

# The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

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**Truro  
Cathedral**  
*sacred space, common ground*

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23<sup>rd</sup> December 2025  
7.00pm

## ABOUT THIS SERVICE

Welcome to this service as we complete our spiritual preparation for the celebration of Christmas, and sing our carols of praise to welcome the God who comes among us as a child in a manger. This is the 145<sup>th</sup> year since the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols was instituted by Bishop Benson, the first Bishop of Truro. At the heart of tonight's liturgy Bishop David will dedicate the Christmas Crib ready to receive the figure of the Christ-Child at the Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve.

The lessons are read by representatives of various aspects of the life of the diocese and cathedral, and partners within the wider community.

*Truro Cathedral is open all year round. You are invited to make a Christmas gift to help care for this beautiful building and pass it on to future generations. A collection will be taken after the third lesson. Contactless payment devices are available on request, or please use a donation machine near the entrance. The cathedral is a registered charity (number 1207821), so using a Gift Aid envelope will boost the value of your donation by 25%.*



**Please make sure that all mobile phones and watches are set to silent or “Do not disturb”.**

The congregation are invited to join in the text of prayers and carols marked in **bold type**. This order of service invites worshippers to sit, kneel or stand but please view these as suggestions and worshippers are free to sit or kneel at other times.

*The congregation stands when the Cathedral lights are extinguished.*

## Opening Carol

*The choir sings the opening verses:*

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.

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.

*All join in singing the remaining verses as the choir and clergy process to their places in the Quire.*

### **3. 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.**

**4. 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.**

### **5. 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.**

**6. 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.**

*Music: Henry Gauntlett (1805–1876),  
arr. David Willcocks (1919–2015)*

*Words: Cecil Frances Alexander (1818–1895)*

## The Bidding Prayer

*read by the Dean. Please sit.*

Beloved in Christ, be it this Christmastide our care and delight to prepare ourselves 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 first days of our disobedience unto the glorious Redemption brought us by this Holy Child: and let us make this Cathedral Church, dedicated to his most pure and lowly mother, glad with our carols of praise.

But first, let us pray for the needs of the whole world; for peace on earth; for love and unity within the Church he came to build; and especially in this city and diocese of Truro, and this county of Cornwall.

And because this of all things would rejoice his heart, let us remember, in his name, 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 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 one can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we for evermore are one.

These prayers and praises let us humbly offer up to the Throne of Heaven, in the words which Christ himself has taught us:

**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.**

## Choir Carol

*Please sit.*

*Nowell.*

Who is there that singeth so, *Nowell*?

I am here, Sir Christemas.

Welcome, my Lord Sir Christemas!

Welcome to all, both more and less, come near. *Nowell.*

Dieu vous garde, beaux sieurs, tidings I you bring:

A maid hath borne a child full young,

which causeth you to sing: *Nowell.*

Christ is now born of a pure maid;

In an ox stall he is laid,

Wherefore sing we at a brayde: *Nowell.*

Buvez bien, buvez bien par toute la compagnie.

Make good cheer and be right merry,

And sing with us now joyfully: *Nowell.*

*Nowell!*

*Music: William Mathias (1934–92)*

*Words: Anon (c. 1500)*

## First Lesson

Genesis 2:15-16, 3:6-7, 17-19

*read by a chorister.*

This first lesson poetically explains how humanity lost its innocence and the life of paradise by disobeying God.

## Choir Carol

Adam lay ybounden,  
Bounden in a bond,  
Four thousand winter  
Thought he not too long

Ne had the apple taken been,  
The apple taken been,  
Ne had never our Lady  
A-been heavene Queen.

And all was for an apple,  
An apple that he took,  
As clerkes finden  
Written in their book.

Blessed be the time  
That apple taken was,  
Therefore we moun singen  
*Deo Gracias!*

*Music: Philip Ledger (1937–2012)*

*Words: Anon. 15<sup>th</sup> century*

## Second Lesson

Isaiah 11: 1-9

*read by Colin Wilson, Lay Vicar.*

Jesus, the Saviour will spring up from the remains of the family tree of Jesse.  
When that day comes all will live in peace; animals will not threaten each other, and children will play in safety.

