



A FESTIVAL OF  
NINE LESSONS & CAROLS



**St Michael at the North Gate  
City Church of Oxford**

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2024  
4.00 pm

## INTRODUCTION

**O**UR Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols is modelled on the service originally drawn up by E.W. Benson, later Archbishop of Canterbury, for use at Truro Cathedral, on Christmas Eve 1880. 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.'

Almost immediately other churches adapted the service for their own use. A wider frame began to grow when the service was first broadcast in 1928. Sometime 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 to Radio Four in the United Kingdom.

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 Dean Milner-White pointed out, derive from the lessons and not the music. 'The main theme is the development of the loving purposes of God ...' seen 'through the windows and words of the Bible'. Local interests appear, as they do here, in the bidding prayer, and 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 on another shore and in a greater light'. The centre of the service is still found by those who 'go in heart and mind' and who consent to follow where the story leads.

*The church is served by a hearing loop. Users should turn their hearing aid to the setting marked T.*

*Members of the congregation are kindly requested to ensure that mobile phones, cellular phones, chiming digital watches, and pagers are switched off.*

*The service is led by the Reverend Anthony Buckley, Vicar of St Michael at the North Gate and City Rector of Oxford.*

*The service is sung by the Choir of St Michael at the North Gate, conducted by Richard Pantcheff, Director of Music.*

*The organ is played by David Goode.*

*Music before the service:*

Canonic Variations on 'von Himmel hoch'

J. S. BACH (1685-1750)

Les Bergers

OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908-1992)

The Holy Boy

JOHN IRELAND (1879-1962)

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*The candles are lit.*

## ORDER OF SERVICE

*As the main lights of the church are dimmed, please stand.*

CHOIR: *A child is born in Bethlehem* SAMUEL SCHEIDT (1587 - 1654)

**A** CHILD is born in Bethlehem, *Alleluia,*  
And joy is in Jerusalem, *Alleluia.*  
Rejoice, rejoice, sing high, sing low, *Alleluia,*  
*Benedicamus Domino, Alleluia.*

To thee, O Lord, be glory paid, *Alleluia,*  
Thou Son of Mary, mother-maid, *Alleluia.*

Latin (trans. DAVID WILLCOCKS)

*All remain standing. The Choir sings*

SOLO: **O**NCE 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.**

**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.**

**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.**

**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.**

H. J. GAUNTLETT (1805-76)

vv. 1-4 harmonised by A.H. MANN (1850-1929)

Descant and organ part by DAVID WILLCOCKS (b. 1919)

CECIL FRANCES ALEXANDER (1818-95)

*All remain standing.*

## THE BIDDING PRAYER

**B**ELOVED in Christ, be it this Christmastide our care and delight to hear again the message of the angels, and 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.

Therefore 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.

But first, let us pray for the needs of the whole world; for peace on earth and goodwill among all his people; for unity and brotherhood within the Church he came to build, and especially in our diocese.

And because this would rejoice his heart, let us remember, in his name, the poor and helpless, the cold, the hungry, and the oppressed; the sick and them that mourn, the lonely and the unloved, the aged and the little children; all those 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 the Lord Jesus we are one for evermore.

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

**O**UR 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.

**T**HE 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. Amen.

*All sit. The Choir sings*

**O**N Christmas night all Christians sing,  
 To hear the news the angels bring,  
 News of great joy, news of great mirth,  
 News of our merciful King's birth,  
 Then why should men on earth be so sad,  
 Since our Redeemer made us glad,  
 When from our sin he set us free,  
 All for to gain our liberty?  
 When sin departs before his grace,  
 Then life and health come in its place;  
 Angels and men with joy may sing,  
 All for to see the new born King.  
 All out of darkness we have light,  
 Which made the angels sing this night:  
 'Glory to God and peace to men,  
 Now and for evermore. Amen.'

*All remain seated.*

TRADITIONAL

THE FIRST LESSON :: GENESIS 3:8-15

*The promise that evil will be defeated.*

**A**ND they 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.

*All stand to sing*

**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 wond'ring love.

How silently, how silently,  
The wondrous gift is giv'n!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of his heav'n.  
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 today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell:  
O come, to us, abide with us,  
Our Lord Emmanuel.

