

THE FORM OF A SERVANT



Christmas Eve

Tuesday 24th December 2024 at 7 pm

Welcome to Coventry Cathedral

About this service

The Form of a Servant is more than a carol service. It is Coventry Cathedral's liturgy for Christmas Eve, a celebration of the God who comes among us as the Word made flesh. Incarnation means that God has entered into all that it is to be human: our pain and our weakness, as well as our joy and achievement. This service celebrates and reflects on Christ's coming as Servant-King to bring God's light, life and love to the whole world. The service has five sections:

<i>Veni Emmanuel</i>	We reflect on God coming into the world.
<i>Father Forgive</i>	We acknowledge our human frailty.
<i>The Word made Flesh</i>	We ponder the miracle of Jesus' birth at Christmas.
<i>Offer my Heart</i>	We make our response to the new-born King.
<i>The Form of a Servant</i>	We worship Jesus who humbled himself for us that we might be saved.

How we might help you

If you would like to talk to someone about the Christian faith, you are welcome to speak to one of our ministers after the service. Alternatively, you can email our clergy (for contact details, please visit <https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/about-us/our-team>) or send us a prayer request at <https://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk/worship-music/prayer>

How you can help us

Donations are vital to keep the Cathedral running, and your generosity is greatly appreciated. There are various ways to donate to the Cathedral: you can make a one-off donation, or set up a recurring donation, using the QR code to the right; alternatively, there are contactless donation points and collection boxes near the entrance.



The image on the front cover is an adaptation of the Stalingrad Madonna, a replica of which is located in the Millennium Chapel in this Cathedral.

The Battle of Stalingrad was the bloodiest and longest of the Second World War. Late in 1942, the German Sixth Army reached the pivotal city of Stalingrad. Winter was setting in. Hitler declared it must be taken, whatever the cost. Stalin declared it must be held, whatever the cost. The war in Europe seemed to hinge on the fate of Stalingrad.

By November, the German army had been surrounded,
the siege had begun.

Dr. Kurt Reuber was a German military surgeon with the 6th Army.

He was also a Lutheran Pastor and a gifted artist. He was deeply opposed to the Nazi regime. He had a great love of the Russian people and was wholly at odds with what Hitler's forces were doing to them.

Tonight is the 82nd anniversary of Christmas Eve 1942 when, while working round the clock in a field operating theatre somewhere in Stalingrad, Dr. Reuber gathered a group of soldiers to hold a Christmas service in an underground bunker: no cross, no tree, no candles. But on the back of a captured Soviet military map, he had drawn an icon - the picture of a Russian Mother, a Russian Mary and her Child: the Stalingrad Madonna. It was fastened to an earthen wall. This Russian Mother, like Mary, was sheltering the vulnerable Christ child in the midst of a world of suffering.

A few weeks later, the 90,000 German soldiers left alive surrendered.

Field Marshal Paulus had disobeyed Hitler's orders. In captivity he survived and joined a group of officers opposing Hitler. Two thirds of the 90,000, Kurt Reuber among them, died in Soviet captivity.

But the Stalingrad Madonna survived. A Red Cross nurse on the last ambulance to leave the besieged city took the Madonna back to Germany. It became a national icon and eventually found its place in West Berlin's famous Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church which, like Coventry Cathedral, was destroyed by bombing, its ruins preserved and a new church built beside them. This became a Cross of Nails Partner, closely linked to Coventry's ministry of reconciliation.

West Berlin's Bishop, Martin Kruse, wanted to make a special gesture of reconciliation on the 50th anniversary of the Coventry Blitz. This replica of the Stalingrad Madonna was made for Coventry Cathedral, and brought as a gift by Bishop Kruse on the 14th November 1990. It was dedicated, in its present location, by the Russian Orthodox Archbishop of Volgograd and by the Bishops of West Berlin and of Coventry.

This service will be Bishop Ruth Worsley's final service with us as Acting Bishop of Coventry. We are so grateful for her ministry amongst us and pray for her as she returns to the Diocese of Bath and Wells.

The Boy and Girl Choristers, Scholars and Clerks of the Cathedral Choir and the Cathedral Chamber Choir are directed by Luke Fitzgerald, Acting Director of Music. The organists are David Rice, Acting Assistant Director of Music, and Amelia Parkin, Organ Scholar.

Before the service, David Rice and Amelia Parkin will play the following organ pieces:

Weihnachten from Op. 145 by Max Reger (1873-1916)

Es ist ein Ros entsprungen by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Jesu Redemptor omnium by Marcel Dupré (1886-1971)

VENI EMMANUEL

At 7pm, please remain SEATED as the Dean welcomes everyone. Silence is kept, and then the choirs sing from the Retro-Choir.

Choir Carol

A child is born in Bethlehem, Alleluia, alleluia,
And joy is in Jerusalem, Alleluia, alleluia.

Rejoice, rejoice, sing high, sing low, Alleluia, alleluia,
Benedicamus Domino, Alleluia, alleluia.

To thee, O Lord, be glory paid, Alleluia, alleluia,
Thou son of Mary, mother-maid, Alleluia, alleluia.

To Holy Trinity give praise, Alleluia, alleluia,
With Deo gracias always, Alleluia, alleluia.

Samuel Scheidt (1587-1654), ed. David Willcocks

Text: v.1 & 2 David Willcocks (v.1 Latin trans.)

v. 3 & 4 from The Cowley Carol Book

A voice proclaims:

Welcome, all wonders in one sight!
Eternity shut in a span.
Summer in winter, Day in night,
heaven in earth, and God in man.
Great little One! Whose all-embracing birth
brings earth to heaven, stoops heaven to earth.

Richard Crashaw (1614-1649)

Carol

Everyone **STANDS** to sing:

**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!**

**God of God, Light of Light,
Lo! he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
Very God, begotten, not created:**

**See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle,
Leaving their flocks, draw nigh with lowly fear;
We too will thither bend our joyful footsteps:**

**Child, for us sinners, poor and in the manger,
Fain we embrace thee, with awe and love;
Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?**

**Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above;
Glory to God in the highest:**

*Words and melody by J. F. Wade (1711-1786)
Tr. Frederick Oakeley (1802-1880) and others
Tune CFC 30 Adeste Fideles; vv. 6 arr. Philip Ledger (1937-2012)*

During this carol, the procession of choirs and ministers moves towards the Crib. Please turn to face the West End of the Cathedral as the procession passes you.

Introduction

We remain STANDING. At the Crib, the Very Reverend John Witcombe, Dean, says:

Welcome to this Cathedral Church on this most holy night.
We gather as God's people in this place
to give thanks to him for the gift of his Son,
to give thanks to him for the love of Christ, who,
taking the form of a servant, was born in a stable in Bethlehem.
With the angels we join our song: Glory to God in the highest!
But our song, like theirs,
is sung in the context of a world in need,
a world which longs for peace and justice,
a world which longs for light
to illumine the darkness of suffering and sin.
So let us turn to God,
and hear again of the miracle of Christmas,
when earth and heaven are joined for ever
because of the Word made flesh;
because the Saviour is born.

Reading

The Dean reads,

Remembering that it happened once,
we cannot turn away the thought,
as we go out, cold, to our barns
toward the long night's end, that we
ourselves are living in the world
it happened in when it first happened,
that we ourselves, opening a stall
(a latch thrown open countless times
before), might find them breathing there,
foreknown: the Child bedded in straw,
the mother kneeling over Him,
the husband standing in belief
he scarcely can believe, in light
that lights them from no source we see,
an April morning's light, the air
around them joyful as a choir.

We stand with one hand on the door,
looking into another world
that is this world, the pale daylight
coming just as before, our chores
to do, the cattle all awake,
our own frozen breath hanging
in front of us; and we are here
as we have never been before,
sighted as not before, our place
holy, although we knew it not.

'Remembering that it happened once' by Wendell Berry (b. 1934)

FATHER FORGIVE

The Coventry Carol

We remain STANDING, facing the Crib, as the Choirs sing:

*Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child,
by by, lully-lullay,
thou little tiny child,
by by lully lullay.*

O sisters too, how may we do
for to preserve this day
this poor youngling,
for whom we do sing
by by lully lullay?

Herod the king, in his raging
charged he hath this day
his men of might
in his own sight
all young children to slay.

That woe is me, poor child for thee!
And ever morn and may,
for thy parting
neither say nor sing
by by lully lullay.

