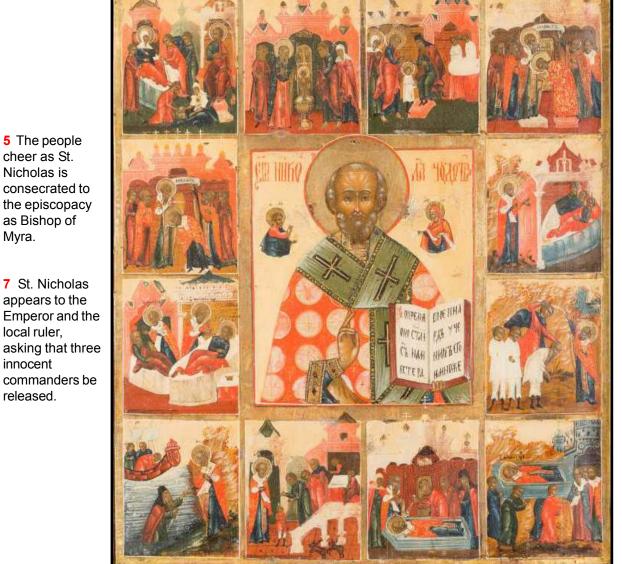# Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker of Myra in Lycia

1 The birth of St. Nicholas.

2 St. Nicholas is presented for Baptism.

3 St. Nicholas studies with the Bishop of Patara.

4 St. Nicholas is ordained to the priesthood .

5 The people cheer as St. Nicholas is consecrated to the episcopacy as Bishop of Myra.

6 St. Nicholas helps a father provide dowries for his three daughters by secretly leaving sacks of gold at their home.

7 St. Nicholas appears to the Emperor and the local ruler, asking that three innocent commanders be released.

8 The falsely accused commanders are freed as a result of St. Nicholas' intervention.

9 St. Nicholas saves Patriarch Athanasius and his companions after their ship capsizes during a violent storm. In thanksgiving, the Patriarch built a church in St. Nicholas' honor in Constantinople.

10 St. Nicholas miraculously intervenes and returns Basilios, who had been taken captive by pirates, to his family.

11 Upon his death in the year 343, St. Nicholas is buried in the church in Myra as his flock mourns the devastating loss of their beloved archpastor.

12 As war and strife in St. Nicholas' homeland increase, his relics are moved to Bari, Italy, where pilgrims from around the world visit and offer prayers for his intercession to this day.

Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker

Theophanes and Nonna were devout Christians living in the city of Patara, in what is now Turkey. They had waited many years for a child, and rejoiced in the year 270 when their son Nicholas was born [1] and baptized [2]. As a young child, Nicholas loved learning about the Church and holy things. His parents encouraged him to spend time with his uncle, the Bishop of Patara [3]. Seeing his nephew's loving nature and kind deeds over the years, his uncle ordained him to the priesthood [4]. As a priest, Nicholas faithfully served his people and shared all he had, including his inheritance after the death of his parents.

While he had hoped to become a monk, Saint Nicholas once heard a voice tell him, "If you hope to be given a crown from me, go and struggle for the good of the world." Saint Nicholas' life would be out among the people, not in the quiet of a monastery. Saint Nicholas was living in Myra, a town near Patara, when the Bishop of Myra died. The other bishops prayed all night for God's guidance in choosing the next bishop. The Lord told one of them that the first priest to enter the church was to be the new bishop of Myra. At sunrise, Saint Nicholas entered the church to pray. While he did not seek to become a bishop, he accepted the Lord's will when he had a vision of Jesus Christ holding a Gospel book and the Mother of God holding an omophorion, a vestment worn only by bishops. As he was consecrated Bishop of Myra, the people cheered [5].

One well-known story about Saint Nicholas relates how he helped an impoverished father of three daughters by dropping three sacks of gold through their window at night [6]. With the saint's gold, the girls would not be forced to beg in the street. Their father could offer dowries – gifts to their potential future husbands – which were expected in those days. There are many other stories of Saint Nicholas calming terrifying storms at sea, saving children from murderers, averting a famine, and helping people in desperate need.

