

'The True Saint Nicolas' was commissioned by Saint Nicolas' Church, Pevensey, to mark its 800th anniversary in 2016. It was first performed by Hailsham Choral Society, along with the children from Pevensey & Westham Primary School. The twenty-minute work takes us on a journey to discover the true identity of Santa Claus, through a series of miraculous events attributed to Saint Nicolas – some of which seem more likely to be fictitious than others! In the end, the children recognise the link between the generosity of Father Christmas and character of the true Saint Nicolas.

Saint Nicolas was a bishop who lived in the 4th century, in a place called Patara, Southern Turkey. Both his mother and father had died when he was young, leaving him a vast inheritance. However, like his parents, Nicolas was a man of great faith. His greatest desire was to point people towards Jesus. He was known for his generosity towards the poor and had a habit of giving anonymous gifts to people in need.

Fanciful versions of Saint Nicolas's life became very popular in Victorian times, and in 1823 a famous poem about him was published – 'Twas The Night Before Christmas.' The poem describes and names his eight reindeer – but Rudolph doesn't appear until 1939, when he was dreamt up by a Chicago artist for a children's colouring book! The Coca-Cola Company are often said to be responsible for clothing Santa in red, as they have used him for their Christmas advertising campaigns ever since the 1930s, but long before Coca-Cola was invented the true St Nicolas had been depicted in red and white bishop's robes.

The name Santa Claus comes from the Dutch for Saint Nicolas, Sinter Klaas. There are many legends about Saint Nicolas, although we don't know how many of them are true – and some of them are highly improbable! The story most likely to be true is the one about him preventing a poor man's daughters from being sold into slavery. Hearing of their situation, Saint Nicolas went to their house in the night and threw bags of gold through their window, anonymously rescuing the family from impoverishment.

Generosity of spirit and anonymous giving are the key characteristics that link the jolly red-suited Santa to his ancient antecedent, remaining constant each time St Nicolas has been reimagined down through the centuries. Saint Nicolas certainly isn't known to have had any reindeer – but the example of his generous spirit lives on!

The True Saint Nicolas

by Ruth Kenward & Martin Neill

Solo parts: Johanna (<i>Soprano</i>)	[No. 2]
Epiphanes (<i>Baritone</i>)	[No. 2]
Saint Nicolas (<i>Tenor</i>)	[Nos. 2, 4 & 5]
Sister 1, Sister 2, Sister 3 (<i>Children</i>)	[No. 5]

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'The True Saint Nicolas' – Libretto

1. Tell Us The Story

Children

Santa, Sinter Klaas, Kris Kringle, Père Noël.
Father Christmas, Father Christmas: who is he?
So many names for just one man!

Tell us the story of the true Saint Nick.
We have to know, we have to know.
Ask yourself on Christmas Eve,
Is he real or make believe?

Tell us the story of the true Saint Nick.
We have to know, we have to know.
Such confusion. Make it clear!
Tell us what we want to hear!

Santa, Sinter Klaas, Kris Kringle, Père Noël.
Father Christmas, Father Christmas: who is he?
So many names for just one man!

2. Once Upon A Time In Patara

Once upon a time in Patara lived Johanna and Epiphanes.
Faithful were Johanna and Epiphanes,
True believers in the Word of God,
Faithful to their Lord, Jesus Christ.

Richest of all folk in Patara were Johanna and Epiphanes,
But they always humbly showed their gratitude.
For their riches they were thankful,
Thankful to their Lord for His grace.

Epiphanes & Johanna

How we are blessed, richly blessed.
Gracious is our Lord. We give thanks.
Thankful are we for every gift that we've received.

They are blessed (so richly blessed),
They are blessed (richly blessed)
And they're thankful for all they've received,
All they've received.

Epiphanes & Johanna

And most of all we give our thanks
That God gave to us our precious son.

Precious son, their precious son, Nicolas their son.
Such a blessing the day he was born.

Then one fateful day in Patara, poor Johanna and Epiphanes
They succumbed to pestilence and died,
When poor Nicolas he was just eighteen.
Oh what sorrow now, what sorrow now.

Just one thing brought hope to his grieving
They had left him vast inheritance.
Though it did not compensate for losing them
Good Saint Nicolas found his calling there,
Bringing others joy with gifts to share.

Nicolas, good Saint Nicolas, he made a vow:

Saint Nicolas

I shall not store my treasure upon this earth
Where moth and rust corrupt,
Where thieves break in to steal.
I shall place all my treasure in heav'n above;
It's where my heart lies, yes, it's where my heart lies.

