CATHEDRAL SINGERS OF
CHRIST CHURCH
LESSONS AND CAROLS
6pm SUNDAY 20 DECEMBER 2020
Welcome to Christ Church. We are so delighted to be able to welcome you to this Carol Service, sung by the Cathedral Singers of Christ Church and conducted by James Potter, their director. At this strange Christmas time, so many of our usual Christmas routines are disrupted and so much of our usual joy seems out of reach. Yet it is more important than ever to remember that Christmas is, at heart, the good news that the God who made us and loves us came to be with his people in Jesus. In this service we will hear again the story of our salvation. We are reminded, as we have been throughout this difficult year, that the world is not as God intended it and that human selfishness has terrible consequences. Yet we are reminded too that into this shadowed and pain-filled world, God comes. Jesus is born to bring hope and healing. The God who made us never abandons his people.

In this service of readings and carols, may the story of God’s love be a blessing to you. Wherever you are, and whatever your Christmas looks like, may it bring Christmas joy. And may Jesus, who is God with us, be with you today and for ever.

Organ Music before the Service

played by Thomas Simpson, Organ Scholar to the Cathedral Singers

Praeludium in D (BuxWV 139)  
Dietrich Buxtehude (1637–1707)

In dulci jubilo (BWV 729)  
JS Bach (1685–1750)

Cover image: The Virgin Adoring the Child, with Saints Lawrence and Mary Magdalen and the Infant Saint John (JBS 48), by Raffaellino del Garbo (c.1466–1524) © Christ Church Picture Gallery reproduced by permission of the Governing Body of Christ Church, Oxford
The congregation in the cathedral remains seated for the Introit and Hymn. Hymns are sung by the choir alone.

**CHOIR INTROIT**

Drop down ye heavens from above,  
And let the skies pour down righteousness.

Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people;  
My salvation shall not tarry.

I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions.  
Fear not, for I will save thee;  
For I am the Lord thy God,  
The holy one of Israel, thy redeemer.

Drop down ye heavens from above,  
And let the skies pour down righteousness.

*Words:* Advent Prose, excerpts from Isaiah 40, 43, 45  
*Music:* Judith Weir (b. 1954)

**HYMN**

Come, thou Redeemer of the earth,  
and manifest thy virgin-birth:  
let every age adoring fall;  
such birth befits the God of all.

Begotten of no human will,  
but of the Spirit, thou art still  
the Word of God, in flesh arrayed,  
the Saviour, now to us displayed.

O equal to thy Father, thou!  
Gird on thy fleshly mantle now,  
the weakness of our mortal state  
with deathless might invigorate.

All laud, eternal Son, to thee  
whose advent sets thy people free,  
whom with the Father we adore  

*Words:* St Ambrose (340–397),  
*trans.* John Mason Neale (1818–1866) and others  
*Music:* Puer nobis nascitur, Michael Praetorius (1571–1621),  
*arr.* David Willcocks (1919–2015)
The congregation in the cathedral stands, using the most ancient Christian posture of prayer, for the Bidding Prayer.

THE BIDDING PRAYER

At Christmas time we delight to hear again the good news of our salvation: the Saviour long-promised, born to redeem the fall of our first parents and to show us the path of love that draws us to the Father. At this Christmas time, as so many are far from home, from family and from those we love, let us hear especially the promise of the Christ-child, Jesus the Emmanuel, God with us.

And so we bid you welcome. Together let us go in heart and mind to Bethlehem, to hear anew the song of the angels, to share the wonder of the shepherds, and to worship the Christ-child, laid in a manger.

But first let us pray for the needs of the whole world:

- for all who are sick, lonely, alone or afraid;
- all who are at risk of serious illness;
- all who care for friends and strangers;
- for peace on earth and good will among all people;
- for the unity of the Church and our witness to Christ’s coming;
- for the people of this Diocese, City, and University of Oxford;
- for all who, like Christ, have been born into poverty;
- for the cold and hungry; for those with no place to call their own;
- for all who, like Christ, have been forced to flee their homes;
- for refugees and asylum-seekers;
- for all who, like Christ, know the pain of suffering and death;
- for the sick, the anxious, and the bereaved;
- and for all whom we love but see no longer;
- all who have hoped in the Word made flesh,
  but worship him now in a greater light and on a more distant shore.

