**St. Nicholas**

More than 1,600 years ago, St. Nicholas was born not far from Myra, in a land that is  now part of the country of Turkey. In those days Orthodox Christians were persecuted for their faith. It wasn’t easy to be a Christian. Many of them were tortured and executed because they believed in Christ.

Nicholas was taught by his parents to love the Lord with his whole mind, heart, soul, and with ail his strength. When they died he inherited their money. He used this to help the poor, the hungry, and the sick. Whenever he helped anyone he did it secretly, so that only God would know, He did not want praise from people; he wanted his reward to be only in Heaven.

After he gave away the money his parents had left him he decided to become a monk. He went to a monastery where he lived and worked and prayed, intending to spend the rest of his life repenting of his sins. But soon it became clear that God wanted him to be a priest, and so he began to study the Law of God.

In the year 325 a great Council of the Orthodox Church was held in the city of Nicea. 317 bishops from all over the world came. At this Council part of the Creed we sing in every Divine Liturgy was written down and St. Nicholas had a wonderful opportunity to defend the teachings of the Church against Arius who denied that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh and was leading many people astray by his false teaching.

St. Nicholas followed the words of our Lord, *Lay up treasure for yourself in Heaven*, by saying his prayers every day, by fasting, and by performing many good deeds. God was so pleased that He worked many miracles through him. Because he was able to calm storms on the sea he became known as the patron saint of sailors. Because he protected children, he is also a patron of young people. He was able to multiply food, just as our Saviour did with the fish and loaves, and in this way he once kept a whole city from starving.

People began to call him a “wonderworker” They were so inspired by his life of service to others that many of them, too, began to lead holy lives, filled with good deeds.

.People all over the world know and love St. Nicholas in America, Germany, Holland, and many other countries know about him. Unfortunately very few know that he was a Bishop of the Orthodox Church. American children don’t know that Santa Claus is St. Nicholas (Santa comes from the Latin for “saint”; Claus is a nickname for “Nicholas”). They know mostly about his gift giving to children; they don’t realize that he was so generous because he loved Christ more than anything else and wanted to serve Him by helping others.

Orthodox children are fortunate to know the whole story of St. Nicholas, and not just one small part of it. We should try to tell our non-Orthodox friends and neighbors the truth about “Santa Claus” so that they too, can realize how important and wonderful it is to follow Christ!