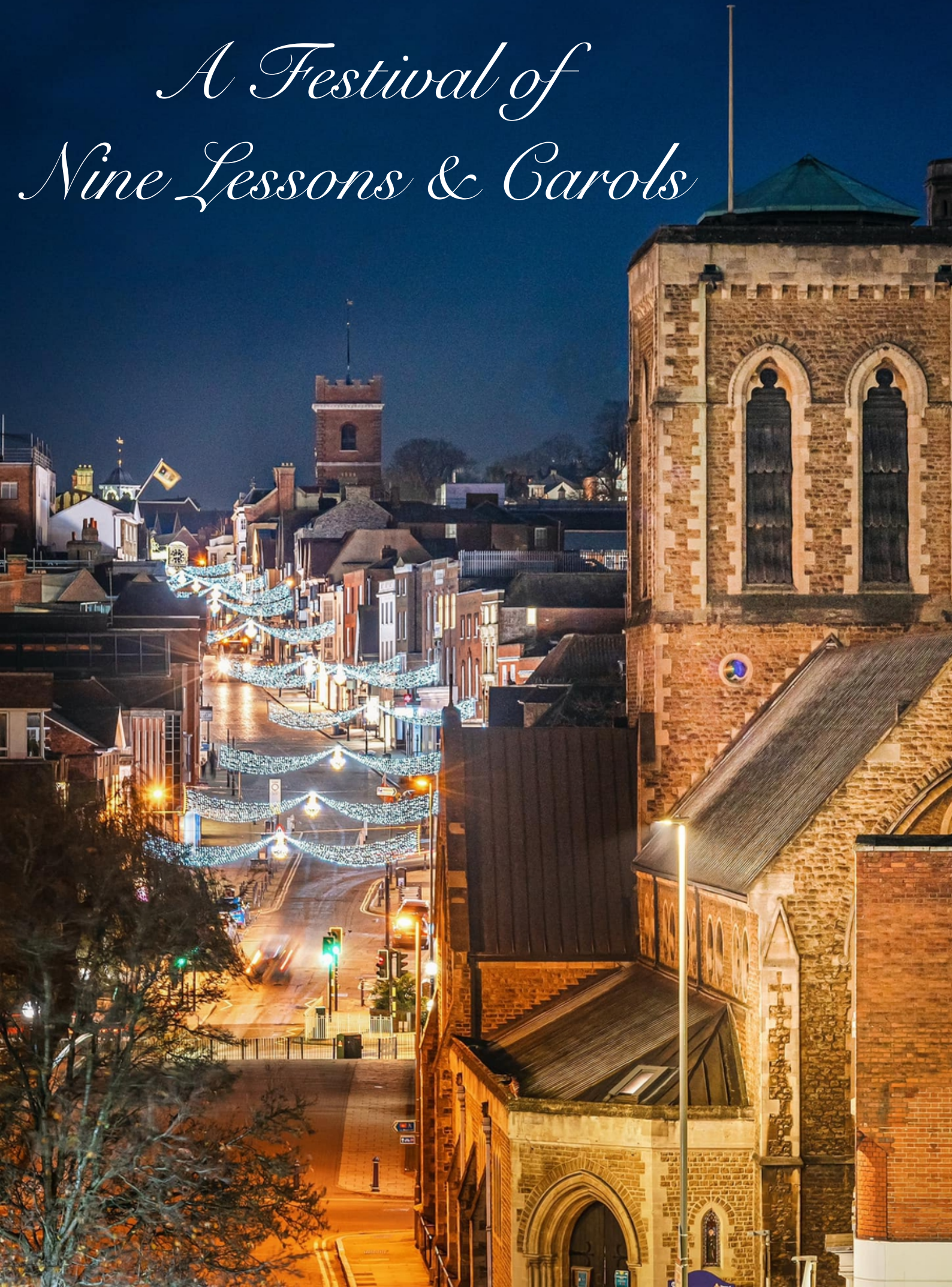


*A Festival of  
Nine Lessons & Carols*



# A Brief History of Nine Lessons & Carols

A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols was first held at King's College Cambridge on Christmas Eve, 1918. It was planned by Eric Milner-White, who had just been appointed Dean after experience as an army Chaplain; this experience convinced him that the Church of England needed more imaginative worship. Evensong, topped and tailed with carols, had been the Christmas Eve service until then but the young Dean, only thirty-four at the time, decided that there was scope for something a little more imaginative.