We entrust these and all whom we carry on our hearts to the God who stooped down from heaven to save us, as we say together the words that Christ has taught us:
All  

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory
for ever and ever.
Amen.

May Almighty God bless us with his grace; Christ give us the joys of everlasting life; and may the King of angels bring us all to the fellowship of the citizens above. Amen.

The congregation in the cathedral is invited to sit.

CHOIR CAROL

This is the truth sent from above,
The truth of God, the God of love;
Therefore don’t turn me from the door,
But hearken all, both rich and poor.

The first thing that I will relate,
That God at first did man create;
The next thing which to you I tell,
Woman was made with him to dwell.

Then after that ‘twas God’s own choice
To place them both in paradise,
There to remain from evil free
Except they ate of such a tree.

Thus we were heirs to endless woes
Till God the Lord did interpose;
And so a promise soon did run:
That he’d redeem us by his Son.
And at this season of the year
Our blest Redeemer did appear,
And here did live, and here did preach,
And many thousands he did teach.

God grant to all within this place
True saving faith, that special grace
Which to his people doth belong:
And thus I close my Christmas song.

WORDS: traditional English carol
MUSIC: Andrew Smith (b. 1970)

FIRST LESSON
Genesis 3:8–15 (NRSV)

Adam and Eve confess their disobedience in the Garden of Eden.

Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the
garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid
themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the
garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are
you?’ He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid,
because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ He said, ‘Who told you that you
were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you
not to eat?’ The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me,
she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.’

Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this that you have
done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent tricked me, and I ate.’ The Lord
God said to the serpent, ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you
among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you
shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity
between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he
will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.’

Thanks be to God.
CHOIR CAROL

Adam lay ybounden, bounden in a bond
four thousand winter thought he not too long.

And all was for an apple, an apple that he took.
As clerkès finden, written in their book.

Ne had the apple taken been, the apple taken been,
ne had never our Ladie abeen heav’ne queen.

Blessed be the time that apple taken was,
therefore we moun singen
Deo gracias!

Words: Sloane Manuscript 2593, 15th century
Music: Deborah Rose

SECOND LESSON
Isaiah 9:2, 6–7 (NRSV)

The prophet Isaiah foretells the coming of the Messiah’s kingdom of peace.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined.
For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onwards and for evermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

Thanks be to God.
CHOIR CAROL

A tender shoot has started up from a root of grace, as ancient seers imparted from Jesse’s holy race:
It blooms without a blight, blooms in the cold bleak winter, turning our darkness into light.

This shoot Isaiah taught us, from Jesse’s root should spring; The Virgin Mary brought us the branch of which we sing;
Our God of endless might gave her this child to save us, Thus turning darkness into light.

WORDS: William Bartholomew (1773–1867)
MUSIC: Otto Goldschmidt (1829–1907)

The congregation in the cathedral remains seated for the hymn, sung by the choir.

HYMN

O little town of Bethlehem,
how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
the silent stars go by:
yet in thy dark streets shineth
the everlasting light;
the hopes and fears of all the years
are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together,
proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King,
and peace to men on earth;
for Christ is born of Mary;
and, gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.
How silently, how silently,  
the wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming;  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him,  
still the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem,  
descend to us, we pray;  
cast out our sin, and enter in,  
be born in us to-day.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
the great glad tidings tell:  
O come to us, abide with us,  
our Lord Emmanuel.

Words: Phillips Brooks (1835–93)
Music: Forest Green, traditional English melody
   arr. Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958),
   v. 3 arr. James Potter (b. 1989
   v. 4 arr. Thomas Armstrong (1898–1994)

THIRD LESSON
Luke 1:26–38 (NRSV)

The angel Gabriel salutes the Blessed Virgin Mary.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus.
He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.'

Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?'

The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.'

Then Mary said, 'Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.' Then the angel departed from her.

Thanks be to God.

