



St Nicholas News

A paper sent free to the St Nicholas' friends
all around the world

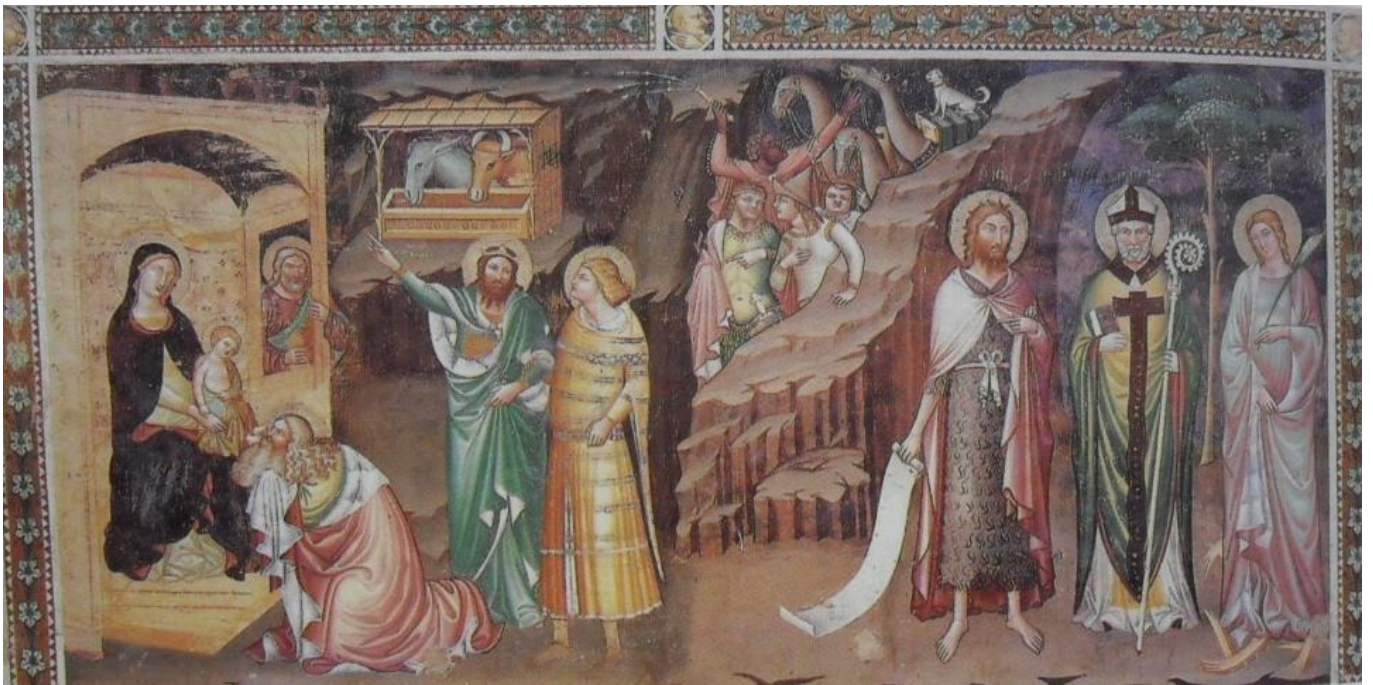
By Fr Gerardo Cioffari, o.p., director of the
St Nicholas Research Center in Bari
(gcioffari@libero.it)