ENGLISH TRADITIONAL, arr. RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

PHILIP BROOKS (1835 - 1893)

*All sit.*



THE SECOND LESSON :: ISAIAH 9. 2, 6-7

*Christ's birth and kingdom are foretold by Isaiah.*

**T**HE 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 judgement and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

*All remain seated. The Choir sings*

CHOIR: *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day* JOHN GARDNER (1917 - 2011)

**T**OMORROW shall be my dancing day:  
I would my true love did so chance  
To see the legend of my play,  
To call my love to my dance:

*Sing O my love, O my love;  
This have I done for my true love.*

Then was I born of a virgin pure,  
Of her I took fleshly substance;  
Thus was I knit to man's nature,  
To call my true love to my dance:  
*Sing O my love ...*

In a manger laid and wrapped I was,  
So very poor, this was my chance,  
Betwixt an ox and a silly poor ass,  
To call my true love to my dance:  
*Sing O my love ...*

TRADITIONAL ENGLISH

*All remain seated.*

THE THIRD LESSON :: ISAIAH 11. 1-2, 6-9

*The peace that Christ will bring is foreshown.*

**A**ND 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; [...] 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.

*All remain seated. The Choir sings*

CHOIR: *In the bleak mid-winter*

HAROLD DARKE (1888-1976)

**I**N the bleak mid-winter Frosty wind made moan,  
Earth stood hard as iron, Water like a stone;  
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, Snow on snow,  
In the bleak mid-winter Long ago.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold Him Nor earth sustain;  
Heaven and earth shall flee away When He comes to reign:  
In the bleak mid-winter A stable-place sufficed  
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

Enough for Him, whom cherubim Worship night and day,  
A breastful of milk And a mangerful of hay;  
Enough for Him, whom angels Fall down before,  
The ox and ass and camel Which adore.

What can I give Him, Poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb,  
If I were a wise man I would do my part,  
Yet what I can I give Him, Give my heart.

CHRISTINA ROSSETTI (1830-1894)

*All remain seated.*

THE FOURTH LESSON :: MICAH 5. 2-4

*The glory of humble Bethlehem is foretold.*

**B**UT thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.

*All remain seated. The Choir sings*

CHOIR: *Sir Christèmas*

WILLIAM MATHIAS (1934-1992)

**N**OWELL, Nowell,  
Who is there that singeth so?  
Nowell, Nowell.

I am here, Sir Christèmas,  
Welcome, my lord Sir Christèmas!  
Welcome to all, both more and less, Come near.  
*Nowell, Nowell.*

*Dieu vous garde, beaux sieurs,* tidings I you bring:  
A maid hath borne a child full young,  
which causeth you to sing:  
*Nowell, Nowell.*

Christ is now born of a pure maid;  
In an oxstall he is laid,  
Wherefore sing we at a brayde:  
*Nowell, Nowell.*

*Buvez bien, par toute la compagnie.*  
Make good cheer and be right merry,  
And sing with us now joyfully,  
*Nowell, Nowell.*

ANON (c. 1500)

*All remain seated.*

THE FIFTH LESSON :: ST LUKE 1. 26-35, 38

*The angel Gabriel salutes the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

**A**ND 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.

*All remain seated. The Choir sings*

CHOIR: *Lullay my Liking*

GUSTAV HOLST (1874-1934)

**L**ULLAY my liking, my dear Son, my Sweeting;  
*Lullay my dear Heart, mine own dear Darling.*

I saw a fair maiden sitten and sing:  
She lulled a little child, A sweete Lording.

That Eternal Lord is He That made alle thing;  
Of alle Lordes He is Lord, of every King, He's King.

Angels bright they sang that night And saiden to that Child  
"Blessed be Thou and so be she That is so meek and mild."

Pray we now to that Child, As to His Mother dear,  
God grant them all His blessing That now maken cheer.

*Lullay my liking ...*

TRADITIONAL, 15th Century

*All remain seated.*

THE SIXTH LESSON :: ST LUKE 2. 1-7

*St Luke tells of the birth of Jesus.*

**A**ND it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 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 Judaea, 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.

*All remain seated. The Choir sings*

CHOIR: *Nativity Carol*

JOHN RUTTER (b.1945)

**B**ORN in a stable so bare, born so long ago;  
Born 'neath light of star He who loved us so.  
*Far away silent he lay, born today, your homage pay;  
For Christ is born for aye, Born on Christmas Day.*

Wise men from distant far land, shepherds from starry hills  
Worship this babe so rare, hearts with his warmth he fills.  
*Far away ...*

Cradled by mother so fair, tender her lullaby;  
Over her son so dear Angel hosts fill the sky.  
*Far away ...*

Love in that stable was born Into our hearts to flow;  
Innocent dreaming babe, Make me thy love to know.  
*Far away ...*

JOHN RUTTER (b.1945)

*All remain seated.*

THE SEVENTH LESSON :: ST LUKE 2. 8-16

*The shepherds go to the manger.*

**A**ND 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.

*All remain seated. The Choir sings*

CHOIR: *Torches*

JOHN JOUBERT (1927-2019)

**T**ORCHES torches, run with torches  
All the way to Bethlehem!  
Christ is born and now lies sleeping;  
Come and sing your song to him!

