



# Blue Christmas



*Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> December 2024, 6pm*

*The photo on the front cover is 'Jesus Heals the Leper' by Ann Lukesh (2014)*  
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# Welcome to Coventry Cathedral

*Thank you for coming to the Blue Christmas Service at Coventry Cathedral.*

*We extend a warm and heartfelt welcome to you tonight.*

*This Blue Christmas Service has been thoughtfully created as a space of solace and reflection for those who find the Christmas season challenging.*

*Whether you are carrying grief, loss, sadness, or simply seeking a quieter way to embrace this time of year, this service is for you.*

*Here, you will encounter gentle poems, carefully chosen hymns, and crafted prayers, all designed to offer comfort, hope, and a sense of peace amidst the busyness and brightness that can sometimes feel overwhelming.*

*You are invited to engage with this service in a way that feels most comfortable to you—whether that means sitting quietly, standing to sing, or simply being present in this sacred space.*

*Those leading the service are here to guide you gently, holding this time with care and reverence. May you find stillness, reassurance, and light in the moments we share together.*

*Peace be with you.*

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*This service is led by the Reverend Nitano Muller,  
Canon for Worship and Welcome. The Reverend Mary Gregory,  
Canon for Arts and Reconciliation, is preaching.*

*The Cathedral Choir is directed by Luke Fitzgerald, Acting Director of Music.*

*In this service, we say the words in **bold** together, and invite you to stand and sit as indicated. However, please stay seated if you prefer.*

*If you would like to speak to a member of clergy after this service,  
you are very welcome to do so.*

# The Gathering

## Memory Stars

*As people enter the Cathedral, each person is welcome to write the name of a departed loved one on the paper stars and place them on the memory tree.*

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## Introit

In the stillness of a church where candles glow,  
in the softness of a fall of fresh white snow,  
in the brightness of the stars that shine this night,  
in the calmness of a pool of healing light,  
in the clearness of a choir that softly sings,  
in the one-ness of a hush of angels' wings,  
in the mildness of a night by stable bare,  
in the quietness of a lull near cradle fair,  
there's a patience as we wait for a new morn,  
and the presence of a child soon to be born.

*Words by Katrina Shepherd  
Music by Sally Beamish (b. 1956)*

## Welcome

*Words of welcome are offered by the Reverend Nitano Muller, Canon for  
Worship and Welcome.*

## The Gathering Prayer

*We remain standing as Canon Nitano Muller prays,*

God of love and understanding,  
in this season of festivity and joy,  
we gather to acknowledge the pain of the world  
and of our own lives,  
offering to you that which  
some of us cannot put into words.  
You came as light into the darkness.  
Grant us a glimpse of the dawn  
and a full measure of the hope, peace, joy and love  
found in your presence.

**Amen.**

## Call to Worship

*Canon Nitano begins the Call to Worship, and we join in with the words in bold.*

The God who speaks comfort to us calls us here.

**The God who addresses us with tenderness meets us here.**

The God who guides us with gentleness cares for us here.

**We come to prepare a way for the Lord.**

We come to meet God here.

**Just as we are.**

*Moira Laidlaw, based on Isaiah 40:1 – 11*

## Hymn

We *STAND* to sing the opening hymn.

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 all,  
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.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife  
the world has suffered long;  
beneath the angel-strain have rolled  
two thousand years of wrong;  
and people, caught in war, hear 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.

Words by E. H. Sears (1810-1876)  
Tune CP 56 Noel English Traditional Melody  
adapted by Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900)

## Light & Remembering

*We SIT. Canon Nitano Muller leads the candle-lighting liturgy saying,*

Holy God of Advent,  
you became weak so that we could find strength  
in moments of heartbreak;  
you left the safety of heaven  
to wander the wilderness of the world.  
You set aside your glory  
to hold our pain, so that we might be healed.  
You became one of us,  
flesh of our flesh, bone of our bone.  
So come now, Child of Bethlehem;  
you have promised to go before us  
into our brokenness, into hospital rooms,  
into empty houses, into our future.  
to strengthen us through our longest nights.  
Be born in our hearts, in our hopes, in our weakness.