December 25, 2012

ST NICHOLAS AND THE THREE WISE MEN IN THE CHRISTMAS CRIB

45

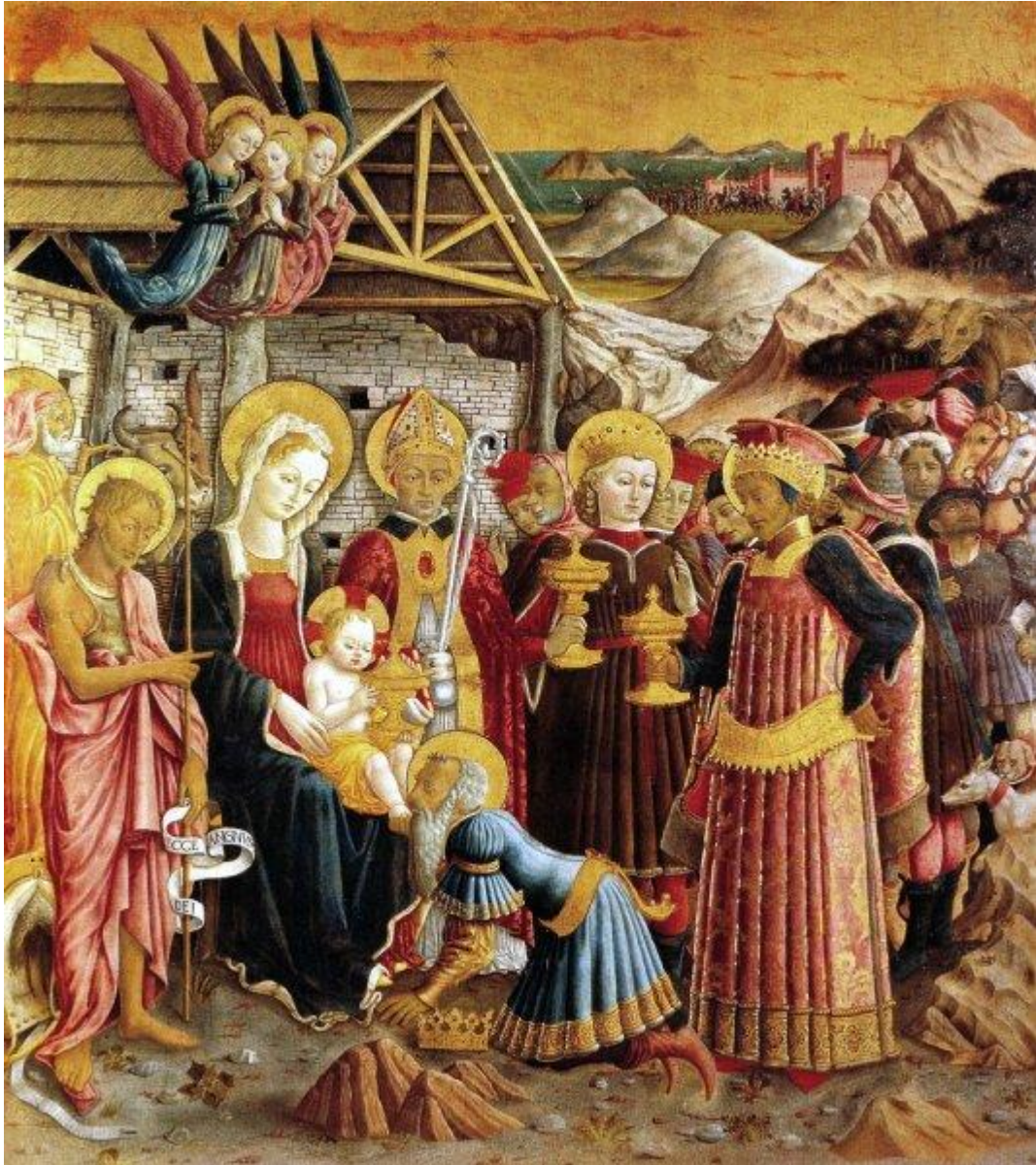
THE ORTHODOX ST NICHOLAS' CHURCH IN BEIT JALA (BETHLEHEM)



ST NICHOLAS AND ST JOHN THE BAPTIST IN THE SCENE WITH THE THREE WISE MEN WORSHIPPING THE CHILD JESUS

Bartolo Di Fredi, Adoration of the Magi (Treviso, San Niccolò)

Bartolo di Fredi (1330-1410), the painter of this *Adoration of the Wise Men*, was born in Siena. He portrayed several times St Nicholas. Besides this beautiful *Adoration* he included him in the polyptych of the year 1388 and dedicated to him the beautiful and very particular fresco of the *Dowry to the three girls* in the church of St Lucchese near Poggibonsi.



**ST NICHOLAS
IS CLOSE TO THE VIRGIN AND THE CHILD
WHILE THE WISE MEN
ARE WORSHIPPING HIM**

Benedetto Bonfigli was born in Perugia between 1420 and 1425, and here he died in 1496. He marked a turning point from the late-gothic pictorial language (still prevailing in Perugia in the XV century) toward the Renaissance taste .

This *Adoration of the Wise Men* with St Nicholas is exhibited in the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria. It is a tempera painting on table (dimensions: cm 187 x 168).



Probably not all St Nicholas' friends know that a St Nicholas church is to be found very close to the place where Jesus was born 2000 years ago. At only 2 km from Bethlehem in fact there is a town named BEIT JALA, with 15.000 inhabitants, mostly arab-christians belonging to the Orthodox Christianity.

