

A carol service for 2020

Call to worship: Isaiah chapter 9 verse 2 and 6 to 7

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 forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this. Amen.

Carol 1, 'Angels from the realms of glory'

**1. Angels, from the realms of glory,
Wing your flight o'er all the earth;
Ye who sang creation's story,
Now proclaim Messiah's birth; *Chorus:***

*Come and worship,
Christ the new-born King.*

*Come and worship,
Worship Christ, the new-born King.*

**2. Shepherds, in the field abiding,
Watching o'er your flocks by night,
God with man is now residing,
Yonder shines the infant light; *Chorus:***

**3. Sages, leave your contemplations,
Brighter visions beam afar;
Seek the great Desire of nations;
Ye have seen His natal star; *Chorus:***

**4. Saints, before the altar bending,
Watching long in hope and fear,
Suddenly the Lord, descending
In His temple shall appear; *Chorus:***

**5. Though an infant now we view Him,
He shall fill His Father's throne,
Gather all the nations to Him;
Every knee then shall bow down; *Chorus:***

© James Montgomery (1771 – 1854)

Background to 'Angels from the realms of glory'

This carol was written by a remarkable man, James Montgomery, whose statue stands in Sheffield, where he spent most of his life as a radical newspaper editor and proprietor. James' parents were missionaries who moved from Scotland to the West Indies where they died of Yellow Fever. James was sent to a strict boarding school near Leeds, where he was a poor student and so found himself apprenticed in a bakery, but hated it so much that he ran away and eventually became a clerk at a radical newspaper, known as "The Sheffield Register". Eventually James became the owner, changing the paper's name to "The Sheffield Iris" He was no respecter of authority and was twice imprisoned, once for celebrating the fall of the Bastille and, later, for condemning the brutality of the militia when it dealt with a riot in Sheffield. His newspaper constantly supported the downtrodden and exploited, opposed slavery, poor sanitation, bad housing, the use of boy chimney sweeps and State Lotteries.

“Angels from the realms of Glory” was first printed in 1816 in “The Sheffield Iris”, entitled ‘Nativity’. It is sung to ‘Iris’ a Flemish melody arranged by Martin Shaw and echoing the name of James’ newspaper.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, how can we adequately sing your praise, speak of your boundless love, power and wisdom, as well as tell of your everlasting goodness and grace, for human language cannot describe your holiness and glory? Nevertheless, Creator God, you are the Word who gave life throughout our universe, so as we come to you in reverence and joy to offer our worship this morning, we remember how you gave your beloved Son, Jesus, to a hostile, sinful world. You sent him as a helpless baby, born to poor parents, not as a prince with wealth and soldiers to protect him. Through Christ we can enjoy a right relationship with you, our heavenly Father. Saviour God. Thank you not only for sending Jesus to redeem our fallen race, but for all that you do for us, all you have given us and all you have accomplished in us. Help us to recognise your generosity and loving-kindness by loving both you and other people wholeheartedly – even sacrificially.

Merciful Lord, forgive us when we let you down by what we do and say. Help us to amend our ways, so our hearts are warm and bright with the love you give us so abundantly, making them fitting places in which Christ Jesus may dwell.

Heavenly Father, as you have taken away the burden of our sins, grant that we may serve you and our neighbours. Help us to live out the gospel message in all we say and do, so we act as beacons to guide everybody we meet to know and love Jesus in a world darkened by sin and selfishness. Amen.

We shall say the Lord’s Prayer.

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

Carol 2, ‘Christians, awake! Salute the happy morn,’

**1. Christians, Awake, salute the happy morn,
Whereon the Saviour of the world was born;
Rise to adore the mystery of love,
Which hosts of angels chanted from above;
With them the joyful tidings first begun
Of God incarnate and the Virgin’s Son.**

**2. Then to the watchful shepherds it was told,
Who heard the angelic herald’s voice: “Behold,
I bring good tidings of a Saviour’s birth
To you and all the nations on the earth:
This day hath God fulfilled his promised word,
This day is born a Saviour, Christ the Lord.”**

**3. He spake; and straightway the celestial choir
In hymns of joy, unknown before, conspire.
The praises of redeeming love they sang,
And heaven’s whole orb with alleluias rang;
God’s highest glory was their anthem still,
Peace on the earth, in ev’ry heart goodwill.**

**4. O may we keep and ponder in our mind
God’s wondrous love in saving lost mankind;
Trace we the babe, who hath retrieved our loss,
From his poor manger to his bitter cross;**

**Tread in his steps, assisted by his grace,
Till our first heavenly state again takes place.**

**5. Then may we hope, the angelic hosts among,
To sing, redeemed, a glad triumphal song;
He that was born upon this joyful day
Around us all his glory shall display;
Saved by his love, incessant we shall sing
Eternal praise to heaven's Almighty King.**