*The first candle is lit.*

We light this first candle to remember those  
whom we have loved and see no longer.  
We pause to remember clearly, their faces,  
their voices, their smiles.

We embrace and give thanks for the memories  
that bind them to us in this season of expectation,  
when all creation waits for the Light.

**We remember them with love.  
May God's eternal love surround them.**

*We take a moment for quiet reflection.*

*The Reverend Mary Gregory, Canon for Arts and Reconciliation, reads,*

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.”

*Hebrews 12:1 – 2*

*The second candle is lit.*

We light this second candle  
to remember the pain of loss:  
Loss of relationships, loss of trust, loss of jobs,  
loss of health, loss of faith, the loss of joy.  
We acknowledge and embrace the pain of the past,  
O God, and we offer it to You,  
asking that into our wounded hearts and open hands  
You will place the gift of peace.

**We remember that through you,  
all things are possible.**

**Refresh, restore, renew us, O God,  
and lead us into your future.**

*We take a moment for quiet reflection, then Canon Mary Gregory reads,*

“And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

*Revelation 21:5*



*The third candle is lit.*

We light this third candle  
to remember ourselves this Christmas time.  
We pause and remember the past weeks,  
months, and for some of us years,  
that have been heavy with our burdens.  
We accept and lay before you, God,  
the sharpness of memory, the sadness and grief,  
the hurt and fear, the anger and pain.  
We accept and lay before you  
the ways we feel we have fallen short,  
and the times we have spent blaming ourselves,  
and you, for all that we have suffered.  
We accept and lay before you  
the time we have walked alone, in darkness;  
and in the knowledge of our own mortality.  
We remember that though we have journeyed far,  
and that, while lost, we may have turned away from the light,  
the light itself has not failed.  
**We remember that though winter be upon us,  
and though the night be dark,  
with the turning of the wheel the dawn will come,  
and dawn defeats the darkness.**

*We take a moment for quiet reflection, then Canon Mary Gregory reads,*

Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,  
whose trust is the Lord.  
They shall be like a tree planted by water,  
sending out its roots by the stream.  
It shall not fear when heat comes,  
and its leaves shall stay green;  
in the year of drought it is not anxious,  
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

*Jeremiah 17:7 – 8*

*The fourth candle is lit.*

We light this fourth candle  
to remember the gift of faith, love and hope  
that God offers to us in the story of Christmas,  
which also began in abandonment, insecurity,  
and humility; in a time of war and in a poor stable.

We remember that the loving God  
who kept the light shining  
and who came to share this life with us,  
promises us comfort and peace.

**We remember the One who shares our burdens,  
who shows us the way to the Light,  
and who journeys with us into all our tomorrows.**

*We take a moment for quiet reflection, then Canon Mary Gregory reads,*

“For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face  
to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as  
I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide,  
these three; and the greatest of these is love.”

*1 Corinthians 13:13*

*Canon Nitano concludes by saying,*

Come, Lord Jesus.

**Amen. Come Lord Jesus.**

*Adapted from Bonnie Kinschner’s Blue Christmas Service*

## Anthem

*The choir sings:*

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  
with 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.

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

*Words by Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)*

*Music by Bob Chilcott (b. 1955)*

## **A Reading**

*We remain seated for the Scripture reading, read by Sophia Burr, one of our Reconciliation Interns.*

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onwards and for evermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

*Isaiah 9:2, 6 – 7*

## **A Reflection**

*The Reverend Mary Gregory, Canon for Arts and Reconciliation, offers a reflection.*

## Hymn

We *STAND* to sing:

**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.**

**Enough for him, whom cherubim  
worshipped night and day,  
a breast full of milk, and a manger full of hay:  
enough for him, whom angels fall down before,  
the ox and ass and camel which adore.**

**Angels and archangels may have gathered there,  
cherubim and seraphim thronged the air  
but only his mother in her maiden bliss  
worshipped the beloved with a kiss.**

**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.**

*Words by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)  
Tune CP 55 Cranham Gustav Holst (1874-1934)*

## Prayers of Intercession

*We SIT for the prayers, led by the Reverend Su McClellan, Cathedral Associate Minister.*

God of silent nights and waiting hearts,  
we come to you amidst the ache of longing,  
where absence feels more familiar than arrival.  
In the stillness of the stable,  
where straw whispers and stars hold their breath,  
meet us where we are—  
in our doubts, in our questioning,  
in the spaces where hope flickers faintly.  
Teach us to wait as the shepherds did,  
to believe as the wise ones dared,  
to listen, as Mary listened,  
for the rustling of angels and the cry of a child.  
In the quiet places of our lives,  
may we encounter the unspoken word of your love.