It is located in Cisjordan (Palestine), but conterminal with the Israeli territory: 2 km from Bethlehem, 10 km south of Jerusalem, on the West Bank on the road to Hebron.

In Beit Jala are 6 christian Churches and two mosques.

Since 1995, when passed under the Palestinian National Authority, the Muslim population increased with people coming from Hebron and other towns. As a consequence of this, the situation has become more dangerous, because some Muslim extremists make violent actions against the nearby Israeli settlement of Gilo.

From the Christian point of view this town is one of the most ecumenical. It hosts a Russian School (founded in 1870), a Roman Catholic Seminary from 1936 belonging to the Latin Patriarchate, and the Talitha Kumi School belonging to the Evangelical-Lutheran church of Jordan and Palestine.

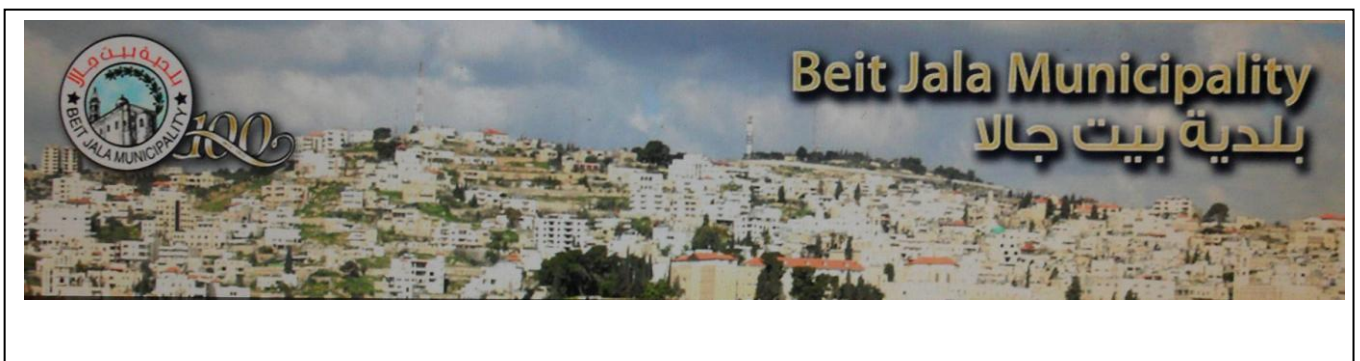
From the Gospel and St Nicholas point of view Beit Jala is an extraordinary example, because all these christian institutions work in the field of Children Aid and Rehabilitation: the *Bethlehem Arab Society*, the *Lifegate Rehabilitation* (German cooperation), the Jemima House (Dutch cooperation).

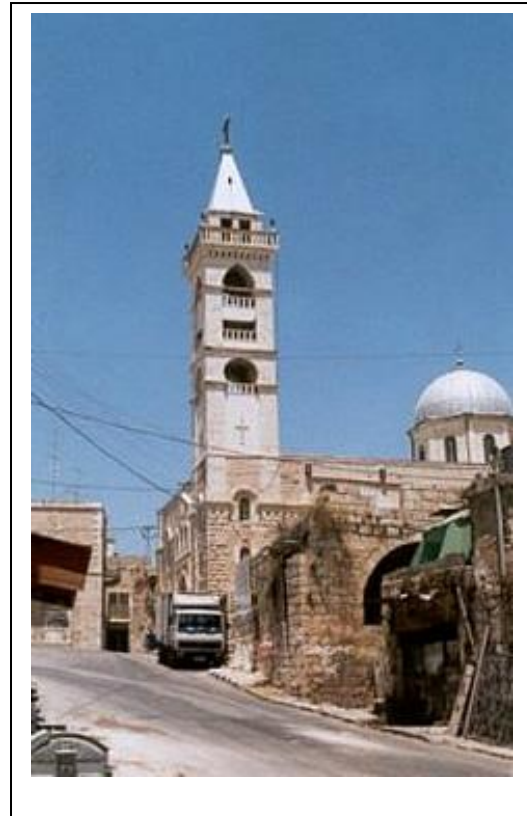
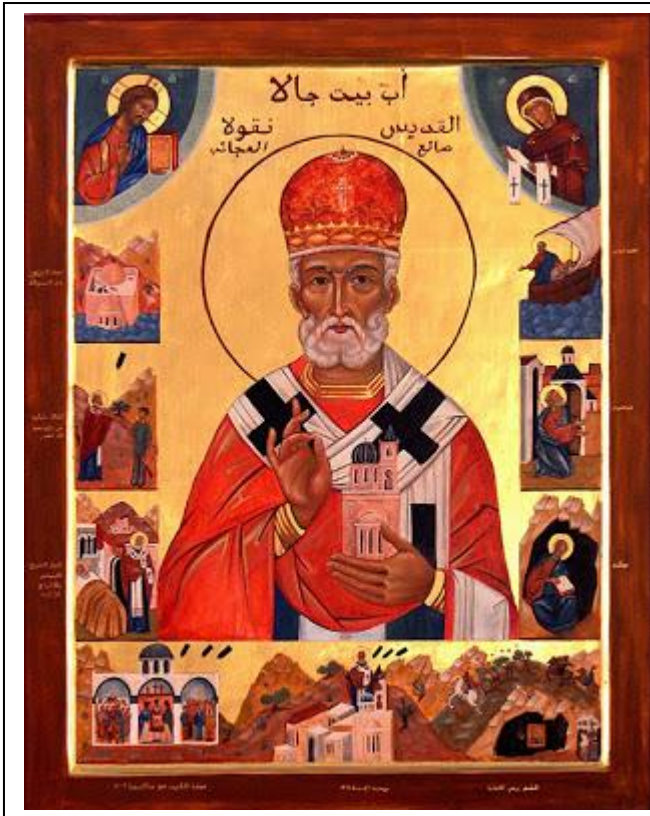
The Greek Orthodox Church of Beit Jala has been built at the beginning of the XX century on a cave, in which (according to the tradition) lived St Nicholas in the IV century during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