**CHOIR CAROL**

Softly a light is stealing,
Sweetly a maiden sings,
Ever wakeful, ever wistful.
Watching faithfully, thankfully, tenderly
Her King of kings.

My soul doth magnify the Lord:
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

Mary her song to Jesus
Softly, serenely sings:
‘I will love you, I will serve you,
May my lullaby glorify, magnify
My King of kings.’

*Words and Music: Andrew Carter (b. 1939)*
FOURTH LESSON
Luke 2:1–7 (NRSV)

*St Luke tells of the birth of Jesus.*

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Thanks be to God.

CHOIR CAROL

Love came down at Christmas,
Love all lovely, Love divine;
Love was born at Christmas;
star and angels gave the sign.

Worship we the Godhead,
Love incarnate, Love divine;
worship we our Jesus,
but wherewith for sacred sign?

Love shall be our token;
love be yours and love be mine;
love to God and others,
love for plea and gift and sign.

*Words:* Christina Rossetti (1830–1894)
In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.’

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!’

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

Thanks be to God.
CHOIR CAROL

Schlaf wohl, du Himmelsknabe du,
Schlaf wohl, du süßes Kind!
Dich fächeln Engelein in Ruh
Mit sanftem Himmelswind,
Wir arme Hirten singen dir
Ein herzigs Wiegenliedlein für.
Schlafe! Himmelssöhñchen schlafе!

Maria hat mit Mutterblick
Dich leise zugedeckt;
Und Joseph hält den Hauch zurück,
Daß er dich nicht erweckt.
Die Schäflein, die im Stalle sind,
Verstummen vor dir Himmelskind.
Schlafe! Himmelssöhñchen, schlafе!

Bald wirst du groß, dann fließt dein Blut
Von Golgatha herab;
Ans Kreuz schlägt dich
der Menschen Wuth,
Dann legt man dich ins Grab.
Hab' immer deine Äuglein zu,
Denn du bedarfst der süßen Ruh.
Schlafe! Himmelssöhñchen, schlafе!

So schlummert in der Mutter Schoß
Noch manches Kindlein ein;
Doch wird das arme Kindlein groß,
So hat es Angst und Pein.
O Jesulein! durch deine Huld,
Hilfs ihnen tragen mit Geduld.
Schlafe! Himmelssöhñchen, schlafе!

Sleep well, you heavenly boy
Sleep well, you sweet child
Angels fan you in peace
with soft winds from heaven.
We poor shepherds sing to you
a heartfelt little lullaby.
Sleep! Heaven’s dear son, sleep!

Mary with her mother’s gaze
looks on you gently
and Joseph holds his breath
so he does not wake you.
The lambs standing in the stalls
are silent before you, heavenly child.
Sleep! Heaven’s dear son, sleep!

Soon you will be grown,
your blood will flow from Golgotha;
on the Cross
human wrath will strike you
and you will be laid in the grave.
But keep your little eyes closed
for you need sweet peace.
Sleep! Heaven’s dear son, sleep!

Sleep, then, in your mother’s lap
still a tiny child for now.
Soon the little child will grow
and know fear and pain.
O little Jesus! through your grace
help them to bear it with patience.
Sleep! Heaven’s dear son, sleep!

WORDS: Christian Daniel Schubart (1739–91)
MUSIC: Karl Neuner (1778–1830)
arr. Max Reger (1873–1916)
SIXTH LESSON
Matthew 2:1–12 (NRSV)

The wise men are led by the star to Jesus.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.’ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: “And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.” ’

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, ‘Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.’ When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Thanks be to God.
In dulci jubilo, in sweet rejoicing
Let us our homage show
Our heart’s joy reclineth in praesepio, in a manger
And like a bright star shineth
Matris in gremio, in his mother’s lap
Alpha es et O! You are Alpha and Omega

O Jesu parvule
My heart is sore for thee!
Hear me, I beseech thee,
O puer optime
My prayer, let it reach thee,
O princeps gloriae.
Trahe me post te!

O Patris caritas!
O Nati lenitas!
Deeply were we stained Per nostra crimina
But thou hast for us gained
Coelorum gaudia
O that we were there!

