catch ducking around the corner?

Nicholas, the young man who lived with his uncle. "Nicholas, it is you! Thank you for helping us—I hardly know what to say!" Nicholas said, "Please, do not thank me—thank God that your prayers have been answered. Do not tell others about me."

Nicholas continued helping people. He always tried to help secretly. He didn't want any attention or thanks. Years passed and he was chosen to be a bishop. Bishops look after their people as shepherds look after their sheep. And that is what Nicholas did. When there wasn't any food, he found wheat; so no one went

hungry. He always helped people in trouble. All his life Nicholas showed people how to love God and care for each other.

The people loved Nicholas. After he died, they told stories of the good and kind things Nicholas had done. Sailors took these stories about Nicholas everywhere they went. Some of the stories were about his special care for children—helping and protecting them when danger threatened. And so more and more people learned about good, kind Nicholas. They wanted to be like him. He is an example of how we should live. And that is why he became a saint .

This is the story of the real Santa Claus, St. Nicholas. To this day people say that St. Nicholas, or Santa, is the special friend of children.

Hymn – A song for St. Nicholas (Tune ‘Zie Ginds Komt de Stoomboot’)

The saint now is coming  
We all sing with cheer.  
A day of rejoicing  
His message is clear.  
We love you, St Nicholas,  
Your praises we sing,  
Awaiting the good news  
This glad season brings.

Strong winds of December  
The cold in the air  
Good children be ready  
Nice presents he bears.  
The old and the young—  
all his coming await,  
O true Father Christmas,\*\*  
O please, don't be late.

The great saint of caring  
Our bishop we hail,  
A true friend of children,  
Your legends and tales  
All speak of the way  
We should all work and play,  
Preparing for Christmas  
That day of all days.

Text: J M ROSENTHAL  
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# ZIE GINDS KOMT DE STOOMBOT

1. Zie ginds komt de stoomboot uit Span - je weer aan, Hij  
*Opgewekt*

brengt ons Sint Ni - co - laas, ik zie hem al staan. Hoe hup - pelt zijn paard - je het

dek op en neer, Hoe waai - en de wim - pels al heen en al weer.

2. Zijn knecht staat te lachen en roept ons reeds toe:  
 „Wie zoet is krijgt lekkers, wie stout is de roe!”  
 Och lieve Sint Nicolaas, och kom ook bij mij,  
 En rijd toch ons huisje vooral niet voorbij !

## Personal details

**Name:** Nicholas of Myra (also known as Nicholas of Bari)

**Popular Names:** Sinterklaas and Santa Claus

**Distinguishing features:** long white hair, beard and mustache; deep voice; since the 17th century sometimes wears glasses

**Clothing:** a bishop's outfit composed of a red stole over a white cassock, a long red cape with golden embroidery, a mitre-shaped red hat with gold trim and applique cross, a long golden shepherd's staff, gloves and quite a few jewelled rings.

**Year of Birth:** 271 A.D.

**Birth Place:** Patara, Turkey (a port town)

**Residence:** Spain

**Profession:** miracle-worker and protector of children, sailors, unmarried girls, merchants and those wrongly accused of crimes

**Date of Death:** December 6th, 342 or 343 A.D.

**Burial spot:** Myra, in the southwest of present-day Turkey

**Feast Day:** December 6th (but traditionally celebrated on the evening of December 5th)

**Major achievements:** survived the Roman Emperor Diocletian's dungeons; became Archbishop of Myra; attended the Council of Nicaea of 325; was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church; was reburied in 1087 in a mausoleum specially built for his remains in Bari, Italy; became internationally famous from the 10th century onwards; started the Santa Claus tradition in North America; and turned the eve of his feast day into the Netherlands' most enjoyable tradition.

**St. Nicholas websites:**

<http://www.stnicholascenter.org/>

Advent Saint: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=235>

Ideas for teachers: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=158>

Crossword: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=176>

Hymns: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=505>

Tunes: <http://www.sinterklaasje.nl/liedjes.html>

Activities to print: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=482>

Poetry and stories: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=155#POEMS>

Puzzles: [http://www.stnicholascenter.org/jigsaw\\_puzzles.html](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/jigsaw_puzzles.html)

Around the world: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=76>

Symbols: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=51>

Icons: [http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=398&category\\_sakey=383](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=398&category_sakey=383)

Art: [http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=398&category\\_sakey=347](http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=398&category_sakey=347)

Recipes: [http://www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk/about\\_the/holidays\\_and/the\\_feast\\_of\\_saint/sinterklaas\\_recipes#Bisschopswijnmulledwine](http://www.netherlands-embassy.org.uk/about_the/holidays_and/the_feast_of_saint/sinterklaas_recipes#Bisschopswijnmulledwine)

Books: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=203>

Plays: <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/Brix?pageID=139>