

'Twas the Night before Christmas...

Who'd have thought it? As **Santa** prepares his reindeer for their annual odyssey across the crowded skies of our fast-paced world, the white-bearded one is going stronger than ever.

It did not always look this way. Born 1,722 years ago in Asia Minor, **St Nicholas** was a Christian bishop who gave presents to the needy. During the Reformation

Martin Luther tried to outlaw his saint's day on December 6, but his supporters just changed his name, to **Père Noël**, **Sinte Klaas**, the **Weinachtsmann** or plain old **Father Christmas**.

Then, in 1931, he got a makeover when he fronted an advert for **Coca Cola**. Santa prefers milk, of course, but he loved his new image, and it's the one we have seen ever since.

That came a few years after he was outed as living on Korvatunturi Mountain on the Finnish-Russian border, inspiring good-hearted travel companies to take children to see him in person.

All very flattering for Santa, of course, but it won't distract him from doing what he does best: whizzing around on Christmas Eve to deliver presents to well-behaved children. **And wait, there's a message: No skimping on the sherry and mince pies.**

And Another Thing...

Santa's free-ranging reindeer, led by **Rudolf** the Red Nosed one, are **Dasher** and **Dancer**, **Prancer** and **Vixen**, **Comet** and **Cupid**, and **Donner** and **Blitzen**



Fact File

Born: Patara, in modern-day Turkey, AD 280

Career low: Being imprisoned as a Christian bishop under Roman Emperor **Diocletian**

Career high: Regularly topping children's popularity polls

Ambitions: To make children happy and foster world peace