## Choir Carol

The tree of life my soul hath seen,  
Laden with fruit, and always green:  
The trees of nature fruitless be  
Compared with Christ the apple tree.

I'm weary with my former toil,  
Here I will sit and rest awhile:  
Under the shadow I will be  
Of Jesus 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.

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive,  
It keeps my dying faith alive;  
Which makes my soul in haste to be  
With Jesus Christ the apple tree.

For happiness I long have sought  
And pleasure dearly I have bought:  
I missed of all; but now I see  
'Tis found in Christ the apple tree.

*Music: Elizabeth Poston (1905–1987)*

*Words: Joshua Smith (1760–1795)*

## Third Lesson

Isaiah 9.2, 6-7

*read by the Reverend Helen Byrne,  
Chaplain of Truro School.*

Isaiah prophesies of a day when the light of hope will shine.  
There will be a solution to the problem of death itself.

## Congregational Carol

*Please stand.*

1. 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.

2. O how blest that wondrous birthday,  
When the Maid the curse retrieved,  
Brought to birth mankind's salvation,  
By the Holy Ghost conceived;  
And the Babe, the world's Redeemer,  
In her loving arms received,  
Evermore and evermore.

3. This is he, whom seer and sibyl  
Sang in ages long gone by;  
This is he of old revealed  
In the page of prophecy;  
Lo! he comes, the promised Saviour;  
Let the world his praises cry!  
Evermore and evermore.

4. 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 and evermore.

*Music: from 'Pie Cantiones', arr. David Willcocks (1919–2015)*

*Words: Prudentius, trans. Robert Davis (1866–1937)*

## Fourth Lesson

Luke 1: 26-35, 38

*read by Emma Arnold, chorister parent. Please sit.*

The angel Gabriel appears and delivers the news that the Blessed Virgin Mary will bear a son by the miraculous power of the Holy Spirit.

## Choir Carol

Of on that is so fayr and bright  
*Velut maris stella, (star of the sea)*  
Brighter than the day is light,  
*Parens et puella: (mother and maiden)*  
Ic crie to the, thou see to me,  
Levedy, preye thi Sone for me,  
*Tam pia, (so pious)*  
That ic mote come to thee  
*Maria. (Mary)*

*Music: Edmund Rubbra (1901–1986)*

Levedy, flour of alle thing,  
*Rose sine spina, (Rose without thorn)*  
Thu bere Jhesu, hevene king,  
*Gratia divina: (divine grace)*  
Of alle thu ber'st the pris,  
Levedy, quene of paradys  
*Electa: (chosen)*  
Mayde milde, moder  
*Es effecta. (you have been made)*

*Words: Anon. 13<sup>th</sup> century*

## Fifth Lesson

Luke 1: 39-45

*read by Jane Kirkham MP.*

The Blessed Virgin Mary visits her cousin Elizabeth. Elizabeth prophesies and declares that Mary is carrying “The Lord” in her womb.

### Choir Carol

*In dulci jubilo* (In sweet rejoicing)  
Let us our homage shew:  
Our heart's joy reclineth  
*In praesepio*; (in the crib)  
And like a bright star shineth  
*Matris in gremio*, (on his mother's lap)  
*Alpha es et O!* (You are Alpha and  
Omega)

*O Jesu parvule*, (Little Jesus)  
I yearn for thee alway!  
Hear me, I beseech Thee,  
*O puer optime*; (holy boy)  
My prayer let it reach Thee,  
*O princeps gloriae*. (Prince of glory)  
*Trahe me post te*. (Bring me after you)

*O patris caritas!* (Father of charity)  
*O Nati lenitas!* (Born of gentleness)  
Deeply were we stained.  
*Per nostra crimina*: (for our crimes)  
But Thou for us hast gained  
*Coelorum gaudia*, (the joy of heaven)  
O that we were there!

*Ubi sunt gaudia*, (Where are joys)  
If that they be not there?  
There are Angels singing  
*Nova cantica*; (new songs)  
And there the bells are ringing  
*In Regis curia*. (in the King's court)  
O that we were there!

