



FOLK SERVICE OF
LESSONS
& **C**AROLS

Sunday, December 17, 2023

Though it was first designed by the Anglican Bishop of Truro in the late 19th century, the Festival of Lessons and Carols solidified as a Christmas Eve tradition at the chapel of King's College, Cambridge. A service of scripture and song, the annual celebration is replete with the angelic voices of the university's famous boychoir.

While loosely modeled after the Cambridge festival, our modified "folk service" of Lessons and Carols features seven lessons beginning with the Genesis account of God's curse for the sin of mankind and His promise of a Savior. The story unfolds with selected prophecies about the coming Messiah, passages detailing the birth of Jesus, and concludes with John's affirmation of Christ's deity. After each lesson, the congregation responds to hearing God's Word, either through singing or prayerful meditation (often accompanied by song).

What makes this service a "folk" one? You may think of acoustic instruments or traditional songs of a community. But more importantly, "folk" here means *you*. "Folk" reminds us that we are not here to watch, consume, or be entertained. Instead, this is the liturgy of the church, the "work of the people." We are here to worship the living God. We in the pews are not the passive audience, but the engaged, participating actors. From our community rise brothers and sisters to proclaim the Word of the Lord (sometimes in different tongues), so that we may hear God speak to us. And from our community then stand members to lead our response in song. Yet they do not sing for us, but with us. Even when we are asked to listen to a carol, we are being called into a holy, active listening, a listening that guides us to prayer and contemplation as a response to what we have heard from the Lord.

Together the readings and songs provide a remarkably rich picture of Advent, as a season of seeking and seeing, of groaning and rejoicing. The culmination is John 1 – “and we have seen His glory” – which takes us, perhaps surprisingly, beyond the stable in Bethlehem to the Lord’s table at the corner of Perry and Iredell: “This is My body, broken for you.” It is in Jesus — fully man, fully God — that we see Him, the truest picture of God, where “justice and mercy kiss each other” (Ps 85:10). And so, our morning’s journey through Scripture and song leads to an invitation to spiritually feed on the body and blood of the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

While many of the carols will be familiar to you, some will be new. You will find the lyrics projected on our sanctuary screens, as well as directions for when to sing and when to prayerfully listen. When it’s time to sing, sing boldly, sing joyfully! Join your voice with the chorus of angels, archangels, and the whole company of heaven in praising our great God!

PRELUDE

“Bright Morning Stars”

WELCOME & CALL TO WORSHIP

Goodie Bell, Associate Pastor

BIDDING CAROL

“Once in Royal David’s City”

BIDDING PRAYER

Wen Reagan, Director of Music & Worship

FIRST LESSON

Genesis 3:8-15 | The Fall, the curse, and the promise

Karl Umble (8:30); Lindsey Dunn (11)

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”

He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”

And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.”

Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,

“Cursed are you above all livestock
and all wild animals!
You will crawl on your belly
and you will eat dust
all the days of your life.
And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

CAROL

“In Adam We Have All Been One”

CALL TO CONFESSION | PRAYER OF CONFESSION |
ASSURANCE OF PARDON | PASSING THE PEACE

CAROL

“Gloria Patri (Three in One)”

SECOND LESSON

Isaiah 9:2-7 | Christ's birth and reign foretold

Brian Mitchell (8:30); Jack Gerend (11)

The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of deep darkness
a light has dawned.
You have enlarged the nation
and increased their joy;
they rejoice before you
as people rejoice at the harvest,
as warriors rejoice
when dividing the plunder.
For as in the day of Midian's defeat,
you have shattered
the yoke that burdens them,

the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor.
Every warrior's boot used in battle
and every garment rolled in blood
will be destined for burning,
will be fuel for the fire.
For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.
The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.

CAROL

"Of the Father's Love Begotten"

THIRD LESSON

Isaiah 11:1-9 | From the root of Jesse salvation shall spring up
Camille Reeves (8:30); Lily Joy & Emelia Smith (11)

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;

with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.

The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.

CAROL

“Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming”

— Children are dismissed for Junior and Children's Church —

FOURTH LESSON

Luke 1:26-35, 38 | The Annunciation of the Christ to Mary

Sasha Lane (Slovak) (8:30); Justin Rasmussen (Kiswahili) (11)

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.”

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God...”

“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.” Then the angel left her.

CAROL

“Gabriel’s Message” (Choir)

FIFTH LESSON

Matthew 1:18-23 | The Annunciation of the Christ to Joseph

Lowrie Beacham (8:30); June Van Bruggen (11)

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

CAROL

“Jesus Christ the Apple Tree” (Choir)

SIXTH LESSON

Luke 2:1-7 | Unto Mary a son is born in Bethlehem

Isela Coonley (Spanish) (8:30); Frauke Schaefer (German) (11)

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) And everyone went to their own town to register.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

CAROL

“I Saw Three Ships”

SEVENTH LESSON

John 1:1-14 | The mystery of the Incarnation

Serena Whisenhunt (8:30); Paul Tshihamba (11)

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 all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

The true light that gives light to everyone 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 did receive 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 Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

CAROL

“In the Bleak Midwinter”

COMMUNION

“Sanctus” | “Thou Who Wast Rich” | “O Come, All Ye Faithful”

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

PRESENTING OUR GIFTS

“Sussex Carol” (instrumental)

BENEDICTION AND SENDING SONG

“Good Christian Friends, Rejoice”

At the conclusion of the service, we invite you to receive prayer from members of our Prayer Team. Team members are stationed near the exits at the front of the sanctuary.

Worship Band: Wen Reagan (guitar & vocals); Sam Gould (keyboard); Nat Stine (piano); Caleb Wagner (cello); Timothy Crouch (fiddle); John Nicholson (bass); Bob Mutter & Paul Alberti (percussion); Allie Hargrove & Kat Burgett (vocals)

The choir is directed by Nat Stine.

Please see all announcements on the homepage of blacknall.org and subscribe to our email list.



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MEMORIAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH