

A Service of Nine Lessons & Carols

BACKGROUND

In 1880 the Anglican bishop of Truro, crafted a festival service of nine lessons and carols for worship on Christmas Eve. Nearly forty years later, the dean of King's College Chapel, Cambridge, adapted that worship order for use at King's on Christmas Eve 1918. Radio broadcasts of the King's service began in the 1930s and were first transmitted to North America in the 1970s.

But the liturgy itself reached North America earlier than that. Clergy, musicians, and worship leaders began adapting it for use in their own churches, cathedrals, and chapels. The service begins and ends in prayer. Nine scripture readings retell the Christmas story and locate it within the broader context of God's saving acts, beginning with Genesis and culminating with the prologue to John's gospel. Carols respond to the readings. We welcome you to worship on this First Sunday of Christmas.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Praise the Lord, all the earth, from the highest heights to the deepest depths!

Let everything sing and shout praise to the Creator!

Praise the Lord, all the heavens and starry host!

All throughout the universe may praise to God abound!

Come, let us joyfully praise God!

Let us live our praise in deeds of loving kindness.

GREETING and OPENING PRAYER

The Babe of Bethlehem be with you.

And also with you.

Let us prayGlory of Israel, the coming of your son, Jesus, broke open the heavens and prepared a way for all of your children to come home to you. Give us eyes to see your miraculous spirit moving in this church and in this world.

Teach us to be proclaimers of your love to the nations, for the sake of the one whose name is redemption for the peoples, Jesus Christ our salvation.

Amen.

OPENING CAROL

[I am So Glad Each Christmas Eve](#)

271

First Lesson: Genesis 3:8–15, 17–19

Adam and Eve lose life in paradise through their sin, as their relationship with God and each other is broken.

They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

CAROL

[Cold December Flies Away](#)

299

Second Lesson: Genesis 22:15–18

God promises to Abraham that because he was faithful, his offspring shall be the Lord's people, numerous as the stars in the sky.

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."

CAROL

[Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming \(Vs. 1,2,4\)](#)

272

Third Lesson: Isaiah 9:2–7

Jesus's reign of justice and peace is prophesied centuries before his birth.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

CAROL

[The Bells Of Christmas](#) (Vs. 1,2,3,4)

298

Fourth Lesson: Isaiah 11:1–9

Jesus will sit upon the throne of David, and usher in the coming kingdom of God.

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

CAROL

[All My Heart Again Rejoices](#) (Vs. 1.2.3)

273

Fifth Lesson: Luke 1:26–35, 38

The angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will conceive Jesus, the Son of God.

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

CAROL

[Hark the Herald Angels Sing](#)

270

Sixth Lesson: Luke 2:1–7

St. Luke tells of the birth of Jesus. In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.

This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

CAROL

[The Holly and the Ivy](#)

See Insert

Seventh Lesson: Luke 2:8–17

The angels bring humble shepherds joyful news—the Saviour of the world has been born.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and 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 heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!” When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.” So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child.

CAROL

[While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks](#)

See Insert

Eighth Lesson: Matthew 2:1–12

The wise men are led by the star to Jesus, and avoid the schemes of King Herod.

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: ‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.”

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

CAROL

[The First Noel \(Vs. 1,2,3\)](#)

300

Ninth Lesson: John 1:1–14

St. John unfolds the great mystery of the incarnation—Jesus is the eternal Word of God, who was, is, and is to come.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

CAROL

[Away in the Manager](#)

278

CLOSING PRAYER

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, you made your holy night shine with the brightness of the true Light. Grant that here on earth we may walk in the light of Jesus' presence, and in the last day wake to the brightness of his glory; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

BENEDICTION

A new year is coming and God is with us; In loving, in caring, in hoping and expecting, God is with us and never lets us go.

God live in us, God live with us, God live through us

God keep us faithful through the days of the New Year that lie ahead; God keep us caring as we see the pain that fills your world; God keep us serving as we seek to do your will

God live in us, God live with us, God live through us

God keep us loving toward neighbours near and far; God keep us trusting through the uncertainties of life; God keep us sharing from your generous abundance.

God live in us, God live with us, God live through us. Amen.

CLOSING CAROL

[O Holy Night](#)

DISMISSAL

Go in peace, go in joy, go in love to meet God's people in the world and greet them with the good news.

Thanks be to the God of peace and love.