

Order of Service
Sunday 17 December 2006
Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

Prayer before worship

*"Father, as Christmas comes again help us, in faith,
as we set out on the road to Bethlehem
to see this thing that has happened.*

*Lead us on our journey through lessons and carols
and kindle in our hearts a spirit of expectancy.*

*May we not rest until we bow in wonder and adoration before Mary's Child,
the everlasting son of the Father,
and sing "Glory to God in the highest"
For Jesus' sake".*

Amen

Organ Voluntaries The Holy Boy (A Carol of the Nativity)
 – John Ireland (1879-1962)
 Pastorale on *Winchester Old*, Op. 37, No. 2
 – Ernest Farrar (1885-1918)

Welcome and Notices

Call to worship and lighting of the Advent Candles

HYMN CH3 193 Once in Royal David's City
Words: Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-95)
Music: IRBY - Henry John Gauntlett (1805-76)

All stand

Solo: Rebecca Caskie

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 only

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, the scorned, the lowly,
Lived on earth our Saviour holy.

All

And, through all his wondrous childhood,
He would honour and obey,
Love and watch the lowly maiden
In whose gentle arms he lay:
Christian children all must be
Mild, obedient, good as he.

For he is our childhood's pattern,
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 who seemed so helpless
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 round,
We shall see him; but in heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high;
When like stars his children crowned,
All in white shall wait around.

Introduction and Prayer

1st Lesson

God announces in the Garden of Eden that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head

Genesis 3: vv 8-15 Page 5 /Large Print Page 3

Reader: John Macpherson

Choir

The truth from above

Words: Traditional

Music: Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

This is the truth sent from above,
the truth of God, the God of love,
therefore don't turn me from your door,
but hearken all both rich and poor.

The first thing which I do relate
is that God did man create;
the next thing which to you I'll tell
woman was made with man to dwell.

Thus we were heirs to endless woes,
till God the Lord did interpose;
and so a promise soon did run
that he would redeem us by his Son.

And at that season of the year
our blest Redeemer did appear;
he here did live, and here did preach,
and many thousands did he teach.

Thus he in love to us behaved,
to show us how we must be saved;
and if you want to know the way,
be pleased to hear what he did say.

2nd Lesson

God promises to faithful Abraham that in his seed shall the nations of the earth be blessed.

Genesis 22: vv 15-18 Page 22/Large Print Page 23

Reader: Holly Wagner

HYMN CH3 180

Child in the manger

Words: Mary MacDonald (1789-1872)

tr. Lachlan MacBean (1853-1931)

Music: BUNESSAN - Traditional

Child in the manger, infant of Mary;
Outcast and stranger, Lord of all!
Child who inherits all our transgressions,
All our demerits on him fall.

Once the most holy child of salvation
Gently and lowly lived below;
Now, as our glorious Mighty Redeemer,
See him victorious o'er each foe.

Prophets foretold him, infant of wonder;
Angels behold him on his throne;
Worthy our Saviour of all their praises;
Happy for ever are his own.

3rd Lesson

Christ's birth and kingdom are foretold by Isaiah

Isaiah 9: vv 2, 6 and 7 Page 693/Large Print Page 798

Reader: Moira Cocksedge

Choir

In the bleak midwinter

Words: Christina Rossetti (1830-94)

Music: Harold Darke (1888-1976)

Solo: Fiona Chapman

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.

Our God, Heaven cannot hold him, nor earth sustain;
heaven and earth shall flee away when he comes to reign;
in the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
the Lord God Almighty Jesus Christ.

Solo: Harry Andrews

Enough for him, whom cherubim worship night and day,
a breastful of milk and a manger-ful of hay;
enough for him, whom angels fall down before,
the ox and ass and camel which adore.

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,
give my heart, give my heart.

4th Lesson

The prophet Micah foretells the glory of little Bethlehem

Micah 5: vv 2-4 Page 933/Large Print Page 1077

Reader: Joan Meikle

HYMN CH3 172 O little town of Bethlehem

Words: Phillips Brooks (1835-93)

Music: CHRISTMAS CAROL - Henry Walford Davies (1869-1941)

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.

Verse 3 Choir only

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 Immanuel.

