

3// HERE BEGINNETH THE LIFE OF ST. NICHOLAS THE BISHOP

Nicholas, citizen of the city of Patras, was born of rich and holy kin, and his father was Epiphanes and his mother Johane. He was begotten in the first flower of their age, and from that time forthon they lived in continence and led an heavenly life. Then the first day that he was washed and bained [bathed], he addressed him right up in the bason, and he would not take the breast nor the pap but once on the Wednesday and once on the Friday, and in his young age he eschewed the plays and japes of other young children. He used and haunted gladly holy church; and all that he might understand of holy scripture he executed it in deed and work after his power.

THE GIFT OF GOLD FOR THE THREE DAUGHTERS

And when his father and mother were departed out of this life, he began to think how he might distribute his riches, and not to the praising of the world but to the honour and glory of God. And it was so that one, his neighbour, had then three daughters, virgins, and he was a nobleman: but for the poverty of them together, they were constrained, and in very purpose to abandon them to the sin of lechery, so that by the gain and winning of their infamy they might be sustained. And when the holy man Nicholas knew hereof he had great horror of this villainy, and threw by night secretly into the house of the man a mass of gold wrapped in a cloth. And when the man arose in the morning, he found this mass of gold, and rendered to God therefor great thankings, and therewith he married his oldest daughter.

Nicholas is said of Nichos, which is to say victory, and of laos, people, so Nicholas is as much as to say as victory of people, that is, victory of sins, which be foul people. Or else he is said, victory of people, because he enseigned and taught much people by his doctrine to overcome vices and sins. Or Nicholas is said of Nichor, that is the resplendour or shining of the people, for he had in him things that make shining and clearness. After this St. Ambrose saith: The word of God, very confession, and holy thought, make a man clean. And the doctors of Greece write his legend, and some others say that Methodius the patriarch wrote it in Greek, and John the deacon translated it into Latin and adjousted thereto many things.

And a little while after this holy servant of God threw in another mass of gold, which the man found, and thanked God, and purposed to wake, for to know him that so had aided him in his poverty. And after a few days Nicholas doubled the mass of gold, and cast it into the house of this man. He awoke by the sound of the gold, and followed Nicholas, which fled from him, and he said to him: Sir, flee not away so but that I may see and know thee.

Then he ran after him more hastily, and knew that it was Nicholas; and anon he kneeled down, and would have kissed his feet, but the holy man would not, but required him not to tell nor discover this thing as long as he lived.

ST. NICHOLAS IS CHOSEN BISHOP OF MYRA

After this the bishop of Mirea died and other bishops assembled for to purvey to this church a bishop. And there was, among the others, a bishop of great authority, and all the election was in him. And when he had warned all for to be in fastings and in prayers, this bishop heard that night a voice which said to him that, at the hour of matins, he should take heed to the doors of the church, and him that should come first to the church, and have the name of Nicholas they should sacre him bishop. And he showed this to the other bishops and admonished them for to be all in prayers; and he kept the doors. And this was a marvellous thing, for at the hour of matins, like as he had been sent from God, Nicholas arose tofore all other. And the bishop took him when he was come and demanded of him his name. And he, which was simple as a dove, inclined his head, and said: I have to name Nicholas.

Then the bishop said to him: Nicholas, servant and friend of God, for your holiness ye shall be bishop of this place.

And sith they brought him to the church, howbeit that he refused it strongly, yet they set him in the chair. And he followed, as he did tofore in all things, in humility and honesty of manners. He woke in prayer and made his body lean, he eschewed company of women, he was humble in receiving all things, profitable in speaking, joyous in admonishing, and cruel in correcting.

THE MARINERS SAVED FROM THE TEMPEST

It is read in a chronicle that, the blessed Nicholas was at the Council of Nice; and on a day, as a ship with mariners were in perishing on the sea, they prayed and required devoutly Nicholas, servant of God, saying: If those things that we have heard of thee said be true, prove them now.

And anon a man appeared in his likeness, and said: Lo! see ye me not? ye called me, and then he began to help them in their exploit of the sea, and anon the tempest ceased.

And when they were come to his church, they knew him without any man to show him to them, and yet they had never seen him. And then they thanked God and him of their deliverance. And he bade them to attribute it to the mercy of God, and to their belief, and nothing to his merits.

THE MIRACLE OF THE WHEAT

It was so on a time that all the province of St. Nicolas suffered great famine, in such wise that victual failed. And then this holy man heard say that certain ships laden with wheat were arrived in the haven. And anon he went thither and prayed the mariners that they would succour the perished at least with an hundred muyes [about 400 bushels] of wheat of every ship. And they said: Father we dare not, for it is meted and measured, and we must give reckoning thereof in the garners of the Emperor in Alexandria.