Ubi sunt gaudia
If they be not there
There are angels singing Nova cantica,
There the bells are ringing In regis curia.
O that we were there!

WORDS: Heinrich Seuse (1295–1366)
MUSIC: Matthew Culloton (b. 1976)
Those in the cathedral stand for the final reading, as a sign of awe at the mystery of God becoming human in Jesus.

SEVENTH LESSON
John 1:1–14 (NRSV)
read by the Revd Canon Richard Peers, Sub Dean of Christ Church

St John unfolds the mystery of the Incarnation.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.

Thanks be to God.

CHOIR CAROL

O magnum mysterium et admirabile sacramentum
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum iacentem in praesepio.
O beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt portare Dominum Jesum Christum. Alleluia!

O great mystery and wonderful sacrament,
that beasts should see the new-born Lord lying in a manger.
O blessed is the Virgin, whose womb was worthy to bear Christ the Lord. Alleluia.

WORDS: liturgical, from the responsories for Christmas morning
MUSIC: Tomas Luis de Victoria (1548–1611)
The congregation in the cathedral remains seated for the hymn, sung by the choir.

HYMN

Of the Father’s heart begotten, 
ere the world from chaos rose, 
he is Alpha: from that Fountain 
all that is and hath been flows; 
he is Omega, of all things 
yet to come the mystic Close, 
    evermore and evermore.

By his word was all created; 
he commanded and ’twas done; 
earth and sky and boundless ocean, 
universe of three in one, 
al that sees the moon’s soft radiance, 
al that breathes beneath the sun, 
    evermore and evermore.

He assumed this mortal body, 
frail and feeble, doomed to die, 
that the race from dust created 
might not perish utterly, 
which the dreadful Law had sentenced 
in the depths of hell to lie, 
    evermore and evermore.

O how blest that wondrous birthday, 
when the Maid the curse retrieved, 
brought to birth mankind’s salvation, 
by the Holy Ghost conceived; 
and the Babe, the world’s Redeemer, 
in her loving arms received, 
    evermore and evermore.
Sing, ye heights of heaven, his praises;  
Angels and Archangels, sing!  
Wheresoe’er ye be, ye faithful,  
let your joyous anthems ring,  
every tongue his name confessing,  
countless voices answering,  
evermore and evermore.

WORDS: Prudentius (348–c.413)  
trans. R F Davis (1866–1937)  
MUSIC: Divinum Mysterium, melody from Piae Cantiones (1582)  
arr. David Willcocks

THE COLLECT FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

Almighty God, you make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our judge; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,  
All he has come to his people and set them free.

Light has sprung up for the righteous  
All and joyful gladness for those who are true of heart.

Glory to God in the highest  
All and peace to his people on earth.
THE BLESSING

May the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men,
the obedience of Joseph and Mary,
and the peace of the Christ-child
be yours this Christmas;
and the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.

All  Amen.

Organ Music after the Service
played by Benjamin Collyer, Senior Organ Scholar

Prelude and Fugue in G major (BWV 541)  JS Bach (1685–1750)

Christ Church Cathedral

CHRISTMAS 2020

Christmas Eve, Thursday 24 December

12 noon  Journey to Bethlehem: on Zoom
         *Online Crib Service for Children & Families*
         See website for Zoom details

3pm      Service of Nine Lessons and Carols
         *Livestreamed on YouTube*

11.30pm  Festal Midnight Eucharist with incense
         *Ticketed service, livestreamed on YouTube*
         *Preacher: The Archdeacon of Oxford*

Christmas Day, Friday 25 December

8am      Holy Communion (1662)
         *No tickets necessary*

11am     Choral Eucharist for Christmas
         *Ticketed service, livestreamed on YouTube*
         *President: The Sub Dean*
         *Preacher: The Bishop of Oxford*

6pm      Said Evening Prayer
         *No tickets necessary*

All services are free to attend

www.chch.ox.ac.uk/christmas2020

If you wish to receive our e-newsletter, which gives information about forthcoming services and events, please email: cathedral@chch.ox.ac.uk.

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