The 1918 service was adapted from an order drawn up by E.W. Benson for use at 10 pm on Christmas Eve in 1880, in the large wooden 'shed' which then served as his Cathedral in Truro.

A. C. Benson recalled: 'My father arranged from ancient sources a little service for Christmas Eve – nine carols and nine tiny lessons, which were read by various officers of the Church, beginning with a chorister, and ending, through the different grades, with the Bishop.' Milner-White used Benson's plan, but wrote the now-classic Bidding Prayer to set the tone at the beginning. Since then the spoken parts, which provide the backbone of the service, have only occasionally been changed. The service was first broadcast in 1928 and, with the exception of 1930, it has been broadcast annually, even during the Second World War, when the ancient glass had been removed from the Chapel – some say you could hear the tar-paper flapping in the background over the radio.

In the early 1930s the BBC began broadcasting the service on overseas programmes. It is estimated that there are millions of listeners worldwide, including those on Radio Four in the United Kingdom. A recording of the service is broadcast on Christmas Day on Radio Three. It was first transmitted to the United States in the 1970s on Minnesota Public Radio and is now relayed by hundreds of radio stations there.

Wherever the service is heard and however it is adapted, whether the music is provided by choir or congregation, the pattern and strength of the service, as Milner-White pointed out, derive from the lessons. 'The main theme is the development of the loving purposes of God ...' seen 'through the windows and the words of the Bible'. Local interests appear, as they do here, in the Bidding Prayer. Personal circumstances give point to different parts of the service. Many of those who took part in the first service must have recalled those killed in the Great War when it came to the famous passage 'all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light'. When they hear these words, following the extraordinary events of these past few years, many today might be thinking of a loved one who has died recently.

Processional Hymn *Once in royal David's city*

Solo: Once in royal David's city  
Stood a lowly cattle shed,  
Where a mother laid her Baby  
In a manger for His bed:  
Mary was that mother mild,  
Jesus Christ her little Child.

Choir: He came down to earth from heaven,  
Who is God and Lord of all,  
And His shelter was a stable,  
And His cradle was a stall;  
With the poor, and mean, and lowly,  
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

All And through all His wondrous childhood  
He would honour and obey,  
Love and watch the lowly maiden,  
In whose gentle arms He lay:  
Christian children all must be  
Mild, obedient, good as He.

All For he is our childhood's pattern;  
Day by day, like us He grew;  
He was little, weak and helpless,  
Tears and smiles like us He knew;  
And He feeleth for our sadness,  
And He shareth in our gladness.

**All**        And our eyes at last shall see Him,  
Through His own redeeming love;  
For that Child so dear and gentle  
Is our Lord in heaven above,  
And He leads His children on  
To the place where He is gone.

**All**        Not in that poor lowly stable,  
With the oxen standing by,  
We shall see Him; but in heaven,  
Set at God's right hand on high;  
Where like stars His children crowned  
All in white shall wait around.

*Verse 6 Descant: David Valentine Willcocks, 1919-2015*

## THE BIDDING PRAYER

*The Rector welcomes the congregation:*

*Rector*        Beloved in Christ, be it this Christmastide our care and  
delight to prepare ourselves to hear again the message  
of the angels; in heart and mind to go even unto  
Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, and  
the Babe lying in a manger.  
Let us read and mark in Holy Scripture the tale of the  
loving purposes of God from the first days of our  
disobedience unto the glorious Redemption brought us  
by this Holy Child; and let us make this Church,  
dedicated to Nicolas, glad with our carols of praise.