And the holy man said to them: Do this that I have said to you, and I promise, in the truth of God, that it shall not be lessed or minished when ye shall come to the garners. And when they

had delivered so much out of every ship, they came into Alexandria and delivered the measure that they had received. And then they recounted the miracle to the ministers of the Emperor, and worshipped and praised strongly God and his servant Nicholas.

Then this holy man distributed the wheat to every man after that he had need, in such wise that it sufficed for two years, not only for to sell, but also to sow.

THE DEVIL AND THE BURNING OIL

And in this country the people served idols and worshipped the false image of the cursed Diana. And to the time of this holy man, many of them had some customs of the paynims, for to sacrifice to Diana under a sacred tree; but this good man made them of all the country to cease then these customs, and commanded to cut off the tree.

Then the devil was angry and wroth against him, and made an oil that burned, against nature, in water, and burned stones also. And then he transformed him in the guise of a religious woman, and put him in a little boat, and encountered pilgrims that sailed in the sea towards this holy saint, and areasoned them thus and said: I would fain go to this holy man, but I may not, wherefore I pray you to bear this oil into his church, and for the remembrance of me, that ye anoint the walls of the hall.

And anon he vanished away.

Then they saw anon after another ship with honest persons, among whom there was one like to Nicholas, which spake to them softly: What hath this woman said to you, and what hath she brought?

And they told to him all by order. And he said to them: This is the evil and foul Diana; and to the end that ye know that I say truth, cast that oil into the sea.

And when they had cast it, a great fire caught it in the sea, and they saw it long burn against nature. Then they came to this holy man and said to him: Verily thou art he that appeared to us in the sea and deliveredst us from the sea and awaits of the devil.

ST. NICHOLAS INTERCEDES FOR THE THREE PRINCES

And in this time certain men rebelled against the emperor; and the emperor sent against them three princes – Nepotian, Ursyn, and Apollyn. And they came into the port Adriatic, for the wind, which was contrary to them; and the blessed Nicholas commanded them to dine with him, for he would keep his people from the ravin [robbery, rapine] that they made.

And whilst they were at dinner, the consul, corrupt by money, had commanded three innocent knights to be beheaded. And when the blessed Nicholas knew this, he prayed these three princes that they would much hastily go with him. And when they were come where they should be beheaded, he found them on their knees, and blindfold, and the righter [executioner] brandished his sword over their heads. Then St. Nicholas, embraced with the love of God, set

him hardily against the righter, and took the sword out of his hand, and threw it from him, and unbound the innocents, and led them with him all safe.

And anon he went to the judgment to the consul, and found the gates closed, which anon he opened by force. And the consul came anon and saluted him: and this holy man having this salutation in despite, said to him: Thou enemy of God, corrupter of the law,. wherefore hast thou consented to so great evil and felony, how darest thou look on us?

And when he had sore chidden and reproved him, he repented, and at the prayer of the three princes he received him to penance.

After, when the messengers of the emperor had received his benediction, they made their gear ready and departed, and subdued their enemies to the empire without shedding of blood and sith returned to the emperor, and were worshipfully received.

And after this it happed that some other in the emperor's house had envy on the weal of these three princes, and accused them to the emperor of high treason, and did so much by prayer and by gifts that they caused the emperor to be so full of ire that he commanded them to prison, and without other demand, he commanded that they should be slain that same night.

And when they knew it by their keeper, they rent their clothes and wept bitterly; and then Nepotian remembered him how St. Nicholas had delivered the three innocents, and admonested the others that they should require his aid and help. And thus as they prayed St. Nicholas appeared to them, and after appeared to Constantine the emperor, and said to him: Wherefore hast thou taken these three princes with so great wrong, and hast judged them to death without trespass? Arise up hastily, and command that they be not executed, or I shall pray to God that he move battle against thee, in which thou shalt be overthrown, and shalt be made meat to beasts.

And the emperor demanded: What art thou that art entered by night into my palace and durst say to me such words?

And he said to him: I am Nicholas bishop of Mirea.

And in like wise he appeared to the provost, and feared him, saying with a fearful voice: Thou that hast lost mind and wit, wherefore hast thou consented to the death of innocents? Go forth anon and do thy part to deliver them, or else thy body shall rot, and be eaten with worms, and thy meiny shall be destroyed.

And he asked him: Who art thou that so menaces me? And he answered: Know thou that I am Nicholas, the bishop of the city of Mirea.

Then that one awoke that other, and each told to other their dreams, and anon sent for them that were in prison, to whom the emperor said: What art magic or sorcery can ye, that ye have this night by illusion caused us to have such dreams?