© John Byrom {1692 – 1763}

Background to 'Christians, awake! Salute the happy morn,'

When John Byrom, asked his daughter, Dolly, what she would like for Christmas she asked only for a poem written by her father. It was no surprise when, at breakfast on Christmas Day 1749, Dolly found a scroll, bound with red ribbon, at her place on the table. When she opened the scroll, she found the words of "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn". I hope John Byrom bought her something else, but whether or not he did so, young Dolly showed off the poem to friends and acquaintances, one of whom was John Wainwright, the organist at Stockport Parish Church where the Byroms worshipped. He must have been impressed, for he secretly decided to convert the poem into a Christmas carol for the following Christmas.

At one minute past midnight on Christmas Day 1750, the Byrom household was roused from sleep by Mr. Wainwright and his choir singing "Christians, awake, salute the happy morn" outside their house. I trust that John Byrom was gracious enough to rise, dress and offer due hospitality to the singers, even though he may well have been exhausted. Moreover, it is as well that John Wainwright found the correct house: otherwise, they might have received the contents of a chamber pot for their pains, Christmas Day or not!

Our Gospel reading is reading is Luke chapter 2 verses 1 to 7

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. Amen.

Carol 3, 'See, amid the winter's snow,'

**1. See amid the winter's snow,
Born for us on earth below;
See, the tender Lamb appears,
Promised from eternal years: *Chorus:***

*Hail, thou ever-blessed morn,
Hail, redemption's happy dawn!
Sing through all Jerusalem,
Christ is born in Bethlehem.*

**2. Lo, within a manger lies
He who built the starry skies;
He, who, throned in heights sublime,
Sits amid the cherubim: *Chorus:***

**3. Say, you holy shepherds, say,
What your joyful news today?
Wherefore have you left your sheep
On the lonely mountain steep? *Chorus:***

**4. 'As we watched at dead of night,
There approached a wondrous light;
Angels, singing peace on earth,
Told us of the Saviour's birth.'** *Chorus:*

**5. Sacred infant, all divine,
What a tender love was thine,
Thus to come from highest bliss
Down to such a world as this:** *Chorus:*

© *Edward Caswall (1814 – 1878)*

Background to 'See, amid the winter's snow.'

Revd. Edward Caswall left the Church of England and joined the Roman Catholic Church in 1847. Three years later worked with John Newman at the Oratory, Edgbaston in Birmingham. There Edward worked with a dozen Catholic priests, serving churches, schools and communities in some of the poorest parts of Ladywood and Hockley.

'See, amid the winter's snow' was published in 1871, but had been published in "The Masque of Mary and other poems" in 1858. It is a fine carol, dealing not only with Luke's account of the nativity, but connecting Christ's incarnation to scriptural prophecies and adding the lovely chorus with its 'hail'. Although it appears in many non-conformist hymnals, perhaps because of Edward's 'popping', it does not appear in 'Hymns Ancient and Modern', 'The English Hymnal', nor 'Songs of Praise', but that is their loss.

Carol 4, 'Silent night, holy night,'

1. Silent night! Holy night.

**All is calm, all is bright
Round yon virgin mother and Child;
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.**

2. Silent night! Holy night.

**Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar,
Heav'nly hosts sing Alleluia;
Christ, the Saviour, is born,
Christ, the Saviour, is born.**

3. Silent night! Holy night.

**Son of God, love's pure light,
Radiant beams from thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace:
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth,
Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.**

© *J. Mohr (1792 – 1848) tr. J. Freeman Young (1820 – 1885)*

Background to 'Silent night, holy night'

Imagine that it is Christmas Eve when your organist announces that some distinctly unholy mice have gnawed holes in the leather bellows of the church organ. It is long before the age of electronic keyboards and all you have is a guitar. It dawns on you that you will have to conduct worship with that instrument when your congregation will be expecting the usual fare of carols. What do you do? If you were Father Joseph Mohr, you would persuade the organist to set to music a carol that you had written recently. Unlikely as it sounds, this is the origin of one of the best-loved Christmas Carols, 'Stille Nacht, Heilige Nact', or, depending upon the translation, 'Silent Night, Holy Night,' or 'Still the Night'.

Joseph Mohr was born in Salzburg in 1792. He was assistant priest at the Church of St. Nicholas in Oberndorf, on Christmas Eve, 1818 when the organist, Franz Gruber, bore him the dire news that mice had punctured the leather organ bellows and not even an asthmatic wheeze could be drawn from the instrument. Father Joseph was nonplussed for a moment only; then he pulled a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket, on which he had written a poem that he had hoped to turn into a children's carol. With admirable faith, he handed it to Herr Gruber, his friend, and invited him to set it to music which could be accompanied upon the guitar and sung by children.