*Lully, lulla, thou little tiny child,
by by, lully-lullay,
thou little tiny child,
by by lully lullay.*

*English 15th century
Arr. Martin Shaw (1875-1958)*

The Litany of Reconciliation

Silence is kept. The congregation turns back to face the Tapestry, and then the Reverend Mary Gregory, Canon for Arts and Reconciliation, leads the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation from the Pulpit.

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race,
class from class,

All: **Father, forgive.**

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess
what is not their own,

All: **Father, forgive.**

The greed that exploits the work of human hands
and lays waste the earth,

All: **Father, forgive.**

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,

All: **Father, forgive.**

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned,
the homeless, the refugee,

All: **Father, forgive.**

The lust which dishonours the bodies
of men, women and children,

All: **Father, forgive.**

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,

All: **Father, forgive.**

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted,
forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Choir Carol

We SIT. The Cathedral Choristers sing:

And snow falls down on me.
Peace on Earth.
The night is dark and soft.
Peace on Earth.
The lights that sparkle in the square,
The smoke that lingers in the air.
Peace on Earth.

And grace falls down on me.
Peace on Earth.
The dark will turn aside.
Peace on Earth.
The fires that burn in every hearth
Do sing our praise of Christmas past.
Peace on Earth.

Hear them singing.
Peace on Earth.

Words and music by Errollyn Wallen (b. 1958)

Reading

Read from the Great Lectern by David East, Cathedral Churchwarden.

God's Word is a lantern to our feet
and a light to our path.

All:

A reading from the prophet Isaiah:

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. 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. 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 onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Isaiah 9:2, 6 & 7

We *STAND* to sing as the procession moves to the Chancel.

**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.**

**By his word was all created;
he commanded and 'twas done;
earth and sky and boundless ocean,
universe of three in one,
all that sees the moon's soft radiance,
all that breathes beneath the sun,
evermore and evermore.**

**He assumed this mortal body,
frail and feeble, doomed to die,
that the race from dust created
might not perish utterly,
which the dreadful Law had sentenced
in the depths of hell to lie,
evermore and evermore.**

**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.**

**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.**

*NEH 33 Divinum Mysterium
Melody from Piae Cantiones Theoderici Petri Nylandensis 1582
Latin, Prudentius (348-413), tr. R. F. Davis (1866-1937)
Arr. David Willcocks (1919-2015)*

We SIT.

THE WORD MADE FLESH

Reading

Read from the Pulpit by Richard Parker, representing the Cathedral's choirs.

There came, at a predetermined moment, a moment in time
and of time,

A moment not out of time, but in time, in what we call history:
transecting,

bisecting the world of time, a moment in time but not like a
moment of time,

A moment in time, but time was made through that moment:
for without the

meaning there is no time, and that moment of time gave the
meaning.

Then it seemed as if men must proceed from light to light, in
the light of
the Word,

Through the Passion and Sacrifice saved in spite of their
negative being;

Bestial as always before, carnal, self-seeking as always before,
selfish and
purblind as ever before,

Yet always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming their
march on
 the way that was lit by the light;
often halting, loitering, straying, delaying, returning, yet
following no
 other way.

T. S. Eliot (1888-1965); Chorus from "The Rock"

Choir Carol

The Chamber Choir sing:

All this time this song is best:
"Verbum caro factum est."

This night there is a child y-born
That sprang out of Jesse's thorn;
We must sing and say therefor,

All this time this song is best:
"Verbum caro factum est."

Jesus is the child's name,
And Mary mild is his dame;
All our sorrow shall turn to game:

All this time this song is best:
"Verbum caro factum est."

It fell upon high midnight:
The stars shone both fair and bright;
The angels sang with all their might;

All this time this song is best:
"Verbum caro factum est."

Now kneel we down on our knee,
And pray we to the Trinity
Our help, our succour for to be;

All this time this song is best:
"Verbum caro factum est."

Words Anon. 16th Century
Music by William Walton (1902-1983)

Reading

Read from the Great Lectern by the Reverend Su McClellan, Cathedral Associate Minister.

God's Word is a lantern to our feet

All: **and a light to our path.**

A reading from the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke:

In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. All went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David. He went to be registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her first-born son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Luke 2:1 – 7

Choir Carol

The Girl Choristers, Clerks and Scholars sing:

A babe is born all of a may,
to bring salvation unto us.
To him we sing both night and day.
Veni Creator Spiritus.

