

# Why are more than 1 million Russians queuing to see a saint's Rib

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More than 1 million Russians have queued for hours in the last month for a glimpse of a relic from St Nicholas.

In a symbol of the close ties between Russian identity and the Orthodox Church, President Vladimir Putin was one of the first to visit the shrine, brought to Moscow's Christ the Saviour Cathedral from its home in Italy on May 21, according to the [Washington Post](#).

A Russian icon depicting Saint Nicholas. [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The gilded ark, allegedly containing the rib of St Nicholas, has become the focus of a mass corporate devotion for the 70 per cent of Russia's population who are Orthodox Christians.

That figure has more than doubled since the Soviet collapse in 1991 and Putin has closely aligned his socially conservative with that of the Church.

Known as the 'miracle worker', Saint Nicholas inspired the legend of Santa Claus and has become a site of special adoration for Russians. 'It's important to be close to the grace of Saint Nicholas,' said Denis Knyazyev, 32, according to the [Washington Post](#). 'All saints are special, but this is the one most dear to us.' Researcher for Russian's independent pollster Levada Center, Natalya Zorkaya, said many Russians consider themselves only 'partially religious' but visiting relics makes people feel part of something bigger.

'The interest in the relics represents a desire to become part of the process, to participate in an event organised not just by the Orthodox Church but also by the state,' she told the [Washington Post](#).

'This is a manifestation of a certain state identity with religious colouring.'

Nicholas was the Bishop of Myra, now southern Turkey, and died in AD 343. Italian sailors brought his bones to Bari, Italy, in 1087, where they have been kept ever since.

The decision to remove a rib and bring it to Russia was made last year at a historic meeting between Pope Francis and the Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill. It was the first time the leaders of the two Churches had met since the Great Schism in the 11th century that divided Eastern and Western Christianity. The rib will be taken to St Petersburg on July 12 and returned to Italy at the end of July.

