

A Podcast for North Coventry Group – Christmas Eve, 2020

Musicⁱ –

Away in a manger, and we wish you a merry Christmas
sung by children of the *Tiny Teddies* Day Nurseries in different parts of Coventry and kindly offered for use in our Group Christmas worship by Lucy Brown of *Tiny Teddies*

Coventry Carol/O come O come Emmanuel
arranged and played by Rick Wakeman
from the album *Christmas Portraits*

Introduction [Bill]

Hello and welcome to a podcast for and from the North Coventry Group of United Reformed Churches. This has been prepared for Christmas Eve, 2020.

Details of music and sources are in the online transcript, and Erica and I would like to thank all our readers, across all the Group's churches, for sharing in the preparation of this service. We have felt supported and blessed by the contributions made since March by all of those who have been willing to record themselves reading scripture, sometimes with the assistance of other family members to get over technical hurdles.

In this service we make use of a pattern of worship established over a century ago in the Anglican diocese of Truro. The pattern traces the interaction between God and his human creation across all ages since Creation itself, the looking forward of the Old Testament prophets and the fulfilment of God's promises in the unexpected incarnation – the baby in the manger. Little else need be said.

The selection and order of the readings will be familiar, although you will realise this is not *Carols from Kings* as we are making use of the New International Version of the Bible, and not all of our carols are sung by choirs.

But we are making use of the traditional opening words of the service:

Prayer and Lord's Prayer [Erica]

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 all across this city of Coventry, and in our Group of churches.

And because this of all things 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 for ever one.

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, 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 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.*

Music: *Of the Father's love begotten*
performed by the Clare College Singers and Orchestra
directed by John Rutter
from the album *The original Carols from Clare, John Rutter*

Of the Father's love begotten,
ere the worlds began to be,
he is Alpha and Omega,
he the source, the ending he,
of the things that are, that have been,
and that future years shall see,
evermore and evermore!

This is he whom seers and sages
chanted of with one accord;
whom the voices of the prophets
promised in their faithful word;
now he shines, the long expected,
let creation praise its Lord,
evermore and evermore!

O that birth forever blessèd,
when the virgin, full of grace,
by the Holy Ghost conceiving,
bore the Saviour of our race;
and the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
first revealed his sacred face,
evermore and evermore!

O ye heights of heav'n, adore him;
angel hosts, his praises sing;
all dominions, bow before him,
and extol our Lord and King.
Let no tongue on earth be silent,
every voice in concert ring,
evermore and evermore.

The Creation of the World:

Genesis 1.1-5ⁱⁱ

Nora Bridge

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day", and the darkness he called "night". And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

God's Promise to Abraham:

Genesis 22.15-18

Elliot Barker

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Music: *In the bleak midwinter*, arranged by Nigel Hess
performed by company members of the Royal Shakespeare Company
from the album, *Love's Labour's Won: Music and Speeches*

In the bleak midwinter
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 midwinter,
long ago.

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, —
[and I] give my heart.

The prophet foretells the Messiah's birth:

Isaiah 9.2, 6-7

Olive Holtom

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Music: *For unto us*, from Handel's *Messiah*
performed by The Sixteen & Harry Christophers

The prophet Micah foretells the glory of Bethlehem:

Micah 5:2-4

Jill Stebbings

"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.

Music: *O little town of Bethlehem*
performed by Annie Lennox
from her album, *A Christmas Cornucopia*

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.

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.

For Christ is born of Mary,
and, gathered all above,
while mortals sleep, the angels keep
their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together
proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King
and Peace to men on earth!

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

The angel Gabriel greets the virgin, Mary:
Luke 1:26-35,38

Mandy Brucculeri

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God."

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said." Then the angel left her.