Gentle God:

**Hold us, we pray.**

Holy God, born on the margins,  
in the shadows of occupation,  
in the arms of a weary mother,  
among beasts who made space where humans would not—  
we pray for all who find themselves pushed to the edges.  
For the homeless, born in Bethlehem streets.  
For the refugee, crossing borders with nothing but hope.  
For the child who feels invisible in a crowded room.  
May your story remind us  
that holiness is found not in power,  
but in the embrace of fragility.  
This Christmas, make our arms strong for holding,  
our hearts wide for welcoming,  
our hands ready for building a kinder world.

Gentle God:

**Hold us, we pray.**

God who entered the world not as perfection,  
but as vulnerability,  
we thank you for the beauty found in imperfection:  
the crooked star atop the tree,  
the misshapen cookies baked with love,  
the awkward carols sung off-key.  
Teach us to let go of the need for flawless lives  
and instead embrace the messy, holy work  
of loving one another deeply,  
of healing what feels irreparable,  
of sitting tenderly with all that is unfinished in us.  
In the chaos of this season,  
may we find peace not in what we control,  
but in what we release to you.  
Gentle God:  
**Hold us, we pray.**

God of the burning bush and the blazing star,  
the world groans beneath wars and weeps in the face of flames.  
Where is your coming, your breaking in?  
You are here—  
in the small act of defiance,  
in the neighbour who opens their door,  
in the cry of the child who demands justice.  
Let this Christmas remind us:  
the kingdom is not waiting in the sky,  
but blooming in the cracks of our broken earth.  
Help us tend the flames of hope,  
feed the fires of change,  
and follow the light that will not be overcome.  
Gentle God:  
**Hold us, we pray.**

Christ who comes wild and free,  
not contained by stained glass or polite hymns,  
but born to shake the world awake—  
we marvel at the audacity of your birth.

In a world that prefers comfort,  
you come demanding love that changes everything.  
In a time that clings to power,  
you come as weakness—small hands, wide eyes.  
Let this Christmas be more than tradition:  
make it a revolution of grace.  
Turn over the tables of our indifference,  
unbind the joy we have kept too small,  
and teach us to live as you lived—  
with courage, with kindness,  
and with hearts that dare to wonder.  
Gentle God:  
**Hold us, we pray.**

## **The Lord's Prayer**

*We remain seated. Please feel free to say the Lord's Prayer in any language or version which is closest to your heart.*

We gather our thoughts and prayers, O Christ,  
praying for the advent of your kingdom,  
in the words you taught us:

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever.  
Amen.**



## Hymn

We **STAND** to sing the hymn, during which the congregation's pilgrim candles are lit.

**Silent night, holy night,  
all is calm, all is bright,  
round yon virgin mother and child;  
holy infant, so tender and mild,  
sleep in heavenly peace.**

**Silent night, holy night,  
shepherds quake at the sight,  
glories stream from heaven afar,  
heav'nly hosts sing alleluia:  
Christ our Saviour is born.**

**Silent night, holy night,  
Son of God, love's pure light  
radiant beams from thy holy face,  
with the dawn of redeeming grace,  
Jesus, Lord at thy birth.**

*Words by Joseph Mohr (1792-1848)*

*Tune CP 69 Stille Nacht Franz Gruber (1787-1863)*

## A Blessing

*We remain standing. Canon Nitano says,*

May the God who chose the manger over a throne  
be found in the humble corners of our lives.  
May the Christ-child who cried for milk  
teach us to listen to the cries of the vulnerable.  
And may the Spirit who hovered over the stable  
fill us with the courage to birth love into the world.  
**Amen.**

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*A gentle organ voluntary is played as the choir and ministers process.*

If you would like to make a one-off donation to the Cathedral via your phone, or set up a recurring donation, please use the QR code below. There are also contactless donation points and collection boxes near the entrance.

