

## A service for 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2023 Christmas 1 Songs of Praise (StF)

### Call to Worship: 'I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year'

I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year,

'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.' And he replied,

'Go out into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way!'

So I went forth and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night. And He led me towards the hills and the breaking of day in the lone East.

**Welcome to our Carols Songs of Praise service. We shall sing each carol, after which I shall tell you something of its background and, hopefully, you won't need a sermon; just a short address.**

*Our opening carol is number 190, 'Angels from the realms of glory'*

**1. Angels, from the realms of glory,**

**Wing your flight o'er all the earth;**

**You 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 newborn King.*

**2. Shepherds, in the field abiding,**

**Watching o'er your flocks by night,**

**God with us is now residing,**

**Yonder shines the infant light; *Chorus:***

**3. Sages, leave your contemplations,**

**Brighter visions beam afar;**

**Seek the great Desire of nations;**

**You 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 the carol**

This carol was written by a remarkable man, James Montgomery, whose statue still 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 Moravian boarding school near Leeds, where he failed to shine academically 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". The owner, Joseph Gales was a plain-speaking liberal and was forced to flee the country when his opinions led to his persecution. James admired

Mr. Gales, so he first took over as editor, then 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, but supported the teaching of reading and writing in Sunday Schools (State education did not exist until 1871).

"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.

*Hymn number 195, '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 spoke; 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 every heart goodwill.**

**4. To Beth'lem straight the enlightened shepherds ran,  
To see, unfolding, God's eternal plan;  
Then to their flocks, still praising God, return,  
And their glad hearts with holy rapture burn;  
Amazed, the wondrous tidings they proclaim,  
The first apostles of his infant fame.**

**5. Like Mary, let us ponder in our mind  
God's wondrous love in saving humankind:  
Trace we the Babe, who has retrieved our loss  
From his poor manger to his bitter cross;  
Treading his steps, assisted by his grace,  
Till our first heavenly state again takes place.**

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

## **Background to the carol**

There can be few questions riskier than to ask an average eleven year-old what he or she would like for Christmas nowadays. It an invitation to empty your wallet or, perhaps, to make your 'flexible friend' feel the strain. Fortunately for John Byrom, things were different in 1749, because his daughter, Dolly, was not as materialistic as contemporary children are encouraged to be by advertisers. She asked only for a poem written by her father. I suppose it would not have been a 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!

John Byrom was born in February 1692 in Kelsall by Manchester, to a landed family. He was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, studied medicine at Montpellier, but does not seem to have gone into practice. Instead he developed a forerunner of the Pitman Shorthand System and taught it professionally in London. Two of his students were John and Charles Wesley, who used Byrom's shorthand in their journals, for which we Methodists are duly grateful! He was elected to the Royal Society in 1723 and, upon the death of his elder brother a year later, he returned to Manchester to run the family estates.

John Wainwright was born in Stockport on 14<sup>th</sup> April, 1723, became a 'singing man' at what has become Manchester Cathedral – it was then the Collegiate Church – and deputy organist two years later, in 1748. Sometime between 1749 and 1750, he became organist at Stockport Parish Church, then was appointed as chief organist at the Collegiate Church, Manchester.

## ***Let us pray***

Glorious gracious God, we come to worship you at the beginning of a New Year, with all its opportunities and challenges, some of which are exciting, but others fill us with trepidation. Help us to remember that you are always here with us as we venture into the future, for you entered our world as a helpless child to be with us in all we do. Thus, we come to pray to you in faith, sing your praises joyfully and listen to your guiding word, for you are the Lord of creation, sustainer of life and our Saviour. You are our strength and stay in both good and bad times, so we humbly offer you all honour, glory and praise in our worship.

Lord, we adore you, for when human beings had rebelled against you and had darkened your creation with sin and misery, you sent your only Son, Christ Jesus, to save us. He came without status or wealth, but was born in humble Bethlehem, in the stable of an inn, to ordinary parents. As Jesus grew among people like us, he shared our joys and sorrows, trials and temptation, our hopes and fears, yet he did so without

sinning, showing us how you want us to live. Because of his self-sacrifice at Calvary, Jesus broke the power of sin and he triumphed over death which no longer has the last word and he offers eternal life to all who believe in him.

Amazing God, such love is beyond our understanding, for we confess that, although we want lead good lives, we often fail to love our neighbours as we love ourselves and we fail to love and serve you wholeheartedly. Sometimes we fail to show kindness to neighbours who are in need or trouble, though we know we really ought to. Lord, help us turn away from our wrongdoing and forgive us in Jesus' name.

Gracious, loving God, we believe you always hear and answer our prayers, so confident that you have already pardoned us, we ask you to help bear the light of your lovingkindness in everything we do and say, in Jesus' lovely name. Amen.

***We shall say the prayer our Lord taught his disciples:***

**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.**

***Hymn number 193, 'Born in the night, Mary's child'***

**1. Born in the night,**

**Mary's child,**

**A long way from your home:**

**Coming in need,**

**Mary's child,**

**Born in a borrowed room.**

**2. Clear, shining Light,**

**Mary's child,**

**Your face lights up our way;**

**Light of the world,**

**Mary's child,**

**Dawn on our darkened day.**

**3. Truth of our life,**

**Mary's child,**

**You tell us God is good;**

**Prove it is true,**

**Mary's child,**

**Go to your cross of wood.**

**4. Hope of the world,**

**Mary's child,**

**You're coming soon to reign;**

**King of the earth,**

**Mary's child,**

**Walk in our streets again.**

© Geoffrey Ainger (1925 - 2013)

**Background to the carol**

Geoffrey Ainger was born in Mistley, Essex, on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1925, was educated at Bracondale School in Norwich, at Richmond College, London, then at the Union Theological Seminary, New York, from which he emerged as a Methodist minister.

During a varied ministry, he spent nine years as part of a team ministry at Notting Hill in the 1960s, when it was a very deprived area.

This hymn was written in 1960, whilst Revd. Geoffrey Ainger was a Methodist minister at Loughton, Essex and was first published in “Songs from Notting Hill” in 1964. The theme reflected Revd. Ainger’s concern for homeless in the area – an official indifference to the plight of people who lacked a roof over their heads.

*Hymn number 215, ‘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 the carol**

Edward Caswall was born at Yateley, Hampshire in July 1814. He was the son of a clergyman and nephew of the Bishop of Salisbury, so it was almost inevitable that, following education Oxford University, he took Holy Orders in 1840. However, he was already part of the Oxford Movement and he followed Dr. John Newman into the Roman Catholic Church in 1847, much to his family’s disapproval. It must have been a shock to Edward’s wife, too, but they remained together until she died in 1850, after which Edward left his home in Wiltshire to join 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.

The work of these priests among the slum-dwellers won them both respect and love – and not only from fellow-Catholics, for they visited the sick, took relief to the poor, visited prisoners at Winson Green Gaol and campaigned for better living conditions. Although his work gave him little free time,

‘See, amid the winter’s snow’ was published in 1871, but had been published in “The Masque of Mary and other poems’ in 1858. 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. Revd. Edward Caswall passed into new life on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 1878 and is buried close to his mentor and friend, John Newman near Bromsgrove.

***We come to our prayers of intercession when we bring our concerns for people nearby and far away to our Lord.***

Loving Lord, you come to your world as King of the nations, to bring peace, built upon justice and mercy. Lord speak to the hearts and minds of those who govern the nations of the world, so they turn away from using violence as a means of having their own way. Instead, may they learn the value of negotiation and compromise over force of arms.

Heavenly Father, we offer our prayer for victims of warfare, terrorism, discrimination and persecution. Bring an end to their suffering and help them rebuild their lives. Warm our hearts with your compassion, so we strive for them to receive the support they need to have a fresh start and hope for the future.

Lord, before you rulers will stand in silence. Guide the leaders of the Northern Hemisphere to be generous to the people of the Developing Nations, where there is great poverty and suffering. We pray for the victims of recent natural disasters, that they may receive speedy help, as well as neighbours in countries facing severe famines. We ask a blessing on the Disasters Emergency Committee, All We Can, Christian Aid, indeed on all organizations which are working to provide desperately-needed aid.

We pray, too, for people in this country who are struggling to live as the cost of food and energy rise and as inflation increases to record levels. We thank you for food banks, warm spaces and for other initiatives which are helping the poor, but may the Government and other agencies find new ways of helping people who are facing the awful choice of heating their homes, or eating to manage during the coming winter.

Saviour, come to your Church as Lord and Judge. We pray for this church and churches in our Circuit that we may be a light of hope to a sin-darkened world. We pray, too, for the World Church, that old differences may be set aside, so all Christians learn to serve you in unity of mission and bring people to know you. Help us to live in the light of your coming and give us a longing to do your will.

Lord of shalom, come to your people as healer and bearer of pain. We pray for people from this church, for families and friends, for people from work, or from our community who are ill, recovering from injuries or operations, or who face surgery in the near future. We remember also everybody who is lonely, confused, burdened or bereaved, for Christmastide often sharpens their pain. In your grace, enfold us all in your love, wipe away the tears of failure, fear and distress, and set us free to serve you for ever.

Father God, as Christmas nears, we pray for ourselves. We don't know what others will ask of us so we pray for the Spirit to guide and encourage us when times are difficult, for vision and hope to enable us to take a risk for the sake of the gospel and courage to remain true to the teaching of Christ.

Abba, Heavenly Father, bless us and our families. Keep us safe and fill us with the love and grace of Jesus, so that our thoughts, words and deeds offer peace and love to people around us, bringing you glory in the name of Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**The Gospel reading is John chapter 1 verses 1 to 14.**

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 recognize 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. Amen.

### *Hymn number 227, 'Brightest and best of the sons of the morning'*

**1. Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,**

**Dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid;**

**Star of the east, the horizon adorning,**

**Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.**

**2. Cold on his cradle the dewdrops are shining;**

**Low lies his head, with the beasts of the stall;**

**Angels adore him in slumber reclining,**

**Maker, and Monarch, and Saviour of all.**

**3. Say, shall we yield him, in costly devotion,**

**Odours of Edom, and offerings divine?**

**Gems of the mountain, and pearls of the ocean,**

**Myrrh from the forest, or gold from the mine?**

**4. Vainly we offer each ample oblation;**

**Vainly with gifts would his favour secure;**

**Richer by far is the heart's adoration;**

**Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.**

**5. Brightest and best of the sons of the morning,**

**Dawn on our darkness, and lend us thine aid;**

**Star of the east, the horizon adorning,**

**Guide where our infant Redeemer is laid.**

© *Reginald Heber* {1783 – 1826}

### **Background to the carol**

The author of the hymn, Reginald Heber, was born into a wealthy Cheshire family, for whom culture and service were important. He went to Whitchurch Grammar School in Shropshire and then to Brasenose College, Oxford, before becoming a Fellow of All Souls when he was only twenty-two. His poem, 'Palestine' won the Newdigate Prize, as a result of which he became a friend of Robert Southey and Sir Walter Scott when he contributed to the literary journal, 'The Quarterly Review'. In 1807 he became vicar of Hodnet in Shropshire, where he worked with Henry Milman to produce hymns to fit the liturgy of the church year. Whilst at Hodnet, Reginald Heber wrote fifty-seven hymns that were published in "Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Church Service of the Year", in 1827, one year after his premature death.

It was almost inevitable that as gifted and conscientious a man as Rev. Heber should rise in the Church and so it was that he was appointed Bishop of Calcutta in

1823. However, his duties were not confined to that one city, as his title implies, but instead to much of the South Pacific, including Ceylon and Australia, for he was the only Anglican Bishop in that hemisphere. Bishop Heber was a modest and conscientious man, whose sense of duty drove him to travel tirelessly during his three years as Bishop. The heat and hard work took their toll of his health and he died aged only forty-two, on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1826, eighteen days short of his forty-third birthday just after he had preached a sermon at Trichinopoly, in which he denounced the caste system before a large congregation.

In the fourth verse of the carol Bishop Heber expressed the same sentiments as Christina Rossetti in the final stanza of her later hymn, 'In the Bleak Midwinter',

**Vainly we offer each ample oblation,  
Vainly with gifts would his favour secure;  
Richer by far is the heart's adoration;  
Dearer to God are the prayers of the poor.**

The usual settings for 'Brightest and best of the sons of the morning' are 'Spean' by J.F. Bridge, so named because he loved to fish on the River Spean in Scotland. However, I still prefer J. F. Thrupp's 'Epiphany Hymn', which was used in the 1933 'Methodist Hymn Book' and which was especially composed for Heber's hymn.

*Hymn (on sheets), 'Wise men, seeking Jesus' (HP 128)*

**1. Wise men, seeking Jesus,  
Travelled from afar,  
Guided on their journey  
By a beauteous star.**

**2. But if we desire him,  
He is close at hand;  
For our native country  
Is our Holy Land.**

**3. Prayerful souls may find him  
By our quiet lakes,  
Meet him on our hillsides  
When the morning breaks.**

**4. In our fertile cornfields  
While the sheaves are bound,  
In our busy markets,  
Jesus may be found.**

**5. Fishermen talk with him  
By the great North Sea,  
As the first disciples  
Did in Galilee.**

**6. Every town and village  
In our land might be  
Made by Jesus' presence  
Like sweet Bethany.**

**7. He is more than near us,  
If we love him well;  
For he seeketh ever  
In our hearts to dwell.**



## **Background to the carol**

James East was born on 28<sup>th</sup> January, 1860, in Kettering and was ordained as a Wesleyan Methodist minister in 1886. Like most itinerant ministers, he served in many circuits, including Cradley, near Stourbridge. Now James East had an ambition, to visit the Holy Land to tread where Jesus had trodden, to see the countryside where our Saviour had lived. Also like most ministers, his stipend was frugal, so he saved for many years to amass the sum he needed to fulfil his ambition.

