

Finding the real St. Nick's Turkish roots

by [Kim Lawton](#)

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A Santa Claus statue in front of a gift shop across the street from the St. Nicholas Church in the ancient city of Myra, now Demre, Turkey. (Photo by Kim Lawton)

Tis the season when Santa Claus is nearly everywhere. Most people know that jolly old St. Nick hails from the North Pole. But many might not realize that the real St. Nicholas, a fourth century Christian bishop, lived and worked in what is now the country of Turkey.

“Most visitors have no idea how much of early Christian history happened in Turkey,” said veteran tour guide and Turkey specialist Servet Ugur.

The modern pop culture Santa evolved from stories about Bishop Nicholas of Myra, who was revered for centuries because of his selfless generosity, good deeds, and love of others, especially children.

Nicholas was born sometime after the year 260 in the important harbor city of Patara, in the Greek-speaking Roman province of Lycia, Asia Minor. The ancient city is in modern-day southwestern Turkey, along the Mediterranean coast. According to the New Testament Book of Acts, the apostle Paul and the Gospel writer Luke changed ships in Patara. The ancient city was known for its worship of the Greek god Apollo.

During the time of Nicholas, Asia Minor was going through a period of great transition, says Adam English, professor of theology and philosophy at Campbell University in North Carolina and author of *The Saint Who Would Be Santa Claus: The True Life and Trials of St. Nicholas of Myra*.

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