And they said that they were none enchanter ne knew no witchcraft, and also that they had not deserved the sentence of death. Then the emperor said to them: know ye well a man named Nicholas?

And when they heard speak of the name of the holy saint, they held up their hands towards heaven, and prayed our Lord that by the merits of St. Nicholas they might be delivered of this present peril. And when the emperor had heard of them the life and miracles of St. Nicholas, he said to them: Go ye forth, and yield ye thankings to God, which hath delivered you by the prayer of this holy man, and worship ye him; and bear ye to him of your jewels, and pray ye him that he threaten me no more, but that he pray for me and for my realm unto our Lord.

And a while after, the said princes went unto the holy man, and fell down on their knees humbly at his feet, saying: Verily thou art the sergeant of God, and the very worshipper and lover of Jesu Christ. And when they had all told this said thing by order, he lift up his hands to heaven and gave thankings and praisings to God, and sent again the princes, well informed, into their countries.

THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF ST. NICHOLAS

And when it pleased our Lord to have him depart out this world, he prayed our Lord that he would send him his angels; and inclining his head he saw the angels come to him, whereby he knew well that he should depart, and began this holy psalm: *In te domine speravi* ["I have hope in thee O Lord"], unto, *in manus tuas*, and so saying: "Lord, into thine hands I commend my spirit," he rendered up his soul and died, the year of our Lord three hundred and forty- three, with great melody sung of the celestial company.

And when he was buried in a tomb of marble, a fountain of oil sprang out from the head unto his feet; and unto this day holy oil issueth out of his body, which is much available to the health of sicknesses of many men. And after him in his see succeeded a man of good and holy life, which by envy was put out of his bishopric. And when he was out of his see the oil ceased to run, and when he was restored again thereto, the oil ran again.

THE TRANSLATION OF HIS BODY TO BARI

Long after this the Turks destroyed the city of Mirea, and then came thither forty- seven knights of Bari, and four monks showed to them the sepulchre of St. Nicholas. And they opened it and found the bones swimming in the oil, and they bare them away honourably into the city of Bari, in the year of our Lord ten hundred and eightyseven.

MIRACLES OF ST. NICHOLAS

The Cheated Jew

There was a man that had borrowed of a Jew a sum of money, and sware upon the altar of St. Nicholas that he would render and pay it again as soon as he might, and gave none other

pledge. And this man held this money so long, that the Jew demanded and asked his money, and he said that he had paid him.

Then the Jew made him to come tofore the law in judgment, and the oath was given to the debtor. And he brought with him an hollow staff, in which he had put the money in gold, and he leant upon the staff. And when he should make his oath and swear, he delivered his staff to the Jew to keep and hold whilst he should swear, and then sware that he had delivered to him more than he ought to him. And when he had made the oath, he demanded his staff again of the Jew, and he nothing knowing of his malice delivered it to him.

Then this deceiver went his way, and anon after, him list sore to sleep, and laid him in the way, and a cart with four wheels came with great force and slew him, and brake the staff with gold that it spread abroad. And when the Jew heard this, he came thither sore moved, and saw the fraud, and many said to him that he should take to him the gold; and he refused it, saying, But if he that was dead were not raised again to life by the merits of St. Nicholas, he would not receive it, and if he came again to life, he would receive baptism and become Christian. Then he that was dead arose, and the Jew was christened.

The Jew and the Thieves

Another Jew saw the virtuous miracles of St. Nicholas, and did do make an image of the saint, and set it in his house, and commanded him that he should keep well his house when he went out, and that he should keep well all his goods, saying to him: Nicholas, lo! here be all my goods, I charge thee to keep them, and if thou keep them not well, I shall avenge me on thee in beating and tormenting thee.

And on a time, when the Jew was out, thieves came and robbed all his goods, and left, unborne away, only the image. And when the Jew came home he found him robbed of all his goods. He reasoned the image saying these words: Sir Nicholas, I had set you in my house for to keep my goods from thieves, wherefore have ye not kept them? Ye shall receive sorrow and torments, and shall have pain for the thieves. I shall avenge my loss, and refrain [subdue] my woodness [madness] in beating thee.

And then took the Jew the image, and beat it, and tormented it cruelly. Then happed a great marvel, for when the thieves departed the goods, the holy saint, like as he had been in his array, appeared to the thieves, and said to them: Wherefore have I been beaten so cruelly for you and have so many torments? See how my body is hewed and broken; see how that the red blood runneth down by my body; go ye fast and restore it again, or else the ire of God Almighty shall make you as to be one out of his wit, and that all men shall know your felony, and that each of you shall be hanged.

