

Nicholai presulis festum celebremus
concrepando modulis letitiae sonemus.
Versibus alimonis diem decoremus
vocibus altisonis intenti testinemus.

In tanto natalitio patrum docet traditio
ut consonet in gaudio fidelium devotio,
est ergo superstitione vacare a tripudio

Nunc igitur iustorum suavitas cantorum
per tymphanum et chorum et omne musicorum
genus instrumentorum psallat deo deorum.

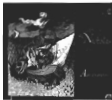
Let us celebrate the feast of bishop Nicholas,
singing happy melodies together.
With sweet songs we'll ornament this day,
letting our voices soar high and quick.

On such a natal feast, our ancestors' tradition teaches
that the devotion of the faithful should harmonize in joy,
so let fear give way to dancing.

Now, therefore let the sweet songs of the just—
with drums and chorus and every kind
of musical instruments—sing to the God of gods.

Performance Notes

The jolly figure of Santa Claus, symbol of the secular side of Christmas, began with a fourth-century Christian saint named Nicholas. His life and deeds were not recorded until several hundred years after his death, so that separating fact from legend is virtually impossible. The legend has it that he was born in the port city of Myra, in modern-day Turkey, and that he was elected as its bishop through divine intervention. He spent the rest of his life performing courageous, altruistic and miraculous acts in defense of his flock, and after his death (given as 6 December, in various years around 342), his bones exuded a fragrant healing oil, and reports of his miracles steadily increased. In the late eleventh century his remains were moved to the Italian city of Bari. His cult grew stronger, and liturgical services and music to adorn and accompany them were being written and sung throughout Europe.



We have selected four works from different times and places in honor of St. Nicholas. These can be heard on our recording "Legends of St. Nicholas" (harmonia mundi usa 907232). On that recording, we use local Latin pronunciation, depending on the origin of each piece (shown in the IPA renderings in this edition). But normal "church Latin" pronunciation is perfectly acceptable.

Our comments below with regard to tempo and number of singers should be taken only as suggestions. The original sources show nothing at all as to tempo, dynamics, expression, number of singers, or even instrumental accompaniment. The pitch at which these pieces were notated in the manuscript is not absolute: feel free to transpose any piece to any comfortable pitch. While these pieces all work well for women's voices, they can also be performed by male voices, children's voices or, in some cases, mixed choir.