*Words and Music: old German,  
arr. Robert Pearsall (1795–1856)*

## Sixth Lesson

Luke 2: 1-7

*read by the Reverend Sian Yates.*

St Luke explains why Mary and Joseph need to travel to Bethlehem, their ancestral home. The guest-rooms are full, so they stay with the animals.



## Congregational Carol

*during which the servers escort the Bishop of Truro to the Crib.*

*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.**

*The Bishop blesses the Crib in which the figure of the Christ-Child will be placed on Christmas Eve.*

Let us pray:

God our Father,  
at this holy season  
your Son Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary  
for us and for our salvation.  
Bless this crib,  
which we have prepared to celebrate that holy birth;  
may all who see it be strengthened in faith  
and receive the fullness of life he came to bring,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. **Amen.**

*The Bishop sprinkles the Crib with Holy Water while the choir sings the following verse*

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.

*The Bishop continues*

We pray you, Lord, to purify our hearts,  
that they may be worthy to become your dwelling place.  
Let us never fail to find room for you,  
but come and abide in us,  
that we also may abide in you,  
for as at this time you were born into the world for us,  
and live and reign, King of kings and Lord of lords,  
now and for ever. **Amen.**

May the grace of Christ our Saviour be with us all. **Amen.**

*All sing the final verse as the Bishop returns to his seat.*

**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.**

*Music: Traditional, arr. Thomas Armstrong (1898–1994)*

*Words: Bishop Phillips Brooks (1835–1893)*

## Seventh Lesson

Luke 2: 8-16

*read by Geraint Richards, High Sheriff of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly.  
Please sit.*

The first recorded visitors to the manger are local shepherds, who are invited to see the wonderful sight by an angel.

### Choir Carol

We stood on the hills, Lady  
Our day's work done  
Watching the frosted meadows  
That winter had won.

Oh, a voice from the sky, Lady  
It seemed to us then  
Telling of God being born  
In the world of men.

The evening was calm, Lady  
The air so still  
Silence more lovely than music  
Folded the hill.

And so we have come, Lady  
Our day's work done  
Our love, our hopes, ourselves  
We give to your son.

*Words and Music: Bob Chilcott (b.1956)*

There was a star, Lady  
Shone in the night  
Larger than Venus it was  
And bright, so bright.

## Eighth Lesson

Matthew 2: 1-11

*read by the Mayor of Truro, Councillor Chris Wells.*

The mysterious gifts offered by these wise travellers from Eastern lands are prophetic: Gold for a king, incense for a priest and myrrh for a prophet.

### Choir Carol

Night has come to Bethlehem,  
The family is asleep  
Exhausted by the wonders seen,  
The news outrageous, deep  
'That I may come and worship him.'

Ox, and ass have closed their eyes,  
Their ears now hear no sound  
Shepherds have gone back to their flocks,  
The mouse still noses around.  
'That I may come and worship him.'

Kings have left for their distant lands,  
Fractious camels moan.  
At a desert spring they make their farewells.  
'It's a mighty way to home!'  
'That I may come and worship him.'

Later that night their heads are filled  
with a dream-drenched holy ray.  
'Do not return to Herod the king,  
Go back another way.'  
'That I may come and worship him.'

And so our Christ is saved from death  
His mission to complete  
To change the world by selfless love  
Satan's legions to beat.

*Music: James Whitbourn (b.1963)*

*Words: Robert Tear (1939–2011)*

## **Ninth Lesson**

*Please stand.*

John 1.1-14

*read by the Bishop of Truro.*

The mysterious words of St John speak of the Word (the Reason behind all reason). This One came and stooped down to live alongside us, that we might come to live with Him forever.