5th Lesson

The angel Gabriel salutes the blessed Virgin Mary

Luke 1: vv 26-38 Page 1026/Large Print Page 1184

Reader: Brian Chapman

Choir

Mary's lullaby

Words and music: John Rutter (b. 1945)

See the child that Mary bore
on her lap so softly sleeping:
in a stable cold and poor,
ox and ass their vigil keeping.

*Sing lullaby, sing lullaby,
my own dear son, my child;
lullaby, sing lullaby;
lullaby, my little baby.*

Flights of angels round his head
sing him joyful hymns of greeting:
"Peace on earth, goodwill to men."
Each to each their song repeating.

Shepherds kneeling by his bed
offer homage without measure;
wise men, by a bright star led,
bring him gifts of richest treasure.

Offering and Prayer

6th Lesson

Matthew tells of the birth of Jesus

Matthew 1: vv 18-23 Page 965/Large Print Page 1113

Reader: Fiona Edwards

Choir

Ding dong! Merrily on high

Words: George Ratcliffe Woodward (1848-1934)
Music: Traditional, arr. Charles Wood (1866-1926)

Ding dong! Merrily on high
in heav'n the bells are ringing:
Ding dong! Verily the sky
is riv'n with angel singing.

Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

E'en so here below, below,
let steeple bells be swungen,
And i-o, i-o, i-o,
by priest and people sungen.

Pray you, dutifully prime
your matin chime, ye ringers;
May you beautifully rime
your eve-time song, ye singers.

HYMN CH3 170

It came upon the midnight clear

Words: Edmund Hamilton Sears (1810-76)

Music: NOEL - Arthur Seymour Sullivan (1842-1900)

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth
To touch their harps of gold: –
"Peace on the earth, good will to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King!"
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come
With peaceful wings unfurled;
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

But with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel strain have rolled
Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love song which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing.

For, lo! the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the Age of Gold,
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendours fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.

7th Lesson

The Shepherds go to the manger

Luke 2: vv 8-16 Page 1027/Large Print Page 1186

Reader: Amy Cumming

Choir

Child of the stable's secret birth

Words: Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926)

Music: FOYE - Valerie Ruddle (b. 1932)

Child of the stable's secret birth,
the Lord by right of the lords of earth,
let angels sing of a King new-born,
the world is weaving a crown of thorn;
a crown of thorn for that infant head
cradled soft in the manger bed.

Eyes that shine in the lantern's ray;
a face so small in its nest of hay,
face of a child who is born to scan
the world he made through the eyes of man:
and from that face in the final day
earth and heaven shall flee away.

Voice that rang through the courts on high
contracted now to a wordless cry,
a voice to master the wind and wave,
the human heart and the hungry grave:
the voice of God through the cedar trees
rolling forth as the sound of seas.

Solo: Rebecca Caskie

Infant hands in a mother's hand,
for none but Mary may understand
whose are the hands and the fingers curled
but his who fashioned and made our world:
and through these hands in the hour of death
nails shall strike to the wood beneath.

Child of the stable's secret birth,
the Father's gift to a wayward earth,
to drain the cup in a few short years
of all our sorrows, our sins and tears;
ours the prize for the road he trod:
risen with Christ; at peace with God.

8th Lesson

The Wise Men are led by the star to Jesus

Matthew 2: vv 1-11 Page 966 /Large Print Page 1114

Reader: Alison Wilkinson

Choir

On Christmas night

Words: Traditional

Music: Philip Ledger (b. 1937)

On Christmas night all Christians sing,
to hear the news the angels bring,
news of great joy, news of great mirth,
news of our merciful King's birth.

Then why should men on earth be so sad,
since our Redeemer made us glad,
when from our sin he set us free,
all for to gain our liberty?

When sin departs before his grace,
then life and health come in its place;
angels and men with joy may sing,
all for to see the new-born King.

All out of darkness we have light,
which made the angels sing this night:
"Glory to God and peace to men,
now and for evermore. Amen."

9th Lesson

John unfolds the great mystery of the Incarnation

John 1: vv 1-14 Page 1063/Large Print Page 1228

Reader: Colin Sinclair

HYMN

Let earth and heaven combine

Words: Charles Wesley (1707-88)

Tune: ST JOHN - William Henry Havergal (1793-1870)

Let earth and Heaven combine,
Angels and men agree,
To praise in songs divine
The incarnate Deity,
Our God contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made Man.

