

*What is the meaning of gift-giving at Christmas?*

The gifts given by the Wise Men to the Infant Jesus are, of course, very probably the source of our present-day custom. We give, thus, to those we cherish, and this derivation is so direct that in many countries even today gifts are given on January 6 rather than December 25. January 6, the Twelfth Night, is believed to be the date on which the Wise Men appeared to the Holy Family, and is so observed in Poland, Italy, Russia, Spain and the Spanish-American countries.

The belief that Saint Nicholas brings gifts stems from the legend of the generosity of Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra. When he died on December 6 in the year 345, he was revered for his generosity and kindness, and it became the custom to give presents to loved ones on his saint's day, the date of his death. For centuries it had been the custom for Christians to give on both Saint Nicholas' Day and Christmas Day, but in general practice the two days gradually fused into one, and Saint Nick was borrowed from his own day to be the patron saint of December 25.

