

UNIVERSITY
CHURCH

Carols by Candlelight

Sunday 21 December 2025

6.00pm

Please take this order of service home with you

Welcome to the University Church of St Mary the Virgin, Oxford. We are delighted that you have joined us this evening. This order of service will guide you through the carol service. Please join in singing the hymns, as well as in saying together the words printed in bold type. Invitations to sit, stand, or kneel are only suggestions; please worship in whatever posture is best for you.

Services of lessons and carols involve the weaving together of song and spoken word to carry us through the story of the Incarnation; from a world in darkness that longs for light and peace, to the familiar tale of shepherds and Magi that surrounds the event of Christ's birth. The service is sung by the University Church choir, under the direction of Robert Howarth, and the Organist is James Brown.

During the service, a collection will be taken towards the work of homelessness charities in Oxford including: The Oxford Winter Night Shelter, The Gatehouse, and The Porch. Please give generously.

INFORMATON ABOUT ST MARY'S

For over 1,000 years, this church has served the city of Oxford as a place of inspiration, worship, and Christian witness. The University of Oxford began within the precincts of this building. Today it is the home of a vibrant and diverse community, and offers a particular welcome to those who feel on the edges of faith or society. We hope that you will enjoy being here with us today and that we will see you again very soon. If you are new and would like to receive our weekly e-newsletter about events and services at St Mary's, sign up at universitychurch.ox.ac.uk/content/keeping-touch. Toilets, including accessible and baby change facilities, are situated at the back of Church behind the glass brick wall.



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Organ music is played as the congregation gather and words of welcome may be offered. Please take care once your candle is lit.

PROCESSIONAL CAROL



Solo Once 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.

Please stand

***All* And through all his wondrous childhood,
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.**

Words: Cecil F Alexander (1818-1895)

Tune: IRBY, H. J. Gauntlett (1805-1876), revised. NEH 34

WELCOME AND BIDDING PRAYER

Minister Beloved in Christ, at this Christmastide let it be 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 beginning of Creation 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 fellowship within the Church he came to build, and especially in this city of Oxford.

Let us also pray for our Universities and especially here in Oxford for the right honourable Lord Hague of Richmond, our Chancellor, for the Vice-Chancellor, the Doctors, the Proctors, and all Heads of Colleges and Halls with their respective societies; that here, and in all places specially set apart for God's honour and service, true religion and sound learning may forever flourish and abound.

And because this of all things would rejoice his heart, let us remember 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 all who yearn for the grace of God.

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 one 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:

All **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.**

Please sit

CHOIR

The Fader of Heven – Peter Maxwell Davies (1934 - 2016)

The fader of heven God omnypotent.
 That sett all on seven, his son has he sent.
 My name couth he neven and lyght or he went.
 I conceyuyd hym full even thugh myght as he ment,
 And now is he borne. He kepe you fro wo! I shall pray hym so;
 Tell furth as ye go, and myn on this morne.

LESSON

Genesis 1.1-5

The world is charged with the grandeur of God

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good; and God 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.

Reader Thanks be to God.

CAROL

Please stand



**Of the Father's heart begotten,
 ere the world from chaos rose,
 he is Alpha: from that Fountain
 all that is and hath been flows;
 he is Omega, of all things
 yet to come the mystic Close,
 evermore and evermore.**

**By his word was all created;
 he commanded and 'twas done;
 earth and sky and boundless ocean,
 universe of three in one,
 all that sees the moon's soft radiance,
 all that breathes beneath the sun, evermore...**

**He assumed this mortal body,
frail and feeble, doomed to die,
that the race from dust created
might not perish utterly,
which the dreadful Law had sentenced
in the depths of hell to lie, *evermore...***

**O how blest that wondrous birthday,
when the Maid the curse retrieved,
by the Holy Ghost conceiving,
bore the Saviour of our race,
and the Babe, the world's Redeemer,
in her loving arms received, *evermore...***

**Sing, ye heights of heaven, his praises;
angels and archangels, sing!
Wheresoe'er ye be, ye faithful,
let your joyous anthems ring,
every tongue his name confessing,
countless voices answering, *evermore...***

Words: Prudentius (348-413), tr Robert F Davis (1866-1937)
Tune: DIVINUM MYSTERIUM from *Piae Cantiones* 1582 NEH 33

Please sit

POEM

Sometimes - Sheenagh Pugh (b.1950)

Sometimes things don't go, after all,
from bad to worse. Some years, muscadell
faces down frost; green thrives; the crops don't fail.
Sometimes a man aims high, and all goes well.
A people sometimes will step back from war,
elect an honest man, decide they care
enough, that they can't leave some stranger poor.
Some men become what they were born for.
Sometimes our best intentions do not go
amiss; sometimes we do as we meant to.
The sun will sometimes melt a field of sorrow
that seemed hard frozen; may it happen for you.

CHOIR

O Radiant Dawn - James Macmillan (b. 1959)
Antiphon for December 21st

O Radiant Dawn, Splendour of eternal Light, Sun of Justice:
Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.
Isaiah had prophesied, the people who walked in darkness have seen the great
light upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone.
Amen.

LESSON

Isaiah 9.2, 6-7

Isaiah proclaims the birth of the Prince of Peace

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 judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.

Reader: Thanks be to God.

CHOIR

Torches – John Joubert (1927 – 2019)

Torches, torches, run with torches
All the way to Bethlehem!
Christ is born and now lies sleeping;
Come and sing your song to Him!

Torches, torches, run with torches
All the way to Bethlehem!
Christ is born and now lies sleeping;
Come and sing your song to Him!

LESSON

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, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible. And Mary said, Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her.

Reader Thanks be to God.

CHOIR

Ave Maria a 5 – Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525 – 1594)

*Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum;
benedicta tu in mulieribus,
et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus.
Sancta Maria, Regina coeli,
dulcis et pia, o Mater Dei,
ora pro nobis peccatoribus,
ut cum electis te videamus.*

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Queen of heaven sweet and merciful, O Mother of God, pray for us sinners, that with the elect we may gaze upon thee.

POEM

The bells of waiting Advent ring,
The Tortoise stove is lit again
And lamp-oil light across the night
Has caught the streaks of winter rain
In many a stained-glass window sheen
From Crimson Lake to Hookers Green.
The holly in the windy hedge
And round the Manor House the yew
Will soon be stripped to deck the ledge,
The altar, font and arch and pew,
So that the villagers can say
'The church looks nice' on Christmas Day.
Provincial Public Houses blaze,
Corporation tramcars clang,
On lighted tenements I gaze,
Where paper decorations hang,
And bunting in the red Town Hall
Says 'Merry Christmas to you all'.
And London shops on Christmas Eve
Are strung with silver bells and flowers
As hurrying clerks the City leave
To pigeon-haunted classic towers,
And marbled clouds go scudding by
The many-steepled London sky.

Christmas – John Betjeman (1906-1984)

And girls in slacks remember Dad,
And oafish louts remember Mum,
And sleepless children's hearts are glad.
And Christmas-morning bells say 'Come!'
Even to shining ones who dwell
Safe in the Dorchester Hotel.
And is it true? And is it true,
This most tremendous tale of all,
Seen in a stained-glass window's hue,
A Baby in an ox's stall?
The Maker of the stars and sea
Become a Child on earth for me?
And is it true? For if it is,
No loving fingers tying strings
Around those tissued fripperies,
The sweet and silly Christmas things,
Bath salts and inexpensive scent
And hideous tie so kindly meant,
No love that in a family dwells,
No carolling in frosty air,
Nor all the steeple-shaking bells
Can with this single Truth compare -
That God was man in Palestine
And lives today in Bread and Wine.

CAROL

Please stand



**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 wondering love.**

Choir 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.

**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.**

Words: Phillip Brooks (1835-1893)

Tune: FOREST GREEN, English traditional melody NEH 32

Please sit

Luke 2.1-7

LESSON

The Blessed Virgin Mary gives birth

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Cæsar 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 Judæa, 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.

Reader Thanks be to God.

CHOIR

When Christ was born of Mary free – John Gardiner (1917 - 2011)

When Christ was born of Mary free,
In Bethlehem, that fair city,
Angels sung e're with mirth and glee,

*In excelsis gloria, gloria, gloria,
In excelsis gloria,
Christo paremus cantica,
In excelsis gloria.*

Herdmen beheld these angels bright--
To them appeared with great light,
And said, 'God's Son is born this night': *Refrain*

This King is come to save his kind,
In the scripture as we find;
Therefore this song have we in mind: *Refrain*

Then, dear Lord, for thy great grace,
Grant us the bliss to see thy face,
Where we may sing to thy solace. *Refrain*

PRAYERS

Please kneel or sit to pray

Minister In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Father, your Son our Saviour was born in human flesh. Renew your Church as the Body of Christ, and purify her that she may bear your glory to the world. God of grace and truth:

All **hear our prayer.**

Minister There was no room for your Son in the inn. Protect with your love those who have no home, and all who live in poverty. God of grace and truth:

All **hear our prayer.**

Minister Mary, in the pain of labour, brought your Son to birth. Hold in your hand all who are in pain or distress. God of grace and truth:

All **hear our prayer.**

Minister Your Christ came as a light shining in the darkness. Bring comfort to all who suffer in the sadness of our world. God of grace and truth:

All **hear our prayer.**

Minister The angels sang, 'Peace to God's people on earth.' Strengthen those who work for peace and justice in the world. God of grace and truth:

All **hear our prayer.**

Minister Heaven is come down to earth, and earth is raised to heaven. Hold in your hand all those who have passed through death in the hope of your coming kingdom. God of grace and truth:

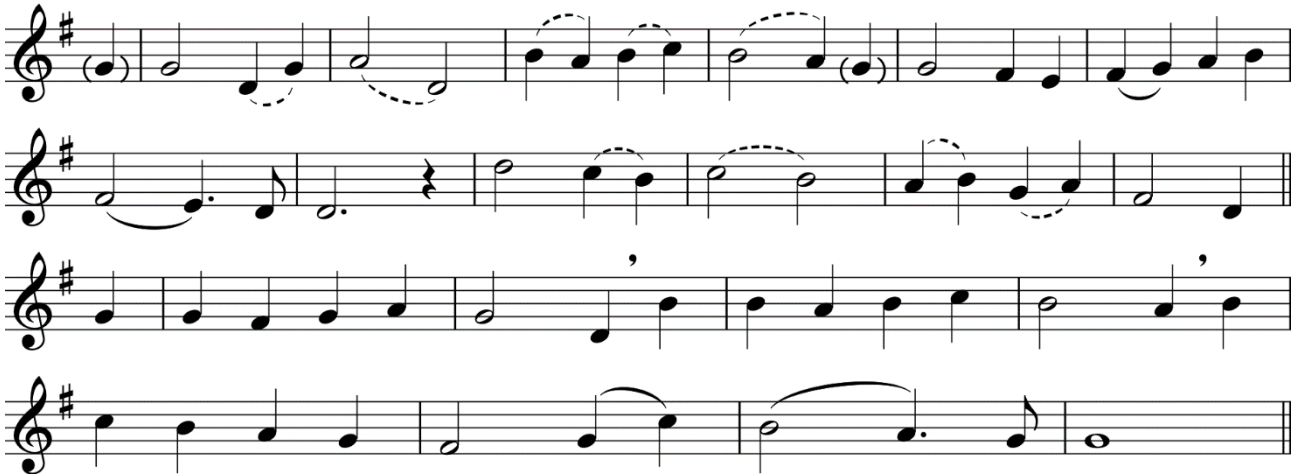
All **hear our prayer.**

Minister Almighty God, you make us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of your only Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as we joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, so we may, with sure confidence, behold him when he shall come to be our judge, who with you and the Holy Spirit reign, one God, now and for ever.

