



A FESTIVAL OF
NINE LESSONS & CAROLS



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

Sunday 21st December 2025
4.00 pm

INTRODUCTION

OUR 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.

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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 George Charman.

The candles are lit.

ORDER OF SERVICE

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

CHOIR: *Make we joy*

WILLIAM WALTON (1902 - 1983)

MAKE we joy now this fest
In quo Christus natus est. Eya.

A Patre Unigenitus Is through a maiden come to us.
Sing we of him and say 'Welcome'! *Veni Redemptor omnium.*

Agnoscat omne seculum A bright star made three kings to come,
Him for to seek with their presents, *Verbum supernum prodigens.*

Maria ventre concepit, The Holy Ghost was aye her with.
Of her in Bethlem born he is, *Consort Paterni luminis.*

O Lux beata Trinitas! He lay between an ox and ass,
Beside his mother-maiden free: *Gloria tibi Domine!*

ANON (15TH CENTURY)

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.**

CECIL FRANCES ALEXANDER (1818-95)

H. J. GAUNTLETT (1805-76)

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

Descant and organ part by DAVID WILLCOCKS (1919-2015)

All remain standing.

THE BIDDING PRAYER

BELOVED 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:

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 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

CREATOR of the starry height,
thy people's everlasting light,
Jesu, Redeemer of us all,
Hear thou thy servants when they call.

Thou, sorrowing at the helpless cry
of all creation doomed to die,
Didst come to save our fallen race
By healing gifts of heavenly grace.

When earth was near it evening hour,
Thou didst in love's redeeming power,
Like bridegroom from his chamber,
Come forth from a Virgin-mother's womb.

At thy great Name, exalted now,
All knees in lowly homage bow;
All things in heaven and earth adore,
and own Thee King for evermore.

To God the Father, God the Son,
and God the Spirit, Three in One,
Praise, honour, might and glory be,
From age to age eternally. Amen.

LATIN HYMN (*CONDITOR ALME SIDERUM*) trans. J.M. Neale.

All remain seated.

THE FIRST LESSON :: GENESIS 3:8-15

The promise that evil will be defeated.

AND 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.

PHILLIPS BROOKS (1835 - 1893)

ENGLISH TRADITIONAL, arr. RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

All sit.

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

Christ's birth and kingdom are foretold by Isaiah.

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 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: *For unto us a child is born* GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL (1685 - 1759)
(from 'Messiah')

FOR unto us a child is born, 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.

ISAIAH 9, v.6

All remain seated.

THE FOURTH LESSON :: MICAH 5. 2-4

The glory of humble Bethlehem is foretold.

BUT 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: *In dulci jubilo*

TRAD. GERMAN, arr. R.L. PEARSALL (1795-1856)

I*N dulci jubilo*, Let us our homage show;
Our heart's joy reclineth *In praesepio*;
And like a bright star shineth, *Matris in gremio, Alpha es et O.*

O Jesu parvule, I yearn for thee alway!

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!

Deep were we stained *Per nostra crimina*;

But thou hast for us gained *Coelorum gaudia*. O that we were there!

Ubi sunt gaudia, if that they be not there?

There are angels singing *Nova cantica*. There the bells are ringing,

In Regis curia: O that we were there!

TRAD. 13TH CENTURY (arr. REGINALD JACQUES)

All remain seated

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

The angel Gabriel salutes the Blessed Virgin Mary.

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.

All remain seated. The Choir sings

CHOIR: *Dixit Maria*

HANS LEO HASSLER (1564-1612)

DIXIT *Maria ad Angelum:*
Ecce ancilla Domini;
Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum:

Mary spake unto the Angel:

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord,
Let it be done to me according to your word.

ST. LUKE 1, v.38

All remain seated.

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

St Luke tells of the birth of Jesus.

AND 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: *A spotless Rose*

HERBERT HOWELLS (1892-1983)

A SPOTLESS Rose is blowing, Sprung from a tender root;
Of ancient seers' foreshowing, Of Jesse promised fruit;
Its fairest bud unfolds to light Amid the cold, cold, winter,
And in the dark midnight.

The Rose which I am singing, Whereof Isaiah said,
Is from its sweet root springing In Mary, purest Maid;

For through our God's great love and might,
The Blessed Babe she bare us In a cold, cold winter's night.

ENGLISH, 14TH CENTURY

All remain seated.

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

The shepherds go to the manger.

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.

All remain seated. The Choir sings

CHOIR: *Shepherd's Pipe Carol*

JOHN RUTTER (b.1945)

GOING through the hills on a night all starry,
on the way to Bethlehem,
Far away I heard a shepherd-boy piping,
on the way to Bethlehem.

Chorus: Angels in the sky brought this message nigh:
Dance and sing for joy that Christ the new-born King
Is come to bring us peace on earth,
and he's lying cradled there at Bethlehem.

'Tell me, shepherd-boy piping tunes so merrily,
on the way to Bethlehem,
Who will hear your tunes on these hills so lonely,
on the way to Bethlehem?'

Chorus.

'None may hear my pipes on these hills so lonely,
on the way to Bethlehem;

But a King will hear me play sweet lullabies
when I get to Bethlehem.'

Chorus: Angels in the sky came down from on high,
Hovered o'er the manger where the babe was lying
cradled in the arms of his mother Mary,
sleeping now at Bethlehem.

'Where is this new King, shepherd-boy piping merrily,
is he there at Bethlehem?

'I will find him soon by the star shining brightly,
in the sky o'er Bethlehem'.

Chorus. Angels in the sky brought this message nigh:
Dance and sing for joy that Christ the new-born King
Is come to bring us peace on earth,
and he's lying cradled there at Bethlehem.

'May I come with you, shepherd-boy piping merrily,
come with you to Bethlehem?

Pay my homage too at the new King's cradle,
is it far to Bethlehem?

Chorus: Angels in the sky brought this message nigh:
Dance and sing for joy that Christ the infant King
is born this night in lowly stable yonder,
Born for you at Bethlehem'.

JOHN RUTTER

All stand to sing

WHILE 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 (1919-2015)

All sit.

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

The wise men are led by the Star to Jesus.

NOW 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

CHOIR: *Bethlehem Down*

PETER WARLOCK (1894-1930)

WHEN he is king we will give him the king's gifts,
Myrrh for its sweetness, and gold for a crown,
"Beautiful robes" said the young girl to Joseph,
fair with her first-born on Bethlehem Down.

Bethlehem Down is full of the starlight,
Winds for the spices, and stars for the gold,
Mary for sleep, and for lullaby music
Songs of a shepherd by Bethlehem fold.

When he is king they will clothe him in grave-sheets,
Myrrh for embalming, and wood for a crown,
He that now lies in the white arms of Mary
sleeping so lightly on Bethlehem Down.

Here he has peace and a short while for dreaming,
Close-huddled oxen to keep him from cold,
Mary for love, and for lullaby music
Songs of a shepherd by Bethlehem fold.

BRUCE BLUNT (1899-1957)

All stand.

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

St John unfolds the great mystery of the Incarnation.

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.

All sit for the homily.

All stand 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 (1919-2015)

All remain standing

THE 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

HARK! 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 (1919-2015)

THE BLESSING

MAY the joy of the angels, the gladness of the shepherds, the worship of the wise men, and the peace of the Christ Child be yours this Christmas; May Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one all things earthly and all things heavenly, fill you with joy and peace; And may 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

Finale from 'Symphonie no. 6'

CHARLES MARIE WIDOR (1844-1937)

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



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