*All remain standing to sing the following hymn, during which a collection is taken.*

**1. 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.***

**2. God of God, Light of Light,  
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's  
womb;  
Very God,  
Begotten, not created:  
*O come, let us adore him...***

**3. See how the shepherds  
Summoned to his cradle,  
Leaving their flocks, draw nigh  
with lowly fear;  
We too will thither  
Bend our joyful footsteps:  
*O come, let us adore him...***

**4. Lo, star-led chieftains,  
Magi, Christ adoring,  
Offer him incense, gold and  
myrrh;  
We to the Christ-Child  
Bring our hearts' oblations:  
*O come, let us adore him...***

**5. Child, for us sinners  
Poor and in the manger,  
Fain we embrace thee with love  
and awe;  
Who would not love thee,  
Loving us so dearly?  
O come, let us adore him...**

**6. 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...***

*Music: attr. John Francis Wade (1711–86),  
arr. David Willcocks (1919–2015)*

*Words: Frederick Oakeley (1802–80) and others*

## **The Collect of Christmas Eve**

*read by The Bishop of Truro.*

*Please sit.*

Almighty God, you have given us your only-begotten Son  
to take our nature upon him  
and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin:  
grant that we, who have been born again  
and made your children by adoption and grace,  
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;

through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

## **A Christmas Proclamation**

*sung by the choir.*

God is with us.  
Hear ye people, even to the uttermost end of the earth.  
The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.  
The people that dwell in the shadow of death,  
upon them the light has shined.  
For unto us a Child is born! For 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!  
Christ is born!

*Music: John Tavener (1944–2013)*

*Words: Orthodox Great Compline of Christmas Eve*

## **The Blessing**

*Please stand.*

Christ, who by his incarnation gathered into one  
things earthly and heavenly, fill you with peace and goodwill  
and make you partakers of the divine nature;  
and the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

## **Final Carols**

*Please sit for the final choir carol, standing as Hark the Herald begins.*

Noe, noe!  
Resonet in laudibus,  
cum jucundis plausibus:  
Sion cum fidelibus  
apparuit quem genuit Maria.

*Nowell, nowell!  
Let Zion and the faithful  
ring with praise  
and joyous applause:  
he has appeared whom Mary bore.*

Noe, noe!  
Parvulus filius hodie natus est nobis,  
Salvator Mundi.  
Cantemus et exultemus  
et lætemur in eo dicentes:  
Gloria in excelsis Deo!  
Noe, noe!

*Nowell, nowell!*  
*A tiny son has been born for us today,*  
*the Saviour of the World.*  
*Let us sing, rejoice,*  
*and be glad in him, saying:*  
*Glory to God in the highest!*  
*Nowell, nowell!*

*Music: David Bednall (b. 1979)*

*Words: Anon. 14<sup>th</sup> century*

**1. Hark, the herald-angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King,  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled.  
Joyful, all ye nations, rise,  
Join the triumph of the skies;  
With th'angelic host proclaim,  
'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'  
Hark, the herald-angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King.**

**2. 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, the incarnate Deity,  
Pleased as Man with man to dwell,  
Jesus, our Emmanuel.  
Hark, the herald-angels sing  
Glory to the new-born King.**

**3. 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.**

*Music: Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847),  
arr. David Willcocks (1919–2015)*

*Words: Charles Wesley (1707–88) and others*

## Organ Voluntaries

In dulci jubilo BWV 729  
Carillon de Westminster

*J.S. Bach (1685–1750)*  
*Louis Vierne (1870–1937)*

*The Bishop, Dean, Chapter, and all at Truro Cathedral wish you a very blessed Christmas and peaceful New Year.*

*We hope you enjoyed the service. There is an opportunity to contribute to the collection as you leave. Thank you for supporting your cathedral, and please come again soon.*

### **Christmas Services at Truro Cathedral**

#### **Christmas Eve**

The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols – 7pm

Midnight Mass – 11pm

#### **Christmas Day**

BCP Holy Communion – 8am

Choral Festal Eucharist – 10am

Mid-day Prayer – 12.15pm

#### **Sunday 28th December**

Children and Pets' Carol Service – 2pm

### **Truro Cathedral Choir – Chorister Opportunities**

If you know a child who likes singing, and who may wish to have the life-changing experience of being a chorister in Truro Cathedral Choir, please do email [jab@trurocathedral.org.uk](mailto:jab@trurocathedral.org.uk). We are hosting a fun chorister experience day for those in school years 2-4 on Saturday 31st January 2026.

### ***Please take this order of service away***

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