He laid His glory by,
Took form in mortal clay;
Unseen by human eye,
The hidden Godhead lay;
Infant of days He here became,
And bore the meek Immanuel's Name.

See in that Infant's face
The depths of Deity,
And labour while ye gaze,
To sound the mystery;
Let even angels gaze no more,
But bow and silently adore.

Unsearchable the love
That hath our Saviour brought;
His grace is far above
Of men or angels' thought:
Suffice for us that God, we know,
Our God, is manifest below.

He deigns in flesh to appear,
Widest extremes to join;
To bring our vileness near,
And make us all divine:
And we the life of God shall know,
For God is manifest below.

Made perfect first in love,
And sanctified by grace,
We shall from earth remove,
And see His glorious face:
His love shall then be fully showed,
And we shall be complete in God.

BENEDICTION

Organ Voluntary

In dulci jubilo BWV 729
– Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Thank you for coming today
Do stay behind for refreshments in the church at the end of the Service

NOTICES

WELCOME to visitors worshipping with us today. We hope you will sign our Visitors' Book in the vestibule.

SOUND SYSTEM There is an effective *loop* in the church. Hearing aid users may wish to use the T switch.

TEA AND COFFEE will be served in the church after the closing voluntary. All are welcome to enjoy fellowship together.

PARENTS of Crèche and Beginners are invited to join their children immediately after the Service, in the Hall for the end of their Christmas party.

FREE WILL OFFERING ENVELOPES for 2007 are now available for uplift from Ian Meikle in the vestibule. Kindly collect your envelopes before Christmas.

CHRISTMAS CARDS Please use and check pigeonholes for exchange of Christmas Cards.

EVENING SERVICE tonight at 6.30 pm is an informal Service of Holy Communion. The theme is "When angels take a hand".

EARLY BIRDS' PRAYER MEETING Wednesday 20 December at 7.00 am in Annan House, 10 Palmerston Place. (Finish 7.30 am) All welcome.

MOBILE HOUSE GROUP meet on Wednesday 20 December at 7.30 pm (for 8 pm start) at Aaron & Jo Black's home (35, 2F2, Morningside Road 446 0221) - *What a Difference! 1 Thessalonians 1: 1-10* All welcome - please speak to Gregor Innes or Andrew Caskie for further details.

HOLIDAYS The office will be closed from Wednesday 20 December until Tuesday 9 January 2007

THE OFFERING at the Watchnight Service and Christmas Day Service will be divided between the Rock Trust and Tear Fund.

PASTORAL CARE Mr Sinclair can be contacted at either the Church Office on 220 1690 or at home on 447 9598. The address of the Manse is 30b Cluny Gardens, Edinburgh EH10 6BJ. Rev W J Macdonald can also be contacted on 332 0254.

SERVICES OVER CHRISTMAS

| | | |
|-----------------------|----------------|--|
| CHRISTMAS EVE | 11.00 am | All Age Nativity Service No Crèche for this service |
| | 6.30 pm | No Evening Service |
| | 11.00 pm | Mince Pies in the Church Hall |
| | 21.30-12.05 am | Watchnight Service |
| CHRISTMAS DAY | 11.00-11.40 am | Family Christmas Service |
| NEW YEAR'S EVE | 11.00 am | Morning Service "A child for ordinary people" |
| | 6.30 pm | No Evening Service |

The Service of Lessons and Carols is as much a part of Christmas as the Nativity Play. But what is it all about? Of course we enjoy the beauty of the music, the familiar carols, and the choir pieces. But what of the nine readings?

! Are they simply to give the choir a chance to catch their breath and sort out their music for the next carol?

! Are they simply to allow a number of the congregation to take part in the service?

Well I suppose both of these may be true but that misses the point.

Although the readings can vary a little, basically they are the same each year, and this is how they are introduced.

"Beloved, in Christ, this Christmas time let it be our care and delight to hear again the message of the angels, and in heart and mind to go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, and the Babe lying in a manger. Therefore, let us read and learn in Holy scripture the tale of the loving purposes of God from the first days of our disobedience to the glorious redemption brought to us by this Holy Child."

It is the story of the journey to Bethlehem.

In other words the readings answer the question "When did it all start?" and the answer may surprise you.

a) Christmas began at Christmas The 6th-8th readings tell us the familiar tale of the journey to Bethlehem by Mary and Joseph, the birth of the child, the angels visit to the shepherds and the way that the star led the wise men, but Christmas didn't start there.

b) Christmas began nine months earlier

The 5th lesson fills out where the 6th begins, by reminding us that Christmas began nine months earlier with the visit of the Angel Gabriel, first to Mary and then to Joseph. Gabriel promised Mary, a virgin, that she would have a child whose name would be Jesus and that he would be given the throne of his Father, David. He would be the one who was promised.

c) Christmas began 800 years before

Promised by who? By the prophets of course. As the carol "Child in a manger" says "Prophets foretold him". God was preparing for Christmas 800 years before Christmas with the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah which form the third and fourth lessons.

It was Isaiah who spoke of a virgin with child (Is 7: 14) and who spoke of the Spirit empowering the One who would come and the peace that would result when the lion would lie down with the lamb and the child put his hand safely in the viper's nest (Is 11: 1-9). The Isaiah passage we read is in Chapter 9 and tells us through four titles that the child will become "Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace". Isaiah further tells us that the child to be born, the son who is given, will come from the north from Galilee of the Gentiles (Is 9: 1,2,4,5). That raises a problem when you realise that his contemporary, Micah, is telling the same people to look south for their deliverance to the little town of Bethlehem (Micah 5: 2-4). It will be 800 years later before we can understand how Jesus can come both from Bethlehem and Galilee!

d) Christmas began in the Garden of Eden

But of course the lessons don't start with reading number three but with number one. The first lesson is set at the moment of disobedience (what we call the Fall) when Adam and Eve, deceived by Satan, ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Evil has been let loose. It will spread with devastating consequences affecting every dimension of human life. Even more seriously, the entrance of sin separated the human race from God and the result was death. However, at the very moment of disaster, God's plans are laid for Christmas. God admits that Satan has seriously affected people and will continue to do so "he has bruised your heel". God not Satan, however, will have the last word. For he promises to Adam and Eve that one of their offspring (seed) will deal a fatal blow to Satan and undo the consequences of the Fall "he will crush your head".

This verse is the first mention of the gospel and reminds us that one thread holding the OT together is the waiting for the "One who is to come".

At first things seem to go from bad to worse. Cain murders Abel and evil dominates the landscape until the Flood results. But the promise will not die, and God chooses one man through whom the promise will continue. That man is Abraham and the promise is given to him that through his offspring (seed) all the nations of the earth will be blessed. This promise is given several times to him, most notably in Gen 12:1-3; 15: 1-6 and in the passage we read 22: 15-18 which fascinatingly ties up the promise of blessing to talk of the offering up of an only son (foreshadowing Calvary). At the end you can look up some verses that follow the promise through the OT.

e) Christmas begins in eternity

Each of the gospels begins at a different point. Mark starts with Jesus' baptism by John and the start of his public ministry.

Matthew makes much of how Jesus fulfils the prophecies of the OT and in the opening verses, which we rarely read, ties the coming of Jesus to the royal line of David (who lived about 1000BC) and the promise given so long ago to Abraham (about 2000 BC). Luke, after telling us the Christmas story, traces Jesus' line back (chapter 3) not just to Abraham but to Adam where our Lessons begin.

But John goes further back. Not just to Genesis 3 but to Genesis 1:1 and before that into eternity.

"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" v1 and "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" v14. Daringly we say in our service God started preparing for Christmas before time even began. That means that Christmas is bigger than the sentimental feelings aroused by the presence of a helpless baby.

! For the baby was the strong king who was promised, whose reign will never end.

! He is the Saviour of the world who will save his people from their sins.

! He is the promise of the Father from Eternity.

! Truly love came down at Christmas.

We take time and care to prepare for Christmas. But God has been preparing, with love and care, since time began. As Paul said:-

"When the time had fully come God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the full rights of the children of God" Galatians 4:4.

Enjoy the Service and have a wonderful Christmas.