

CELEBRATE ADVENT SAINTS

Feast of St. Nicholas

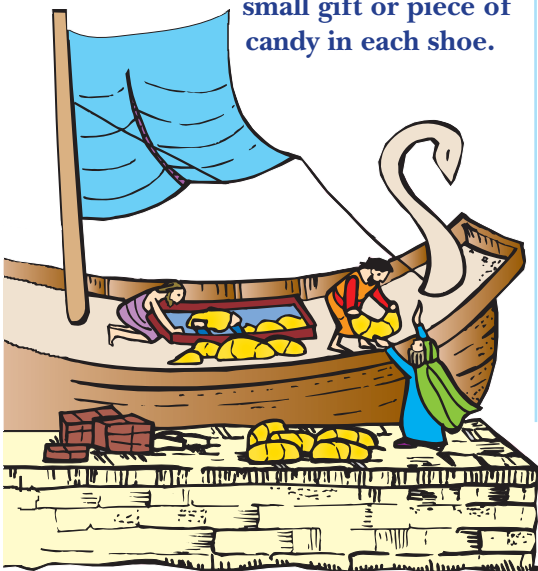
St. Nicholas, a bishop in 4th-century Turkey, is one of the saints most revered among Orthodox Christians. To this day Christians tell stories of his concern for the poor.

Once Bishop Nicholas heard a poor man had too little money for his three daughters to marry. Secretly at night he tossed bags of his own money through the poor man's window.

Another story remembers how Nicholas helped his people during a famine. At the wharf ships loaded with grain arrived *en route* to Rome. Bishop Nicholas asked the captain for grain to keep his people from starving. The captain insisted the grain belonged to the emperor, who would punish him for shorting the amount of grain in the shipment.

Nicholas suggested that he take just a little grain for the poor from each ship. The captain finally agreed. When he arrived in Rome, the emperor's soldiers weighed the grain and found not a kernel missing—a miracle of justice.

Celebrate St. Nicholas's feast day by having family members put a shoe outside their doors before going to bed on December 5. Imitate St. Nicholas and put a small gift or piece of candy in each shoe.



Our Lady of Guadalupe

In 1519, the Spanish began the conquest of the Aztec empire in Mexico and through battle and disease defeated the indigenous peoples. Missionary priests accompanied the soldiers to teach the people about Jesus and baptize them as Christians.

On December 9, 1531, an Aztec man is on his way to Mass when on a hilltop he hears birds singing and a woman's voice call his name in his own language, "Juan Diego." Juan turns and sees a beautiful woman with brown skin and dark eyes like his own, who is wearing a turquoise cloak covered with stars.

The woman explains that she is Mary, the holy Virgin and Mother of God. She asks Juan to tell the bishop to build a church on this hill in her honor. "In this place I will show all my love and compassion. I am a loving mother to all who live in this land. I will hear their prayers and heal their suffering."

Juan leaves immediately to do as the Lady asks. After a long wait the bishop welcomes Juan and listens to his message but refuses to believe. Juan returns to the Lady. "You have sent me to walk in places where I do not belong," he tells her. "You will have to send someone more important."

"I have many servants, but I send you," the Lady says and sends Juan to try again. This time the bishop asks Juan where he saw this lady and what she looks like. "Bring me a sign that proves she is the Mother of God," he requests.

Juan tells the Lady that the bishop wants a sign. "Return tomorrow," she says. But Juan cannot return because he must



find help for his sick uncle. When he passes near the hilltop later that week, the Lady asks "Where are you going?" She tells Juan he will find roses on the hilltop to take to the bishop.

Finding roses blooming in December surprises Juan. He cuts them, carries them to the bishop in his cloak (called a *tilma*), and explains how he found them on the hilltop where only cactus grow.

As Juan opens his *tilma*, the roses tumble to the floor and the bishop falls on his knees. Juan wonders why. Then he sees on his cloak the image of the Lady, who spoke to him.

"I will build a church where the Mother of God has asked," the bishop promises. The church stands in Mexico City to this day and enshrines Juan Diego's *tilma*. Within six years of Our Lady of Guadalupe's appearance to Juan Diego, nine million Aztec people had been baptized as Christians.