

Happy St. Nicholas Day! In celebration here is a tribute from the Armenian tradition adapted from the Armenian Menologian (Domar by the AOTRI) and Canonical Hymns:

+**Nicholas of Myra**, Bishop and Father of the Church was born in the Middle East in the fourth century. He was ordained a priest by his uncle. On his way in pilgrimage to the holy land, Nicholas was caught in the middle of a terrible storm. He began praying and calmed the stormy sea. Eventually he was ordained the bishop of Myra [Smyrna]. With great zeal he assumed his new position, especially focusing his energies on the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the widows and the orphans. He was known for his great love for children. A well-known story about Nicholas tells of how he helped three unfortunate young sisters who all had suitors but had no dowries to marry because their poor father could not even raise the money. When the first daughter was ready to marry, Bishop Nicholas thought of a way to give her money anonymously wishing to avoid notoriety. The good bishop tossed a bag of gold into the house at night. Later, when the second daughter prepared to marry, she too received a mysterious bag of gold. When the third daughter prepared to marry, the poor father of the three girls was determined to find out who had been so generous. So he kept watch and saw the bishop drop another bag of gold into the house. Some accounts state that Nicholas, (perhaps suspicious of being watched) climbed aloft the roof and dropped the third bag of gold down the chimney where it landed in a stocking hung there to dry (which is the reason we hang Christmas stockings to this day). When the father saw what had happened, Nicholas begged him to keep the secret, but, of course, the news got out. From then on, when someone received an unexpected gift, they often thanked St. Nicholas.

When the Emperor Licinius resumed the persecutions initiated by Diocletian, Nicholas was arrested and exiled. During his exile, he did not abandon his preaching of the Gospel. With the return of peace, he was restored to his Episcopal throne and he attended the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. It is said that during the Ecumenical Council Nicholas ended a debate with the arch-heretic Arius by punching him in the face for denying the divinity of Christ. The following year after the Council, Nicholas fell asleep in the Lord -peacefully and happy. He is considered a patron saint not only of sailors but also of children toward whom he had always given special attention. In America, he is often referred to as Santa Claus which is equivalent to the Armenian “Gaghant Baba.” He is considered the national saint of Russia. His popularity spread to the west when his relics were translated in 1087 A.D. to the city of Bari, Italy where a huge cathedral was built in his name.

*The bodiless angels were amazed, seeing the blessed Nicholas,  
Who in the flesh led an unearthly life  
By his prayers we beseech the forgiveness of our sins.*

*We who have sinned beseech You, O Holy Trinity!  
Remit our sins by the prayers of Nicholas  
By his prayers we beseech the forgiveness of our sins.*

-SHARAGAN TO ST. NICHOLAS THE WONDERWORKER - MODE 8