Franz Gruber was a gifted musician, but he must have been surprised how quickly the melody for 'Stille Nacht' came to him. Upon Christmas Day the two men and twelve children gave the maiden performance of the carol and, like most innovations, it received a mixed reception. However, when the organ repairer saw the composition, he begged a copy and circulated it round his village of Fugen in Zillertal. Soon it had become extremely popular and was translated into several languages, the first English translation being by Emily Eliot of Brighton in 1858.

Carol 5, 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night,'

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

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

**3. 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:**

**4. The heav'nly babe you there shall find
To human view displayed;
All meanly wrapped in swathing bands,
And in a manger laid.**

**5. Thus spake the seraph and forthwith
Appeared a shining throng
Of Angels praising God, who thus
Addressed their joyful song:**

**6. "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)

Background to 'While shepherds watched their flocks'

Nahum Tate was the son of an Irish priest, Revd, Faithful Brady, and after graduating from Trinity College, Dublin, came to England, where he published a book of verse in 1677. Some of Nahum Tate's work were of a spiritual nature, for he collaborated with a fellow Irishman, the Revd. Nicholas Brady to produce 'A new version of the psalms of David', dedicated to King William III in 1696 and the enduring hymn, 'Through all the changing scenes of life'. Nahum Tate became Poet Laureate from 1690, some might say more the result of his influence at Court than of his talent. Unfortunately, Nahum became addicted to drink and fell into such serious debt

that he had to spend his last days in a debtors' refuge. Indeed, he died in June, 1715, hiding in the Royal Mint in Southwark where debtors were protected from arrest.

Although 'While shepherds watched their flocks by night' is usually sung to "Westminster Old", it is sometimes sung to 'Lyngham', though I like it sung to 'On Ilkley Moor baht' at'. I have been told that it can be sung to the chorus of 'Sweet chiming Christmas bells'! I have sung 'Sweet chiming Christmas bells' to its original words, so I feel I must try that melody to 'While shepherds watched' sometime.

Carol 6, 'O come, all ye faithful,'

**1. 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; *Chorus*
*O come, let us adore him,
Christ the Lord.***

**2. God of God,
Light of Light,
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin's womb:
Very God,
Begotten, not created; *Chorus***

**3. Sing, choirs of angels,
Sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heaven above;
Glory to God
In the highest; *Chorus***

© *Frederick Oakeley (1832 – 1865)*

Background to 'O come, all ye faithful'

"O come, all ye faithful" first appeared in Latin form in an Eighteenth Century Jacobean manuscript, 'A Prayer for James'. The James alluded to was probably James III, the 'Old Pretender' and the author is believed to have been John Francis Wade, a member of a colony of exiled Roman Catholics, living in Douai, France. Certainly, the manuscript is in Wade's own hand. This Catholic colony had fled Britain after the enforced abdication of King James II in 1688 and it retained its British character until the late Eighteenth Century, when it was either assimilated in French society, or simply disintegrated. Jesuits are believed to have brought back the manuscript when they were allowed to return at the dawn of the Nineteenth Century.

John Wade was a gifted linguist, producing manuscripts in a number of languages and teaching both music and Latin. It is believed that the manuscript 'Adeste fidelis' was held by Jesuits at a college in Lisbon, Portugal. Shortly afterwards, the manuscript was discovered by Rev. Frederick Oakeley, who was born in Shrewsbury at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century. He took his degree at Christ Church, Oxford, after which he was ordained. He became Vicar of St. Margaret's Chapel, London, (now called All Saints, Margaret Street).

In time Revd. Oakeley rose to become Prebendary of Lichfield Cathedral, but he had become an active part of the Oxford Movement, so he followed John Newman into the Roman Catholic Church after 1845. He spent much of his time as a Catholic priest working among the poor of the districts around Islington, before he ended his days in 1880 as a canon of Westminster Cathedral. It is worth noting that, at a time when the Church of England seemed to have lost impetus, the Methodists and Salvationists at one extreme and the Anglo-Catholics at the other saw outreach to the poor and marginalized as an essential part of their faith.

“O come, all ye faithful”, or “Ye faithful, approach ye” as it was originally, was translated for the congregation at St. Margaret’s Chapel and first appeared in “The Hymnal for Use in the English Church” in 1852.

Benediction

May the joy of the angels, the wonder of the shepherds and the steadfastness of the wise men be ours this Christmas and may God bless us all, evermore. Amen.