Thank you for your support.



## **THE SEASON OF ADVENT**

### **Handel's Messiah by Candlelight**

Monday 16<sup>th</sup> December, 7pm

*'Unto Us a Child is Born. Alleluia!'*

*A highlight of the Chorus' season for us all is always the performance of Handel's Messiah and we are thrilled to be performing this wonderful work in Coventry Cathedral again. Surely, there's no better way to prepare for Christmas than through the story of the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.*

*For more information and to book tickets, please visit:*

<https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/events/handels-messiah-by-candlelight-2>

### **EX CATHEDRA: Christmas Music by Candlelight**

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> December, 7pm

*Immerse yourself in the serene embrace of this popular, atmospheric concert. Join us in the beautiful surrounds of Coventry Cathedral where hushed anticipation and spellbinding seasonal music fills the air, and the choir is enveloped in the soft glow of candlelight. Ex Cathedra perform a seamless sequence of Christmas favourites, little-known gems and gorgeous new music, interspersed with a selection of readings, to explore the magic, mystery – and humour – of the season.*

*For more information and to book tickets, please visit:*

<https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/events/ex-cathedra-christmas-music-by-candlelight-2>

## **Britten's Ceremony of Carols**

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> December, 5:30pm

*The Cathedral Choristers perform Benjamin Britten's perennial Christmas favourite 'A Ceremony of Carols' with harpist Cecily Beer.*

*Composed in 1942, this is a twenty-minute, eleven-movement work scored for 3-part treble choir, soloists and harp.*

*The words, from The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems, are in Latin and Middle English.*

## **Candlelight: Christmas Pop Hits On Strings**

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> December, 8:30pm

*Candlelight concerts bring the magic of a live, multi-sensory musical experience to awe-inspiring locations like never seen before in Coventry. Get your tickets now to discover the music of Christmas Pop Hits On Strings at Coventry Cathedral under the gentle glow of candlelight.*

*For more information and to book tickets, please visit:*

<https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/events/candlelight-christmas-pop-hits-on-strings>

## **The Snowman at Coventry Cathedral**

Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> December, multiple showings

*With a live Orchestra and a solo from the Cathedral's Choristers, this magical screening with live performance will be an experience that can't be missed. In keeping with the book, the film of The Snowman is wordless and free of dialogue, except for the now iconic, "Walking in the Air" which features as part of a now timeless musical score. For more information and to book tickets, please visit:*

<https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/events/the-snowman-at-coventry-cathedral-first-show>

## **Carols by Candlelight**

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 5pm

*A candlelit service of traditional Christmas carols and readings, with beautiful music from our choirs. A chance to sing your favourite Christmas carols, old and new, with the Cathedral lit up by hundreds of candles, with a sequence of readings.*

## **La Nativité du Seigneur**

Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 5pm

*Coventry Cathedral presents one of the greatest organ works of all time, Olivier Messiaen's festive masterpiece La Nativité du Seigneur.*

*Composed in 1935, this piece is perfectly suited to the French-influenced colours of Coventry Cathedral's Harrison Organ and depicts imaginative tableaux from the nativity story.*

### **Carols for Families**

Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2:30 – 3:30pm

*A fun, interactive retelling of the Christmas story with singalong carols. A lighter take on Christmas, everyone is welcome! Children might like to come dressed as a character from the nativity. Adults might want to wear their jazziest Christmas jumper!*

### **Form of a Servant**

Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> December, 7pm

*A service unique to Coventry Cathedral, The Form of a Servant explores why Jesus was born; how He was born to serve and to save humanity. This candlelit service is full of beautiful music, powerful readings and profound symbolism.*

### **The Eucharist for Christmas Day**

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> December, 10:30am

*A traditional Christmas morning service. Join us as we give thanks for the birth of our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Whether you're a regular member of our congregation or you're just looking for a place to celebrate, you're welcome here. Come and celebrate with us!*