

# The Order for the Celebration and Public Worship of God on December 22, 2024

6:00 PM A Service of Lessons and Carols

**Prelude to Worship**

**Welcome & Announcements**

**Silent Preparation**

## The 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 story of the loving purposes of God from the first days of our disobedience 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 brotherhood within the Church He came to build, and especially in this our congregation. And because this would rejoice his heart, let us remember, in his name, the poor and helpless; the cold, the hungry, and the oppressed; the sick and those that mourn; the lonely and the unloved; the aged and the little children; all those who know not the Lord Jesus, or who love Him not, or who by sin have grieved his heart of love. 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 man can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom in the Lord Jesus we are one forevermore.

Carol #225: "Once in Royal David's City"

*Verse One: Youth Choir*

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.

*Verses Two, Four, and Five: Children's Choir & Congregation*

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 Savior holy.

And our eyes at last shall see him, through his own redeeming love;  
for that child so dear and gentle is our Lord in heav'n 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;  
when like stars his children crowned all in white shall wait around.

## The First Lesson

*The Lord first promises a coming Messiah.*

Genesis 3:8-15

Youth Choir: "Jesus Christ, the Apple Tree"

The tree of life my soul has seen, laden with fruit and always green;  
The trees of nature fruitless be compared with Christ the apple tree.

His beauty doth all things excel: by faith I know, but ne'er can tell  
The glory which I now can see in Jesus Christ the apple tree.

\*Carol #195: "Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come"

1 Joy to the world! The Lord is come:  
let earth receive her King;  
let every heart prepare him room,  
and heav'n and nature sing,  
and heav'n and nature sing,  
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.

2 Joy to the earth! The Savior reigns:  
let men their songs employ;  
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat the sounding joy,  
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

3 No more let sins and sorrows grow,  
nor thorns infest the ground;  
he comes to make his blessings flow  
far as the curse is found,  
far as the curse is found,  
far as, far as the curse is found.

4 He rules the world with truth and grace,  
and makes the nations prove  
the glories of his righteousness  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders of his love,  
and wonders, wonders of his love.

## The Second Lesson

*The prophet Isaiah foretells the coming  
of the Messiah of righteousness and peace.*

Isaiah 9:2,6-7

Chancel Choir: "Peace Canon"

Dona nobis pacem (grant us peace)  
Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free.  
From our sins and fears release us; let us find our rest in Thee.  
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art,  
Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Carol #194: "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"

1 O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here,  
until the Son of God appear.

Refrain:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
shall come to thee, O Israel.

2 O come, O come, thou Lord of might,  
who to thy tribes, on Sinai's height,  
in ancient times didst give the law  
in cloud and majesty and awe. [Refrain]

3 O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free  
thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell thy people save,  
and give them vict'ry o'er the grave. [Refrain]

4 O come, thou Dayspring from on high,  
and cheer us by thy drawing nigh;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight. [Refrain]

5 O come, thou Key of David, come  
and open wide our heav'nly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high,  
and close the path to misery. [Refrain]

### **The Third Lesson**

*The prophet foretells the glories of the kingdom of the Messiah.*

Isaiah 35:1-10

\*Carol #198: "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates!"

1 Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates!  
Behold, the King of glory waits;  
the King of kings is drawing near,  
the Savior of the world is here.

2 A helper just he comes to thee,  
his chariot is humility,  
his kingly crown is holiness,  
his scepter, pity in distress.

3 O blest the land, the city blest,  
where Christ the Ruler is confessed!  
O happy hearts and happy homes  
to whom this King in triumph comes!

4 Fling wide the portals of your heart;  
make it a temple, set apart  
from earthly use for heav'n's employ,  
adorned with prayer and love and joy.

5 Redeemer, come! I open wide  
my heart to thee; here, Lord, abide!  
Let me thy inner presence feel;  
thy grace and love in me reveal.

6 So come, my Sovereign, enter in!  
Let new and nobler life begin!  
Thy Holy Spirit, guide us on,  
until the glorious crown be won.

### **The Fourth Lesson**

*The prophet Micah foretells the place of the Messiah's birth.*  
Micah 5:1-5a

Carol #201: "O Little Town of Bethlehem" (verse 4 a cappella)

1 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.

2 For Christ is born of Mary;  
and gathered all above,  
while mortals sleep, the angels keep  
their watch of wond'ring love.  
O morning stars, together  
proclaim the holy birth!  
And praises sing to God the King,  
and peace to men on earth.

3 How silently, how silently,  
the wondrous gift is giv'n!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
the blessings of his heav'n.  
No ear may hear his coming,  
but in this world of sin,  
where meek souls will receive him still,  
the dear Christ enters in.

4 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.

### **The Fifth Lesson**

*The announcement of the Savior's birth is spoken to Mary.*  
Luke 1:26-35, 38

\*Carol #229: "Gentle Mary Laid Her Child"

1 Gentle Mary laid her child  
lowly in a manger;  
there he lay, the Undefined,  
but no more a stranger.  
Such a babe in such a place,  
can he be the Savior?  
Ask the saved of all the race  
who have found his favor.

2 Angels sang about his birth,  
wise men sought and found him;  
heaven's star shone brightly forth,  
glory all around him.  
Shepherds saw the wondrous sight,  
heard the angels singing;  
all the plains were lit that night,  
all the hills were ringing.

3 Gentle Mary laid her child  
lowly in a manger;  
he is still the Undefined,  
but no more a stranger.  
Son of God of humble birth,  
beautiful the story;  
praise his name in all the earth,  
hail the King of glory!