Just as he had raised the necessary amount of money, a close acquaintance was found to be seriously ill and, as it was long before the National Health Service, in desperate need of financial assistance to pay for the treatment – a real matter of life or death. Although it must have profoundly grieved James East, he immediately went to his friend's aid, sacrificing his chance to visit the shores of Galilee. Sometime later, he took a humbler holiday and, as he walked the cliffs on the East coast of England, he came to terms with his frustrated wishes when he realised the truth that you do not have to travel to the Holy Land in order to establish a close relationship with Christ.

'Wise men seeking Jesus' first appeared in "The Wesleyan Methodist School Hymnal" of 1911, next in "School Worship" of 1926, then in the 1933 "Methodist Hymn Book" The sentiments are a sermon in themselves – for all ages and denominations – a sermon lived out by the author.

Two tunes are associated with this hymn. The first is 'Worship' by A.H. Mann which was used in both "The Wesleyan Methodist School Hymnal" of 1911 and the "Methodist Hymn Book". The alternative melody, 'Glenfinlas', by K.G. Finlay, was first used with 'Wise men seeking Jesus' in 1951. (This glen runs into Loch Lomond - a useless fact that I offer gratis to those who like "Trivial Pursuits").

### **Address:**

Our carols are centred on the incarnation of God as a helpless baby, born without privilege in an unimportant town in an occupied land. But around Jesus' nativity there are several characters, Mary and Joseph, shepherds, Magi and the innkeeper and wife (she's important, for you can be sure she had to clean the stable and probably helped Mary deliver Jesus!)

As individuals they would have been considered insignificant in Judean society, yet they are vital 'signs' in God's Story. Shepherds were considered low-caste, ceremonially unclean and dishonest. Magi were foreigners who broke the Law of Moses because they told fortunes by the position of stars. The innkeeper and his wife were just working people – often unable to travel to the temple to worship on feast days. Mary was a young, inexperienced girl who was unmarried when she became pregnant – we know the circumstances, but her neighbours and critics wouldn't have. Joseph was a man who broke convention by marrying Mary even though she became pregnant whilst they were betrothed and he knew he was not the child's blood-father. We know why he married her, but his family and neighbours wouldn't have and they'd have thought him weak.

Each of these characters is included in the birth narratives because God wants everybody to be part of his salvation story, whatever his or her status, race or background. The Good News is for everybody including people whose lifestyles are dramatically different from ours. Let us make sure that there is room in our church and in our hearts for Jesus, our friends and strangers who, if we care for them, may become our friends, too. Amen.

## **Background to the carol**

This hymn was published in 'Heaven Shall Not Wait' in 1987 by John Bell and Graham Maule, of the Iona Community. They have written many hymns, often using Scots ballad melodies, but this one uses a popular tune, 'Scarlet Ribbons', which was composed in about fifteen minutes by Evelyn Danzig in 1949 at her home in Port Washington, New York. John Lamberton Bell was born in Kilmarnock and studied at the University of Glasgow in 1974. He was elected Rector at the University in 1977, while he was still a student, as was Gordon Brown.

After working in the Netherlands and doing spells of church youth work, John Bell became employed full-time in the areas of music and worship with the Wild Goose Resource Group. He is a former convener of the Church of Scotland's Panel on Worship and also convened the committee to revise the Church Hymnary. In 1987, he also wrote the hymn "The Summons" – 'Will you come and follow me' which is set to 'Kelvingrove'. You may sometimes hear John Bell on Radio 4's 'Thought for Today'. The simplicity of this carol's message will, I am sure, make it increasingly popular and the last two lines of each verse are utterly inspired for Christmas:

*'God surprises earth with heaven,  
Coming here on Christmas Day.'*

*Hymn number 222, 'Who would think that what was needed'*

**1. Who would think that what was needed**

**To transform and save the earth  
Might not be a plan or army,  
Proud in purpose, proved in worth?  
Who would think, despite derision,  
That a child might lead the way?  
God surprises earth with heaven,  
Coming here on Christmas Day.**

**2. Shepherds watch and wise men wonder,**

**Monarchs scorn and angels sing;  
Such a place as none would reckon  
Hosts a holy, helpless thing.  
Stable beasts and by-passed strangers  
Watch a baby laid in hay:  
God surprises earth with heaven, / Coming here on Christmas Day.**

**3. Centuries of skill and science**

**Span the past from which we move,  
Yet experience questions whether,  
With such progress, we improve.  
While the human lot we ponder,  
Lest our hopes and humour fray,  
God surprises earth with heaven,  
Coming here on Christmas Day.**

**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 ours not only at Christmas, but always. And may the peace of Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit remain with us for evermore. Amen.**