(contd.)

He brought truth, he brought love,
He brought joy with his gift from above

Saint Nicolas Amen!

We are blessed, so richly blessed.
We are blessed, richly blessed,
And we're thankful for all we've received!
Blessing the day he was born.

3. So Many Tales

Nicolas lived a long time ago now.
Tales of his deeds may not all be true.
Some could be fact, some could be fiction.
Who can decide? We'll leave it to you.

Children

Like the story of the pickled boys.
Tell us what happened there!

Three boys were on a pilgrimage,
Staying at an inn where the landlord fell on hard times.
He put the young men in a pot,
Added vinegar and a touch of salt and spices.

Children

Are you telling us they ate the boys?
How could they stomach it?

A vision of Saint Nicolas came to rescue them. Amen.

Children

So many tales, so many legends.
How many things can one man achieve?
Some could be fact, some could be fiction.
How do we know which ones to believe?
What about the soldiers in the jail?
Tell us what happened there!

Three soldiers were condemned to die,
Without proper trial, by Eustathius of Myra.
He ordered their beheading.
People gathered round to observe the execution.

Children

Are you telling us they got the chop?
What a pain in the neck!

Saint Nicolas had heard the news
And he set them free again.
Eustathius bowed down to him;
Asked for blessing. Amen

Children

So many tales, so many legends.
How many things can one man achieve?
Some could be fact, some could be fiction.
How do we know which ones to believe?
Which ones to believe?

4. The Story Of The Storm

Children What about the story of the storm?
Could that be true?

The story of the storm? The story of the storm?

Children Yes, yes! The one about the storm!
Could that be true?

It may be true in part. We know it's true at heart!

Nicolas set sail for Egypt
As a pilgrim to the Holy Land.
On the first night he had a dream
That would end his trip before it began.

In the dream he saw a storm
That would surely bring the ship to harm.
So the next day he told the sailors,
Who were more than a little alarmed.

Straight away the sky began to darken
And rain began to fall.

The rain fell, and the wind blew.
The waves rose as the wind grew.
So the sailors were afraid!
What hope is there for us?

The storm blew, raising up the sea into a tumult.
From a sky jet black the lightning cracked,
Raising up the sea into a tumult.
The waves rose, breaking over the deck.
Might the ship be wrecked?

What hope is there for us?

Wave after wave, wave after wave,
Crashing and a-splashing on the deck, on the deck!
Nicolas, Nicolas, Nicolas, good Saint Nicolas, pray!
Nicolas, pray to God in heaven above!
Pray that we are saved.

Is there some hope for us?
Is there some hope for us? Is there some hope?

Saint Nicolas
Peace mighty waves! Deep peace, mighty waves!
In Jesus' name I pray, be still.
In Jesus' mighty name I pray, be still.

5. Three Sisters

Children
Calming a storm, stilling the waters,
That's quite a feat we have to agree.
There must be more, one more example,
Showing the world that love is the key.

Three sisters were weeping, were weeping with sorrow.
No money, no future, no food for tomorrow.
Their father was in despair, was in despair.

(contd.)

(contd.)

Sisters
What's to become of us?
Are we to spend our days accepting charity
Or doing anything that pays?

This is a story that could end in tears.

Children
We want to know, we want to know.
Tell us the story. Did it end in tears?
We want to know, we want to know.

It seemed the only option was to sell,
Sell the three girls, sell the three girls.

Children
This cannot be! This cannot be! This cannot be!

Sisters
What's to become of me?
Am I to spend my days accepting charity
Or doing anything that pays?

Saint Nicolas
There will be no weeping.
While you all are sleeping
I will end your sorrow.
When you wake tomorrow
You'll find your cares have ended,
Your precious lives have mended!

That night Saint Nicolas he came,
He left some money but no name.
A fine example of his love,
He was inspired by God above, God above!

Children
This is the man that we recognise! The man called:
Santa, Sinter Klaas, Kris Kringle, Père Noël.
Santa, Sinter Klaas, Kris Kringle, Saint Nicolas!

6. The True Saint Nicolas

Children
The true Saint Nicolas he teaches us
Like Jesus to show we care.

And his example is to love and bless,
Like Jesus to give ourselves, giving with joy!

Children
We've listened well and now we understand.
There's so much to learn from this special man!
The joy of giving without glory and fame
Goes hand in hand with his name.

Every time we give and we receive
All throughout the year, not just Christmas Eve,
Let's be like Nicolas in heart and in mind,
And let us be just as kind.

Let us be as kind as good Saint Nicolas! Amen!