Luke tells of the birth of Jesus:
Luke 2:1-7

Jill Waring

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to his own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Music: *Lullaby, my Jesus*, by Peter Warlock
performed by the Choir of Winchester Cathedral and David Hill
from their album *Warlock: Capriol Suite, Songs*

The shepherds go to the manger:

Luke 2,8-16

Wynne Davidson

And there were shepherds living out in the fields near by, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,
"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favour rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Music: *Away in a manger*
performed by the Choir of St Paul's Cathedral
from their album, *Away in a Manger – popular Christmas Carols*

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,
the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,
the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,
but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.
I love thee, Lord Jesus! look down from the sky,
and stay by my bed until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus; I ask thee to stay
close by me forever and love me I pray.
Bless all the dear children in thy tender care,
and fit us for heaven, to live with thee there.

The Magi are led by the star to Jesus:

Matthew 2,1-18

Margaret Barker

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

When Herod realised that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

"A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning,
Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

Music:

Unto us is born a son

performed by Magdalen College Choir, Oxford, Bill Ives & Richard Pinel
from their album *Christmas Music – Nine Lessons and Carols*

Unto us is born a son,
king of choirs supernal:
see on earth his life begun,
of lords the Lord eternal.

Christ, from heav'n descending low,
comes on earth a stranger;
ox and ass their Owner know
becradled in a manger.

Of his love and mercy mild
this our Christmas story:
and O that Mary's gentle child
might lead us up to glory!

This did Herod sore affray,
And grievously bewilder,
so he gave the word to slay,
and slew the little childer.

O and A and A and O,
cum cantibus in choro,
let the merry organ go
benedicamus Domino.

John unfolds the mystery of the Incarnation:

John 1:1-14

Janet Powell

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Prayers of Intercession [Bill]

We bring our prayers to God

Lord God our Father, creator of all, sustainer of your Creation, giver and motivator of all that is good, we offer our prayers to you today. In a time of uncertainty, frustration and upset, show us once again how important was the message of your Son, how fundamental were his commandments to his disciples and to us.

Even as we celebrate the coming of Christ the child, remind us of the sacrifice of Christ the man. By our actions as the Body of Christ may we continue his work – reconnecting the marginalised, bringing relief to those who are desperate, hope and purpose to those who believe they have none.

Be with those who have little cause to celebrate anything this Christmas. Those who are lonely, those recently bereaved, those who are ill. We thank you for those who have responded to your call by caring for them, and that we live in a society with some safeguards for those in difficulties. And we pray for the many in other parts of the world – sisters and brothers in the human family – who have none.

Amidst all the turmoil and concern that is the winter of 2020 to 21, grant us peace to be grateful for Jesus. And to refocus our lives on you.

In the name of your Son, our Lord. Amen.

Music: *Hark! The Herald angels sing*
sung by Trinity College Choir, Cambridge & Richard Marlow
from the album, *The Great British Carol Collection*

Hark! The herald-angels sing
"glory to the newborn 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
"glory to the newborn King".

Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son 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
"glory to the new-born king".

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 among you and remain with you always.

Amen

Music: *The Shepherds' Farewell*, by Hector Berlioz
performed by John Rutter and The Cambridge Singers
from the album, *The Cambridge Singers' Christmas Album*

Thank you for listening to our podcast. The next podcast will be a short edition uploaded on Christmas Morning. The last in this series will be this weekend, for Sunday 27 December. The archive on our website will remain available until Easter, and after that depending on licensing conditions.

Credits

Thanks again to our readers tonight; Nora Bridge, Elliot Barker, Olive Holtom, Jill Stebbings, Mandy Brucculeri, Jill Waring, Wynne Davidson, Margaret Barker and Janet Powell.

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For unto us, from Handel's *Messiah* was performed by The Sixteen & Harry Christophers

O little town of Bethlehem was performed by Annie Lennox from her album, *A Christmas Cornucopia*. This is dedicated to Flora Young – a favourite carol at her favourite time of year.

Lullaby, my Jesus, by Peter Warlock was performed by the Choir of Winchester Cathedral and David Hill from their album *Warlock: Capriol Suite, Songs*

Away in a manger, performed by the Choir of St Paul's Cathedral, came from their album, *Away in a Manger – popular Christmas Carols*

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ⁱⁱ Bible passages are taken from the New International Version, Anglicised Edition.