This tradition is based therefore on the ancient identification of the holy bishop of Myra of the IV century with the monk Nicholas, archimandrite of Sion, who really went in pilgrimage to Jerusalem at the beginning of the VI century.

The Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, on whom the church depends, usually goes in Beit Jala to celebrate the feast of St Nicholas. Arriving into the town this year the patriarch Theophilos was made object of controversy. The protesters accused him publicly of having betrayed his promises to revoke the acts of his predecessor Irenaeus (who sold Orthodox properties near the Jaffa Door in Jerusalem to Israeli Government) and to engage more Arab Palestinians in responsibility roles of the Patriarchate.

It is however difficult to say how much this charge is grounded and how much it comes from Arabs who want fight at all levels against Israel.





THE ORTHODOX CHURCH OF ST NICHOLAS IN BEIT JALA (BETHLEHEM) PALESTINE

THE CAVE IN WHICH ACCORDING TO THE TRADITION ST NICHOLAS LIVED DURING HIS PILGRIMAGE TO JERUSALEM AND ON WHICH IT WAS BUILT THE CHURCH



The first scholar to distinguish historically the Fourth century bishop of Myra from the Sixth century archimandrite of Sion, who really went in pilgrimage to Jerusalem, was in 1869 Antonin Kapustin, head of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Jerusalem. After him and Anrich there are no more doubts.



**ST NICHOLAS
GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
IN THE ARAB-CHRISTIAN TOWN OF
BEIT JALA, NEAR BETHLEHEM
IN PALESTINE**





NIDAL, the parish priest's son



**BEIT JALA FULLY REVEALS
THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS**

**TO PERMIT JESUS' BIRTH
IN OUR HEARTS,
NOT ONLY THROUGH THE PRAYER,
BUT ALSO THROUGH
ACTIVE CHARITY.**

**ORTHODOX, CATHOLICS AND
PROTESTANTS HAVE HERE
CHILDREN RELIEF WORKS**

**NEAR THE PLACE OF JESUS' BIRTH
BEIT JALA IS THE IDEAL PLACE TO
WHICH ADDRESS OUR
GENEROSITY.**



Father James Rosenthal, Parish priest of the St Nicholas church in St Nicholas at Wade (Kent, England) is the one who marvelously interprets the spirit of the Bishop of Myra, by bringing back to life the Santa Claus tradition not out of folkloric taste, but in view of charity initiatives, especially to children's benefit. To this purpose he was several times in Beit Jala.



FROM BARI
MY BEST WISHES
FOR A
MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND A HAPPY
NEW YEAR



Bartolo di Fredi. *St Nicholas and the Dowry to the three girls* (1360 circa). The scene has the particularity of the girls' father (usually asleep) who looks at Nicholas.