But first let us pray for the needs of his whole world; for peace and health over all the earth; for unity and goodwill within the Church he came to build, and especially in the dominions of our Sovereign Lord, King Charles. And because this of all things would rejoice his heart, let us at this time remember in his name the poor and the helpless, the cold and the hungry, the abused, the exploited and the oppressed; the sick in body and in mind and them that mourn; the isolated, the lonely and the unloved; the elderly and the little children; all who know not the Lord Jesus, or who love him not, or who by sin have grieved his heart of love.

Lastly, let us remember before God all those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light, that multitude which no man can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we for evermore are one.

These prayers and praises let us humbly offer up to the throne of heaven, in the words which Christ himself hath taught us:

*All*

**Our Father,  
which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,  
in earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive them that 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.**

## The Advent Wreath

*The Advent Candle for Advent IV is lit and censed and this prayer is said,*

God our Father,  
the angel Gabriel told the Virgin Mary  
that she was to be the mother of your Son.  
Though Mary was afraid,  
she responded to your call with joy.  
Help us, whom you call to serve you,  
to share like her in your great work  
of bringing to our world your love and healing.  
We ask this through Jesus Christ,  
the light who is coming into the world.

### Collect

*Priest* Let us pray:  
God our redeemer,  
who prepared the Blessed Virgin Mary  
to be the mother of your Son:  
grant that, as she looked for his coming as our saviour,  
so we may be ready to greet him  
when he comes again as our judge;  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever.

*All* **Amen**

The Almighty God bless us with his grace:  
Christ give us the joys of everlasting life:  
and unto the fellowship of the citizens above  
may the King of Angels bring us all.

*All* **Amen.**

## Choir Invitatory: *Ring out, ye crystal spheres*

*June Nixon, b 1942*

Ring out, ye crystal spheres,  
Once bless our human ears  
    if ye have power to touch our senses,  
And let your silver chime move in melodious time.  
And let the bass of heaven's deep organ blow,  
and with you nine-fold harmony make up full consort  
to the angelic symphony.

- John Milton, 1608-1674

¶ Please SIT

## First Lesson

*God tells sinful Adam that he has lost the life of Paradise and that his seed will bruise the serpent's head. (Genesis 3)*

Adam and Eve heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Thanks be to God.

**Choir Carol: *Adam lay ybounden*** Vernon Hoyle, b1948

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 clerkes finden written in their book.  
Ne had the apple taken been, the apple taken been,  
Ne had never our Lady been heaven Queen.  
Blessed be the time that apple taken was,  
Therefore we moun singen, *Deo gracias!*



## Second Lesson

*The prophet foretells the coming of the Saviour. (Isaiah 9)*

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Thanks be to God.

### **Choir Carol: O come, divine Messiah**

*French carol, arr Howard Helvey, b 1968 Abbe Simon-Joseph Pellegrin, 1663-1745, trans  
Sister Mary of Philip, 1823-1904*

O come, divine Messiah!  
The world in silence waits the day  
When hope shall sing its triumph and sadness flee away,  
Dear Saviour, haste, come, come to earth.  
Dispel the night and show your face,  
And bid us hail the dawn of grace.  
You come in peace and meekness,  
and lowly will your cradle be;  
All clothed in human weakness shall we your Godhead see.  
O Christ, whom nations sigh for;  
Whom priest and prophet long foretold  
Come break the captive fetters, redeem the long-lost fold.

## Third Lesson

*The peace that Christ will bring is foreshown. (Isaiah 11)*

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots: and the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. With righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

Thanks be to God.

### **Choir Carol: A tender shoot**

*Otto Goldschmidt, 1829-1907*

A tender shoot hath started up from a root of grace,  
As ancient seers imparted, from Jesse's holy race,  
It blooms without a blight, it blooms without a blight,  
Blooms in the cold bleak winter turning 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, our God of endless might  
Gave her this Child to save us,  
thus turning darkness into light.

