

ST. NICHOLAS WALK

A fascinating Yuletide look in York Minster at the life and legends of St Nicholas-the origin of Santa Claus

ST. NICHOLAS OF MYRA/BARI

Died 342/3. Feast Day 6th December

Patron Saint of Russia, Greece and Aberdeen

Children, Pawnbrokers, Travellers & Sailors, Clerks and Scholars & Against Fire

Penitent Prostitutes, Unmarried girls, Merchants, Perfumiers and Apothecaries

He was buried at Myra (modern Mugla).

Body carried off by Merchants of Bari, Italy, in 1087. They stole his body from area under Muslim rule. Landed at Bari 9th May, 1087, (Feast of his Translation) and buried in Church of St. Stephen, and over 30 people cured from illnesses. His tomb oozed sweet perfume hence patron of perfumiers and apothecaries. One of the most popular Saints in East and West - over 400 churches in England to St. Nicholas. Not much known of life except that he was Bishop of Myra in 4th Century. From Patara, Lycia. Possibly in prison during Diocletian's persecution late 3rd Century. Said to have been at Council of Nicaea in 325, and to have refuted Arianism and according to one story to have hit Arius on the jaw!

In 18th and 19th C was a custom in the Low Countries for somebody to dress as a Bishop and distribute presents to good children, on Eve of St. Nicholas (5th Dec). United it to Nordic folk legends of a magician on a sleigh drawn by reindeer who gave presents to good children and punished naughty, possibly derived from Woden and his 8 legged horse Slepnir. Reached England C.1840, via Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam, Santa Nikolaus - Santa Klaus

Dutch Legends. Accompanied by Zwarte Piet, a moor, from Madrid on his arrival. There are now many Zwarte Piets accompanying him. St. Nicholas lives in Spain with moors. Zwarte Piet was originally a Moorish slave or one of 3 Kings!

LEGENDS OF ST. NICHOLAS

Nativity. Stands up in Bath on first day and praises God

Became Monk of Monastery of Holy Zion, Myra, made Abbot, and Bishop of Myra by popular acclaim.

3 girls saved from prostitution by money passed through window to provide dowry on 3 successive nights.

3 boys pickled by innkeeper, to feed guests during famine, resurrected.

Famine relieved by grain ship for Alexandria. Commanded to unload at Myra and miraculously refilled at sea.

His tomb produced healing oil or perfume at both Myra and Bari.

Dishonest Christian owed Jew money. Jew took him to court. Christian took money in hollow staff. When called to witness he gave the Jew the staff to hold and swore he had given money back. As he went out he was run over and the staff broke open. Jew converted and asked Nicholas to restore Christian to life.

Most of these legends are illustrated in York Minster's St Nicholas chapel in the North Transept.