And they said: Who art thou that sayest to us such things? And he said to them: I am Nicholas the servant of Jesu Christ, whom the Jew hath so cruelly beaten for his goods that ye bare away.

Then they were afeard, and came to the Jew, and heard what he had done to the image, and they told him the miracle, and delivered to him again all his goods. And thus came the thieves to the way of truth, and the Jew to the way of Jesu Christ.

The Child Revived on St. Nicholas's Day

A man, for the love of his son, that went to school for to learn, hallowed, every year, the feast of St. Nicholas much solemnly. On a time it happed that the father had do make ready the dinner, and called many clerks to this dinner. And the devil came to the gate in the habit of a pilgrim for to demand alms: and the father anon commanded his son that he should give alms to the pilgrim. He followed him as he went for to give to him alms, and when he came to the quarfox [four meeting ways] the devil caught the child and strangled him.

And when the father heard this he sorrowed much strongly and wept, and bare the body into his chamber, and began to cry for sorrow, and say: Bright sweet son, how is it with thee? St. Nicholas, is this the guerdon that ye have done to me because I have so long served you?

And as he said these words, and other semblable, the child opened his eyes, and awoke like as he had been asleep, and arose up tofore all, and was raised from death to life.

The Miracle of the Cups

Another nobleman prayed to St. Nicholas that he would, by his merits, get of our Lord that he might have a son, and promised that he would bring his son to the church, and would offer up to him a cup of gold. Then the son was born and came to age, and the father commanded to make a cup, and the cup pleased him much, and he retained it for himself, and did do make another of the same value.

And they went sailing in a ship toward the church of St. Nicholas, and when the child would have filled the cup, he fell into the water with the cup, and anon was lost, and came no more up.

Yet nevertheless the father performed his avow, in weeping much tenderly for his son; and when he came to the altar of St. Nicholas he offered the second cup, and when he had offered it, it fell down, like as one had cast it under the altar. And he took it up and set it again upon the altar, and then yet was it cast further than tofore and yet he took it up and remised [put] it the third time upon the altar; and it was thrown again further than tofore.

Of which thing all they that were there marvelled, and men came for to see this thing. And anon, the child that had fallen in the sea, came again prestly [quickly] before them all, and brought in his hands the first cup, and recounted to the people that, anon as he was fallen in the sea, the blessed St. Nicholas came and kept him that he had none harm. And thus his father was glad and offered to St. Nicholas both the two cups.

The Kidnapped Boy

There was another rich man that by the merits of St. Nicholas had a son, and called him: *Deus dedit*, "God gave." And this rich man did do make a chapel of St. Nicholas in his dwellingplace; and did do hallow every year the feast of St. Nicholas.

And this manor was set by the land of the Agarians. This child was taken prisoner, and deputed to serve the king.

The year following, [on] the day that his father held devoutly the feast of St. Nicholas, the child held a precious cup tofore the king, and remembered his prise [capture], the sorrow of his friends, and the joy that was made that day in the house of his father, and began for to sigh sore high. And the king demanded him what ailed him and the cause of his sighing; and he told him every word wholly.

And when the king knew it he said to him: Whatsomever thy Nicholas do or do not, thou shalt abide here with us. And suddenly there blew a much strong wind, that made all the house to tremble, and the child was ravished [taken away] with the cup, and was set tofore the gate where his father held the solemnity of St. Nicholas, in such wise that they all demeaned great joy.

And some say that this child was of Normandy, and went oversea, and was taken by the Sowdan [Sultan], which made him oft to be beaten tofore him. And as he was beaten on a St. Nicholas day, and was after set in prison, he prayed to St. Nicholas as well for his beating that he suffered, as for the great joy that he was wont to have on that day of St. Nicholas.

And when he had long prayed and sighed he fell asleep, and when he awoke he found himself in the chapel of his father, whereas was much joy made for him.

Let us then pray to this blessed saint that he will pray for us to our Lord Jesu Christ which is blessed *in secula seculorum* [for ever and ever]. Amen.

The [iconography of St. Nicholas](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

Scanned by Robert Blackmon. bob_blackmon@mindspring.com.

This text was taken from the [Internet Medieval Source Book](#). The Sourcebook is a collection of public domain and copy-permitted texts related to medieval and Byzantine history.

Permission is granted for electronic copying, distribution in print form for educational purposes and personal use. If you do reduplicate the document, indicate the source. No permission is granted for commercial use.

E-text © Paul Halsall, September 2000
halsall@fordham.edu

Reformatted with paragraphs, rubrics, italics, and explanatory insertions by Richard Stracke, rstracke@aug.edu