*English version: W Bartholomew*

## Fourth Lesson

*The Lord reigns. (Micah 5)*

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labour gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.

Thanks be to God

¶ Please STAND

**Congregational Carol 32: *O little town of Bethlehem***

(omit verse 4) Descant: Thomas Armstrong, 1898-1994

¶ Please SIT

## Fifth Lesson

The angel Gabriel salutes the Blessed Virgin Mary. (Luke 1)

And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And the angel came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be.

And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Thanks be to God.

### **Congregational Carol: The angel Gabriel**

**The angel Gabriel from Heaven came,  
His wings as drifted snow, his eyes as flame;  
All hail, said he, thou lowly maiden Mary,  
Most highly favoured lady, Gloria!**

**For know, a blessed mother thou shalt be,  
All generations laud and honour thee,  
Thy Son shall be Emmanuel, by seers foretold,  
Most highly favoured lady, Gloria!**

**Then gentle Mary meekly bowed her head,  
To me be as it pleaseth God, she said,  
My soul shall laud and magnify His holy name.  
Most highly favoured lady, Gloria!**

Of her, Emmanuel, the Christ, was born  
In Bethlehem, all on a Christmas morn,  
And Christian folk throughout the world  
will ever say—  
Most highly favoured lady, Gloria!

*Trans. Sabine Baring-Gould, 1834-1924*

## Sixth Lesson

*St Luke tells of the birth of Jesus. (Luke 2)*

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Thanks be to God.

**Choir Carol: O magnum mysterium** Tomas Luis de Victoria, 1540-1611

*O magnum mysterium et admirabile sacramentum,  
ut animalia, viderent Dominum natum, jacentem in præsepio!  
O beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt portare Dominum Christum.  
Alleluia.*

O great mystery, and wonderful sacrament,  
that animals should see the newborn Lord, lying in a manger!  
Blessed is the virgin whose womb was worthy to bear the  
Lord, Jesus Christ. Alleluia!

## Seventh Lesson

*The shepherds go to the manger. (Luke 2)*

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.

Thanks be to God.

Congregational Carol: *While Shepherds NEH 42*

## Eighth Lesson

*The wise men are led by the star to Jesus. (Matthew 2)*

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judæa: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also. When they had heard the king, they departed; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Thanks be to God.

¶ Please STAND

Congregational Carol *In the bleak mid winter (NEH28)*

¶ Please SIT

Choir Carol: *Sing lullaby* Herbert Howells, 1892-1983

Sing lullaby, while snow doth gently fall,  
Sing lullaby to Jesus born in an oxen-stall;  
Sing lullaby to Jesus born now in Bethlehem  
The naked blackthorn's growing to weave his diadem;  
Sing lullaby to Jesus. While thickly snow doth fall,  
Sing lullaby to Jesus the Saviour of all.

FW Harvey

¶ Please STAND

Ninth Lesson

*St John unfolds the great mystery of the Incarnation. (John 1)*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.



But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.

Thanks be to God.

### **Congregational Carol 30: O Come all ye faithful (verses 1, 2 and 6 only)**

¶ Remain **STANDING**

### **Prayers & Blessing**

Rector The Lord be with you.

All And with thy spirit.

Let us pray.

O God, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of thy only son, Jesus Christ: grant that as we joyfully receive him for our redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him, when he shall come to be our judge; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.

All **Amen.**

Eternal Christ,

who by his incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, fill you with peace and goodwill, and make you partakers of the divine nature; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be amongst you and remain with you always.

All **Amen.**

Congregational Carol 26: *Hark! The herald angels sing*  
(omit verse 4)

Recessional: O Sanctissima – Félix-Alexandre Guilmant  
(1837-1911)

*With thanks to Adam Stockbridge and Samantha Barnhart, trumpets;  
Will Brown and Jim Alexander, trombones; Chris Pearce, tuba*

*Do join us for Mince pies and  
Mulled Wine in the Parish Hall*