

Did Archaeologists Find the Grave of Santa Claus?

St. Nicholas was born in A.D. 280 in Turkey. He became an influential pastor and participated in the First Council of Nicaea in A.D. 325. This week, researchers announced that they have discovered a tomb that could house his undisturbed remains.

Many historians thought that Italian merchants stole Nicholas' bones from a damaged sarcophagus during the first crusade in 1087 and took them to a basilica in Italy. However, an elaborate tomb has now been found beneath the church in Turkey where he was buried. It is possible that the Italians took the bones of a different priest, meaning that the real saint's remains are still underground. There are mosaics covering the floor, so it will take time for removal and excavation to prove the theory.

Whether we now know the location of St. Nicholas's grave or not, his legacy is unquestioned.

Nicholas was best known for his ministry to the poor and underprivileged. He was the first in his area to initiate programs for mentally challenged children. He often visited children at night, disguised in a red and white hooded robe, leaving gifts of money, clothing or food at their windows or fireplaces. He gave gold to three poor young women so they would have dowries and could afford to be married.

The Dutch spelled his name "Sint Nikolass," which in America became "Sinterklass" or "Santa Claus." Dr. Clement Clarke Moore immortalized him in his 1822 poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas." The illustrator Thomas Nast put Dr. Moore's description to art, creating the figure we picture as Santa Claus.

Do we need more Christians like the real St. Nicholas today? Consider some items in the news.

In a recent poll, 72 percent of Canadian caregivers favored permitting Alzheimer's patients to be euthanized, even if the person never requested euthanasia. Non-voluntary euthanasia is widespread in other countries; many worry that the practice will come to America.

Meanwhile, the drug addiction crisis is so acute in San Francisco that officials may create supervised injection sites to offer clean syringes and medical supervision. And the ACLU is suing to make an abortion pill available to women without medical supervision.

Have we returned to the time of Judges, when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6)? Is there hope for us? God promises: "At one moment I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it. If that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to do to it" (Jer. 18:7-8).

However, "at another moment I may speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant it. If it does evil in My sight by not obeying My voice, then I will relent of the good with which I said I would bless it" (vv. 9-10).

Is our nation closer to God's forgiveness or his judgment? If St. Nicholas lived in your community, how would he encourage you to respond to your culture today? {eo}

This article originally appeared on The Denison Forum.