

## Festive celebrations

# St. Nicholas Day

Every December, people around the world celebrate the story of St Nicholas, a 3rd-century bishop who is thought to have been a real person. Long before Santa Claus filled stockings, St. Nicholas was known for helping those in need and protecting children. His reported kindness has inspired many of the traditions we associate with Christmas today.

### Did you know?

- St. Nicholas is not the same as Father Christmas or Santa Claus, although some people confuse the two. He is believed by Catholics to be the patron saint of children, sailors, merchants and brewers – amongst many other things.
- There are a number of miracles and legends shared about St. Nicholas; one is that he resurrected three children when they were killed.

### What is the story of St. Nicholas?

Thought to have been born in the year 270 AD, St. Nicholas was a Christian bishop living in the region we now know as Turkey. Stories tell of him coming from a wealthy family, and dedicating his life to helping others, giving away much of his own wealth to people who were struggling.

As part of his faith, Nicolas is said to have travelled on a pilgrimage to Palestine and Egypt. During this time, many Christians were persecuted, and it is said that Nicholas was imprisoned for his beliefs.

The date traditionally linked to his death is 6th December, which is known to many Christians as the Feast Day of Saint Nicholas.

## Cultures and customs

- In places like **Germany**, **Belgium** and parts of **France**, children leave out their shoes or boots on 5th December. They wake up to find them filled with small presents – such as fruit, nuts or sweets – that are said to have been left by St Nicholas himself.
- In the **Netherlands** he is known as *Sinterklass*, who arrives by boat from Spain and rides a white horse, handing out sweets.
- In **Ukraine**, *Sviatyi Mykolai* – the Ukrainian name for St. Nicholas – brings small gifts or coins for children and is celebrated on 19th December.
- In **Poland**, *Święty Mikołaj* arrives on 6th December, leaving sweets or presents for well-behaved children.
- In the **Czech Republic**, Svatý Mikuláš visits on 5th December, often with an angel and a devil, reminding children to be good.

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