St. Nicholas, Bishop

Saint Nicholas Day, also called the Feast of Saint Nicholas, is observed on 6 December or on the eve of 5 December in Western Christian countries, and on 19 December in Eastern Christian countries using the old church Calendar. It is the feast day of Nicholas of Myra with particular regard to his reputation as a bringer of gifts.

On December 6th, Saint Nicholas Day recognizes the third-century saint who became an inspiration for the modern-day Santa Claus. St. Nicholas is known for selling all his possessions and giving his money to the poor. Raised as a devout Christian, St. Nicholas dedicated his whole life to serving the sick and suffering.

Legendary stories about St. Nicholas later become part of the inspiration for the modern-day Santa Claus. For example, during the third century, a daughter's chances of marriage increased when her father offered a large dowry to prospective husbands. One story tells of a poor father with three daughters. He had no dowry to offer. Traditionally, families left their shoes by the fires at night so that they could dry. On three separate occasions, St. Nicholas provided a dowry for each girl. Legend says he made gold appear in their shoes, drying by the fire.
While St. Nicholas Day is not to be confused with Christmas, though similarities do exist. Traditions include leaving gifts in shoes (or stockings) or the exchange of small gifts. Another tradition suggests leaving treats for good boys and girls. However, the naughty ones receive a twig or chunk of coal.

**Interesting facts associated with St. Nicholas:**
- He is the patron saint of a great many causes. Some of the causes include sailors, travelers, clergy, school children, and thieves, to name a few.
- He was born in the village of Patar, located on the southeastern coast of modern-day Turkey.
- Buried in a tomb in Myra, water believed to have healing powers formed in his grave. It is called the Manna of Saint Nicholas.
- December 6th is also known as The Feast of St. Nicholas, widely celebrated in Europe.

**How to observe St. Nicholas Day**

Incorporate some Saint Nicholas Day traditions into your holiday season. Slip a gift or surprise into someone’s shoe. It doesn’t have to be anything elaborate.

- You could leave a special note or a small wrapped piece of chocolate.
- Leave a coin or an ornament for the tree.
- Tuck a stress ball or a new pair of socks into a loved one’s pair of shoes.
- A fun air freshener or small bath bomb are two more fun gifts to sneak into a pair of shoes.

**St. Nicholas Day History**

St. Nicholas Day is celebrated worldwide on the anniversary of his death, December 6th. In the European countries of Germany, boys have traditionally dressed like bishops and begged alms for the poor. In Ukraine and Poland, children wait for St. Nicholas to come and to put a present under their pillows provided that the children were good during the year. Children who behaved badly may expect to find a twig or a piece of coal under their pillows. In the Netherlands, Dutch children put out a clog filled with hay and a carrot for Saint Nicholas’ horse. On Saint Nicholas Day, gifts are tagged with personal humorous rhymes written by the sender. In the United States, one custom associated with Saint Nicholas Day is children leaving their shoes in the foyer on Saint Nicholas Eve in hope that Saint Nicholas will place some coins on the soles.

The American Santa Claus, as well as the British Father Christmas, derive from Saint Nicholas. "Santa Claus" is itself derived in part from the Dutch Sinterklaas, the saint’s name in that language. However, the gift-giving associated with these descendant figures is associated with Christmas Day rather than Saint Nicholas Day itself. Saint Nicholas saved three children lost in the countryside. These children were kidnapped by
a butcher before being saved by Saint Nicholas and returned to their parents. European people celebrate Christmas from 5-25 December. The U.S., however, doesn't publicly celebrate Saint Nicholas' Day.