Ah Roro, Roro, my baby, my love, Roro,  
Sleep you well, my heart's own darling,  
While we sing you our Roro.

Sing, my friends, and make you merry,  
Joy and mirth and joy again;  
Lo, he lives, the King of heaven,  
Now and ever more, Amen.

TRADITIONAL GALICIAN (trans. J. B. TREND 1887-1958)

*All stand to sing*

**W**HILE shepherds watched their flocks by night,  
All seated on the ground,  
The angel of the Lord came down,  
And glory shone around.

'Fear not,' said he (for mighty dread  
Had seized their troubled mind);  
'Glad tidings of great joy I bring  
To you and all mankind.

'To you in David's town this day  
Is born of David's line  
A Saviour, who is Christ the Lord;  
And this shall be the sign:

'The heavenly Babe you there shall find  
To human view displayed,  
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,  
And in a manger laid.'

Thus spake the Seraph; and forthwith  
Appeared a shining throng  
Of angels praising God, who thus  
Addressed their joyful song:

'All glory be to God on high,  
And on the Earth be peace;  
Goodwill henceforth from heav'n to men  
Begin and never cease!'

NAHUM TATE (1652-1715)

Este's Psalter, 1592

Descant and organ part by DAVID WILLCOCKS (b. 1919)

*All sit.*

THE EIGHTH LESSON :: ST MATTHEW 2. 1-11

*The wise men are led by the Star to Jesus.*

**N**OW when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea 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 Judaea: 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, enquired 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.

*All remain seated. The Choir sings.*



**H**OW sweet and clear  
above the sounds of war  
The clamorous bells are  
pealing their delight!

The angels sing of glory, as they soar  
Among the man-made stars, this Christmas night.  
And, once again, with spices and with gold,  
Three Kings are riding through the sparkling snow

To this poor longing in the bitter cold  
Where Mary kneels within the lantern glow  
To watch her baby lying in the hay,

And think about the wonder of His birth;  
And as He sleeps, to fold her hands and pray  
For peace to come upon this troubled earth.

MARY WILSON (b.1970)

*All stand.*

THE NINTH LESSON :: ST JOHN 1. 1-14

*St John unfolds the great mystery of the Incarnation.*

**I**N 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.

*All remain standing to sing*

**O** COME, all ye faithful,  
Joyful and triumphant,  
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;  
Come and behold him,  
Born the King of angels;

*O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him,  
O come, let us adore him,  
Christ the Lord!*

God of God, Light of Light,  
Lo, he abhors not the virgin's womb;  
Very God, begotten, not created:  
*O come, etc.*

Sing, choirs of angels, Sing in exultation,  
Sing all ye citizens of heaven above:  
"Glory to God In the highest:"  
*O come, etc.*

Yea, Lord we greet thee, Born that happy morning,  
Jesu, to thee be glory givn';  
Word of the Father, Soon in flesh appearing:  
*O come, etc.*

Tr. F. OAKELEY, W. T. BROOKE and others

J. F. WADE (c. 1711 - 1786)  
arranged by DAVID WILLCOCKS (b. 1919)

*All remain standing.*

## THE PRAYERS

**T**HE Lord be with you.  
And with thy spirit.  
Let us pray.

### THE COLLECT FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

**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 Ghost, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.**

*All stand to sing*

**H**ARK! the herald-angels sing  
glory to the new-born King,  
peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
join the triumph of the skies;  
with the angelic host proclaim,  
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.

*Hark! the herald-angels sing  
glory to the new-born King.*

Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
late in time behold him come,  
offspring of a virgin's womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!  
Hail, the incarnate Deity!  
Pleased as man with man to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

*Hark! the herald-angels sing ...*

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of peace!  
Hail, the sun of righteousness!  
Light and life to all he brings,  
risen with healing in his wings.  
Mild he lays his glory by,  
born that man no more may die,  
born to raise the sons of earth,  
born to give them second birth.  
*Hark! the herald-angels sing ...*

C. WESLEY, T. WHITEFIELD, M. MADAN and others.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN (1809-47)

Descant and organ part by DAVID WILLCOCKS (b. 1919)

## THE BLESSING

**M**AY he who by his Incarnation gathered into one things earthly and heavenly, fill you with the sweetness of inward peace and goodwill; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, be upon you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

*All remain standing as the Choir and Clergy process to the south door for the vestry prayer.*

*The organist plays*

Final from 'Symphonie no. 1'

LOUIS VIERNE (1870-1937)

**Members of the Congregation are requested to remain in their places until the end of the organ voluntary.**