At that time, the Emperor Diocletian, an enemy of the Christian faith, ordered the Christians throughout the Roman Empire to renounce Jesus Christ and worship the Roman gods. Saint Nicholas continued to preach openly. He was thrown into a crowded prison with other believers, beaten and starved. But he never stopped preaching and lifting the spirits of his fellow sufferers.

A new day for believers dawned when the Christian emperor Constantine ascended the throne. Christian prisoners were liberated, and Saint Nicholas returned to his flock. In the year 325, he attended the Ecumenical Council at Nicaea, at which the words of the Nicene Creed were basically agreed on by the whole Church. Once again, Saint Nicholas boldly defended the faith. When he heard the priest Arius proclaiming false teachings about Christ, he corrected him. When Arius continued, Saint Nicholas struck him, unable to listen to any more. The other bishops were horrified at this violent act and stripped Saint Nicholas of his rank. But then some of them saw the same vision of Jesus Christ and the Mother of God, with the Gospel book and omophorion, that Saint Nicholas had seen when he was called to be a bishop. Seeing this, the others restored Nicholas to his position.

Once, when he was away from Myra, Saint Nicholas was told that some falsely-accused men were about to be put to death. He hurried back to the place of execution and grabbed the sword right out of the executioner's hand. With him at the time were three commanders who had been sent by the Emperor to end a dangerous revolt. They met Saint Nicholas on their way back to the capital. When they arrived there, they were rewarded by the Emperor for their good work. But envious rivals whispered lies to the Emperor, claiming that they were plotting against him. Without investigating the charges, the Emperor imprisoned the commanders. The rivals also went to the local ruler of the city and convinced him that the commanders should be put to death. They did this so that the commanders would not have the chance to prove their innocence. That evening, as the terrified commanders awaited death in the morning, they remembered seeing Saint Nicholas seize the executioner's sword to save innocent lives. They began to pray that he would rescue them as well. Later that night, Saint Nicholas appeared in a vision to the sleeping Emperor and then to the ruler, demanding that the innocent commanders be released [7]. When morning came, the two men were amazed and disturbed to discover that they had both seen a stranger who dared to give them orders. The Emperor called the commanders before him, and they explained their innocence, telling him about Saint Nicholas' wonderful deeds. The Emperor, embarrassed at having imprisoned them without proof, freed them and told them to offer his thanks to Saint Nicholas for keeping him from the terrible sin of an unjust execution [8].

Saint Nicholas saved people from sin and danger even after his repose. Once, for example, an iconographer in Constantinople painted three large icons of Jesus Christ, the Mother of God, and Saint Nicholas. He stood them together as a group. But when Patriarch Athanasius saw the icons, he said that Nicholas, being the son of mere peasants, was not worthy to stand with Christ and His Mother, and he ordered the icon of Saint Nicholas to be placed in a storeroom. Weeks later, the Patriarch and other clergy, while traveling by ship to visit a sick woman in Myra, encountered a fierce storm. The ship capsized, and the passengers fell into the water. Remembering his arrogant dismissal of the Bishop of Myra, the Patriarch cried out, "Forgive me, Nicholas the Wonderworker, and save us from the depths of the sea!" Saint Nicholas suddenly appeared, righted the ship, and took the Patriarch by the hand so that he and the others could get back on and finish the voyage [9]. When the Patriarch returned to Constantinople, he laid the cornerstone for Saint Nicholas Church, and put the saint's stored icon in a place of honor.

Long after their beloved Bishop Nicholas had died, the people of Myra continued to celebrate his feast annually. One year, pirates swooped down on the town, stole valuable treasures from the church and kidnapped a young boy named Basilios. Their king gave him the job of pouring his wine daily. A year went by, and Basilios' sad parents decided not to celebrate Saint Nicholas' feast day. Instead they prayed quietly for their son's safety. At the very same time they were doing so, the pirate king was stunned to see Saint Nicholas appear and whisk Basilios away, returning him to his parents [10].

After his death in the year 343, Saint Nicholas was buried in the church in Myra [11]. During the years of war and strife that followed, Myra's Christians became worried that this might make it difficult for people to reach Saint Nicholas' tomb, so his relics were moved to Bari, Italy [12] to which pilgrims come from all over the world even to this day to honor the beloved saint.

O Holy Father Nicholas, pray unto God for us! ■