### **The Sixth Lesson**

*Luke records the birth of the Savior, Jesus.*  
Luke 2:1-7

Chancel Choir: "Agnus Dei"

Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world  
Have mercy upon us and grant us peace

Carol #216: "Infant Holy, Infant Lowly"

1 Infant holy, infant lowly,  
for his bed a cattle stall;  
oxen lowing, little knowing  
Christ, the babe, is Lord of all.  
Swift are winging angels singing,  
noels ringing, tidings bringing:  
Christ the babe is Lord of all.  
Christ the babe is Lord of all!

2 Flocks were sleeping: shepherds keeping  
vigil till the morning new  
saw the glory, heard the story,  
tidings of a gospel true.  
Thus rejoicing, free from sorrow,  
praises voicing, greet the morrow:  
Christ the babe was born for you.  
Christ the babe was born for you.

### **The Seventh Lesson**

*The shepherds hear the song of the angels and hurry to the manger.*  
Luke 2:8-16

Youth Choir: "Angels Are Singing, Heaven Is Ringing"

Angels are singing, heaven is ringing, "Glory in the Highest!"  
Angels are winging, noels they're bringing, "Glory in the Highest!"  
Born in a manger, He is the Savior!  
To Bethlehem now go! He has come to save us.  
Praise the name of Jesus! The Lord is born tonight!

Angels we have heard on high, sweetly singing o'er the plains,  
And the mountains in reply, echoing their joyous strains:  
"Gloria! In excelsis Deo!"

Come to Bethlehem and see Him whose birth the angels sing.  
Come adore on blended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King!

### **The Eighth Lesson**

*The wise men are led by the star to Jesus.*  
Matthew 2:1-12

Chancel Choir: "Venite Adoremus" (Gesu Bambino)

When blossoms flow' red amid the snow upon a winter's night,  
Was born the Child, the Christmas Rose, the King of Love and Light.  
The angels sang, the shepherds sang, the grateful earth rejoiced.  
And at His blessed birth, the stars their exultation voiced.  
O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Carol SH #15: "The First Noel"

1 The first Nowell the angel did say  
was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay,  
in fields where they lay keeping their sheep,  
on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Refrain:

Nowell, Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
born is the King of Israel.

2 They looked up and saw a star  
shining in the east beyond them far;  
and to the earth it gave great light,  
and so it continued both day and night. [Refrain]

3 And by the light of that same star  
three wise men came from country far;  
to seek for a king was their intent,  
and to follow the star wherever it went. [Refrain]

4 This star drew nigh to the northwest;  
o'er Bethlehem it took its rest,  
and there it did both stop and stay,  
right over the place where Jesus lay. [Refrain]

5 Then entered in those wise men three,  
full reverently upon their knee,  
and offered there in his presence  
their gold, and myrrh, and frankincense. [Refrain]

### **\*The Ninth Lesson**

*The Apostle John unfolds the great mystery of the Incarnation.*  
John 1:1-14

### **The Homily**

Bryan Backus

Youth Choir: "Jesus Christ, the Apple Tree"

I'm weary with my former toil, and here I sit and rest awhile.  
Under the shadow I will be of Jesus Christ, the Apple Tree.

\*Carol #227: "On Christmas Night All Christians Sing"

1 On Christmas night all Christians sing,  
to hear the news the angels bring;  
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.

2 Then why should we on earth be sad,  
since our Redeemer made us glad:  
then why should we on earth be sad,  
since our Redeemer made us glad:  
when from our sin he set us free,  
all for to gain our liberty.

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

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

### **\*Dismissal**

Minister: Now go into the night, refreshed with music and the spoken Word.

**People: We have seen a great light, the Light of the world.**

Minister: Glory be to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

**Unison: Glory be to God on high!**

### **\* Postlude**

*\* Those who are able may stand.*

Our service this evening reflects a tradition whose roots run back more than a century ago. In his book, *The English Carol*, Eric Routley provides the following account of the original service of Lessons and Carols and its subsequent development.

*In his Life of Edward White Benson, Archbishop of Canterbury, Vol. I (1900), pp. 483–484, A. C. Benson wrote as follows:*

*“My father arranged from ancient sources a little service for Christmas Eve – nine carols and nine tiny lessons, which were read by various officers of the church, beginning with a chorister, and ending, through the different grades, with the Bishop.”*

*This service was first performed on Christmas Eve at 10 p.m. in 1880 in the wooden cathedral of Truro. Its structure consisted of the nine lessons (not those now usual) read by the nine readers. . . . Between the lessons were two hymns, four carols, and three choruses from the Messiah, with the Magnificat as the climax.*

*In 1918 the Rev. E. Milner-White tried out the devotion in the Chapel of King’s College, Cambridge, of which he was then Dean. Excellent on paper, it did not transfer at all well into a service. Extracts from the Messiah were wholly out of place, and for these the Dean substituted carols. . . .*

*Next year the Dean re-ordered the service by prefacing it with an act of prayer, a Christmas Bidding and Our Father; by cutting out the Magnificat and the Benedictions – except after the Lord’s Prayer and at the end – and by making the Ninth Lesson, the Gospel of the Incarnation from the first chapter of St. John, the supreme climax, for which everybody stood. . . . The “Nine Lessons and Carols” attracted vast crowds to Cambridge: and even before the B.B.C. made it a world institution, it had spread throughout England (including non-Anglican churches and chapels) and to all of the Dominions....*

*The main theme is the development of the loving purpose of God from Creation to the Incarnation through the windows and words of the Bible. The Scriptures, not the carols, are the backbone. It is fatally easy to ruin the devotion, to make it mere “community carol-singing,” by reducing the number of lessons and doubling the number of carols.*

As it stands, the service is a fruitful example of the use of ancient liturgical form in a new combination to create a “Special Service” – a devotion of Christmas, with dignity of order, development, mood, color, action, and variety of parts, all appropriately concentrated upon the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*December 22, 2024*

*6:00 PM*