All **Amen.**

CAROL

During this carol, a collection is taken. Please stand.



**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: *Refrain.***

**See how the Shepherds, summoned to his cradle,
leaving their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear;
we too will thither bend our joyful footsteps: *Refrain.***

**Lo! star-led chieftains, magi, Christ adoring,
offer him incense, gold, and myrrh;
we to the Christ-child bring our heart's oblations: *Refrain***

**Sing, choirs of Angels, sing in exultation,
sing, all ye citizens of heaven above:
Glory to God in the Highest:**

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

Words: Latin 18th Century, trans Frederick Oakeley (1802-1880) et al
Tune: ADESTE FIDELES, attrib J. F. Wade (1711-1786). NEH 30

Please sit

LESSON

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.

Reader Thanks be to God

CAROL

Please stand.



**God rest you merry, gentlemen, let nothing you dismay,
for Jesus Christ our Saviour was born on Christmas Day,
to save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray:
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy!
*O tidings of comfort and joy!***

**From God our heavenly Father a blessed angel came,
and unto certain shepherds brought tidings of the same,
how that in Bethlehem was born the Son of God by name:
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy!
*O tidings of comfort and joy!***

**And when they came to Bethlehem where our dear Saviour lay,
they found him in a manger, where oxen feed on hay;
his mother Mary kneeling down, unto the Lord did pray:
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy!
*O tidings of comfort and joy!***

**Now to the Lord sing praises, all you within this place,
and with true love and brotherhood each other now embrace;
this holy tide of Christmas all other doth efface:
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy!
*O tidings of comfort and joy!***

Words: Traditional
Tune: GOD REST YOU MERRY, London Carol Melody NEH 25

LESSON

The Magi 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 Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: 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. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Reader Thanks be to God

CHOIR

What child is this – arr. John Stainer (1840 – 1901)

What Child is this who, laid to rest
On Mary's lap is sleeping?
Whom angels greet with anthems sweet,
While shepherds watch are keeping?
This, this is Christ the King,
Whom shepherds guard and angels sing;
Haste, haste, to bring Him laud,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

So bring Him incense, gold and myrrh,
Come peasant, king to own Him;
The King of kings salvation brings,
Let loving hearts enthrone Him.
Raise, raise a song on high,
The virgin sings her lullaby.
Joy, joy for Christ is born,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.
Hail, hail the Word made flesh,
The Babe, the Son of Mary.

**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, th'incarnate Deity,
pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Emmanuel.
Hark, the herald-angels sing
glory to the new-born King.**

**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
glory to the new-born King.**

Words: Charles Wesley (1707-1788), George Whitfield (1714-1770), Martin Madan (1726-1790)
Tune: MENDELSSOHN, Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847). NEH 26

BLESSING

Minister May he who by his incarnation
gathered into one things earthly and heavenly,
bestow upon you the fullness of inward peace and goodwill;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be upon you and remain with you always.

All Amen.

ORGAN VOLUNTARY

Toccata - Théodore Dubois (1837-1924)

Christmas at St Mary's

Christmas Eve	16.30	Crib Service	<i>Nave</i>
	23.30	Midnight Mass	<i>Nave</i>
Christmas Day	8.30	Holy Eucharist	<i>Chancel</i>
	10.30	Choral Eucharist	<i>Nave</i>
Friday <i>Stephen, Deacon, Martyr</i>	11.00	Church opens	
	12.15	Eucharist	<i>Chancel</i>
Saturday <i>John, Apostle, Evangelist</i>	11.00	Church opens	
	12.15	Eucharist	<i>Chancel</i>

Next Sunday

Sunday 28 December The First Sunday of Christmas

8.30	Holy Eucharist <i>Preacher: The Revd Canon Dr William Lamb</i>	<i>Chancel</i>
10.30	Sung Eucharist <i>Preacher: The Revd Sorrel Shamel-Wood</i>	<i>Nave</i>

Please note that there is no evening service today.

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CHURCH

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