

SAINT NICOLAS, OP. 42
BENJAMIN BRITTEN
Words by Eric Crozier

I. Introduction

Our eyes are blinded by the holiness you bear.
The bishop's robe, the mitre, and the cross of gold.
Obscure the simple man within the Saint.
Strip off your glory, Nicolas! Nicolas! and speak! speak! speak!

Help us, Lord! to find the hidden road
That leads from love to greater love,
From faith to greater faith.
Strengthen us, O Lord!
Screw up our strength to serve Thee with simplicity.

II. The Birth of Nicolas

Nicolas was born in answer to prayer,
in answer to prayer, in answer to prayer,
And leaping from his mother's womb he cried-
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

Swaddling bands and crib awaited him there,
awaited him there, awaited him there,
But Nicolas clapped both his hands and cried-
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

Innocent and joyful, naked and fair,
naked and fair, naked and fair,
He came in pride on earth to abide-
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

Water rippled Welcome! in the bathtub by his side,
bathtub by his side, bathtub by his side.
He dived in open-eyed, he swam, he cried-
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

When he went to Church at Christmastide,
at Christmastide, at Christmastide,
He climbed up to the font to be baptized.
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

Pilgrims came to kneel and pray by his side,
to pray by his side, to pray by his side.
He grew in grace, his name was sanctified.
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

Nicolas grew in innocence and pride,
in innocence and pride, in innocence and pride, in pride....
His glory spread a rainbow round the countryside, round the countryside.
"Nicolas will be a Saint! Nicolas will be a Saint! Nicolas will be a Saint!"
the neighbors cried.
GOD BE GLORIFIED!

III. Nicolas devotes himself to God

Chorus Tacet

IV. He journeys to Palestine

Nicolas sailed for Palestine
Across the sunlit seas.
The South-West Wind blew soft and fair,
Seagulls hovered through the air
And spices scented the breeze.

Everyone felt that land was near,
All dangers now were past,
Except for one who knelt in prayer.
Fingers clasped and head quite bare,
Alone by the mizzenmast.

The sailors jeered at Nicolas,
Who paid them no regard,
Until the hour of sunset came
When up he stood and stopped their game
Of staking coins on cards.

Nicolas spoke and prophesied
A tempest far ahead.
The sailors scorned such words of fear,
Since sky and stars shone bright and clear,
So 'Non-sense!' they all said.

Darkness was soon on top of them,
but still the South Wind blew.

The Captain went below to sleep,
and left the helmsman there to keep
His course with one of the crew.

Nicolas swore he'd punish them
For mocking at the Lord
The wind arose, the thunder roared,
Lightning split the waves that poured
In wild cascades on board.

Water-spouts rose in majesty
Until the ship was tossed
Aft, aback, astern, abeam,
Lit by the lightning's livid gleam
And all aboard cried 'Lost!'

Lightning hisses through the night,
Blinding sight with living light!
Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Spare us!
Man the pumps! Man the pumps!
Axes! Axes! Ah!

Winds and tempests howl their cry
Of battle through the raging sky!
Spare us! Lifeboats! Lifeboats!
Lower away! Lower away!
Waves repeat their angry roar
Fall and spring again once more.
Ah! Shorten sail! Reef her! Reef her! Heave her to!
Let her run before the wind!
Shorten sail! Reef her! Reef her!

Thunder rends the sky asunder
With its savage shout of wonder!
Ah! Ah!

Pray to God!
Kneel and pray!
Lightning, Thunder, Tempest, Ocean
Praise their God with voice and motion.

Nicolas waited patiently
Till they were on their knees
Then down he knelt in thankfulness
Begging God their ship to bless
And make the storm to cease.

Amen.

V. Nicolas comes to Myra and is chosen Bishop

Come, stranger sent from God!
Come, man of God!
Stand foremost in our Church and serve this diocese
As Bishop Nicolas, our shield, our strength, our peace!
Amen! Amen!

Place the mitre on your head to show your mastery of men.
Take the golden robe that covers you with Christ's authority.
Wear the fine dalmatic woven with the cross of faith.
Bear the crozier as a staff and comfort to your flock.
Set the ring upon your hand,
the ring upon your hand in sacramental sign
in sign of wedlock with thy God.

Serve the faith and spurn his enemies,
and spurn his enemies,
Serve the faith and spurn his enemies, etc.....

All people that on earth do dwell
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.
Him serve with fear
His praise forth tell,
come ye before Him and rejoice.

O enter then His gates with praise
Approach with joy His courts unto
Praise, laud and bless His name always,
For it is seemly so to do.

For why? The Lord our God is good;
His mercy is for ever sure;
His truth at all times firmly stood,
And shall from age to age endure.
Amen.

VI. Nicolas from Prison

Chorus Tacet

VII. Nicolas and the Pickled Boys

Famine tracks us down the lanes
Hunger holds our horses' reins,
Winter heaps the road with snow,
O we have far to go.

Starving beggars howl their cry,
Snarl to see us spurring by
Times are bad and travel slow,
O we have far to go.

We mourn our boys, our missing sons,
We sorrow for three little ones.
Timothy, Mark and John are gone,
are gone, are gone, are gone, are gone!

Landlord take this piece of gold!
Bring us food before the cold
Make our pangs of hunger grow
O we have far to go

Day by day we seek to find
Some trace of them but oh! unkind!
Timothy, Mark and John are gone,
are gone, are gone, are gone.

Let us share this dish of meat!
Come, my friends, sit down and eat!
Join us, Bishop, for we know
That you have far to go!

Mary meek and Mother mild
Who lost thy Jesus as a child
Our Timothy, Mark and John are gone,
are gone, are gone, are gone!

Come! your Grace, don't eat so slow!
Take some meat...

See! See! three boys spring back to life,
Who slaughtered by the butcher's knife,
Lay salted down! and entering,
Hand in hand they stand and sing
Alleluia to their king!
Alleluiah!!.....etc.....

VIII. His piety and marvellous works

For forty years our Nicolas,
Our Prince of men, our shepherd and
Our gentle guide, walked by our side.
We turned to him at birth and death,
In time of famine and distress,
In all our grief, to bring relief.

He led us from the valleys to
The pleasant hills of grace.
He fought to fold us in from mortal sin.
O! he was prodigal of love!
A spendthrift in devotion to us all,
And blessed as he caressed.
We keep his memory alive
In legends that our children
And their children's children treasure still.

A captive at the heathen court
Wept sorely all alone.
"O Nicolas in here, my son!
and he will bring you home!"

"Fill, fill my sack with corn," he said,
"We die from lack of food!"
and from that single sack he fed
A hungry multitude.

Three daughters of a nobleman
Were doomed to shameful sin,
Till our good Bishop ransomed them
By throwing purses in.

The gates were barred,
the black flag flew,
Three men knelt by the block
But Nicolas burst in like flame,
And stayed the axe's shock!

"O help us, good Nicolas!
Our ship is full of foam!"
He walked across the waves to them
And led them safely home.

He sat among the Bishops who

Were summoned to Nicaea:
Then rising with the wrath of God
Boxed Arius's ear.

He threatened Constantine the Great
With bell and book and ban,
Till Constantine confessed his sins
Like any common man!

Let the legends that we tell,
Praise him with our prayers as well.....etc....

We keep his memory alive
In legends that our children and
Their children's children treasure still.....

IX. The Death of Nicolas

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation
Which thou has prepared before the face of all people
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles
And to be the glory of thy people Israel.

Glory be to the Father.....and to the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be....
World without end. Amen.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform.
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up his bright designs,
And works his sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head.

Amen!