At Bethlehem, that blessed place,
the child of bliss now born he was;
and him to serve God give us grace,
O lux beata Trinitas.

There came three kings out of the East,
to worship the King that is so free,
with gold and myrrh and frankincense,
A solis ortus cardine.

The angels came down with one cry,
a fair song that night sung they
in worship of that child:

Gloria tibi Domine.

A babe is born all of a may,
to bring salvation unto us.
To him we sing both night and day.
Veni Creator spiritus Noël!

Words anon. 15th century

Music by William Mathias (1934-1992)

Reading

Read from the Pulpit by the Reverend Nitano Muller, Canon for Worship and Welcome.

All: God's Word is a lantern to our feet
and a light to our path.

A reading from the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Luke:

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see, I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!"

Luke 2:8 – 16

Carol

Everyone STANDS to sing:

**All: 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.**

Choir: 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.

**All: 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)
Carol by Richard Storrs Willis (1819-1900)
Arr. Mack Wilberg (b. 1955)*

Reading

We SIT for the reading, read from the Great Lectern by Margaret Sedgwick, Lay Canon and Reader Emeritus.

Christmas sets the centre on the edge;
the edge of town, out-buildings of an inn,
the fringe of empire, far from privilege
and power, on the edge and outer spin
of turning worlds, a margin of small stars
that edge a galaxy itself light years
from some unguessed-at cosmic origin.
Christmas sets the centre at the edge,
and from this day our world is re-aligned;
a tiny seed unfolding in the womb
becomes the source from which we all unfold
and flower into being. We healed,
the End begins, the tomb becomes a womb,
for now in him all things are re-aligned.

'On the Edge', by Malcolm Guite (b. 1957)

Choir Carol

The Girl Choristers, Scholars and Clerks sing:

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.'

Traditional Carol
Arr. Philip Ledger (1937-2012)

Reading

Read from the Pulpit by Amelia Parkin, Organ Scholar.

In the midst of it all...
a government tax, a burdened journey,
a burgeoned town,
no room
in the midst of it all.

In the midst of it all...
each single life, here and now,
walks the hard pavement of ordinary life,
wading through
the sinking mud or flash flood
of waking tasks,
worried racks of anxious unknowns.

But, somewhere in this night,
the desert night of long ago,
or this daily desert of a road—
a twinkling here, a shining there,
a flower blooms
in deepest winter.
Love has come
and calms the shiver.

A warming kiss
a soft embrace,
a lighted window
a stable place.

In the midst of it all...
a hard won labor,
grace is born in fleshly groans.
The baby cries his birthday song
as angels weep and sweep
the heaven-to-earthbound glory.

And, love has come,
to each and every one of us
whether our eyes are open
and we perceive,
or closed in lonely fear.

We will receive
this love come to us –
whether open-hearted
in abundant waves,
or in unsuspected
and surprising ways.

Love has come.
Love has come...
Arise and shine – with the sun!
Love has come
in newborn grace
to offer truth
and God a face.

Posted by Barbara Doerrer-Peacock on her blog, Living Desert Voice

Carol

The choirs sing the first two verses of the carol; please STAND and sing from the beginning of verse 3.

Solo: 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: 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 stand to sing: **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 so dear and gentle
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 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.**

Words by C. F. Alexander (1818-1895)

Irby H. J. Gauntlett (1805-1876)

Arr. David Willcocks (1919-2015)

Everyone SITS.

OFFER MY HEART

Reading

Read from the Great Lectern by the Very Reverend John Witcombe, Dean.

All: **God's Word is a lantern to our feet
and a light to our path.**

A reading from the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Matthew:

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage." When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'" Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Matthew 2:1 - 12

Reading

Read from the Pulpit by the Reverend Nitano Muller, Canon for Worship and Welcome.

This was the moment when Before
turned into After, and the future's
uninvented timekeepers presented arms.

This was the moment when nothing
happened. Only dull peace
sprawled boringly over the earth.

This was the moment when even energetic Romans
could find nothing better to do
than counting heads in remote provinces.

And this was the moment
when a few farm workers and three
members of an obscure Persian sect
walked haphazard by starlight
straight into the kingdom of heaven.

BC - AD by U. A. Fanthorpe (1929-2009)

Choir Carol

The Boy Choristers, Scholars and Clerks 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.

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)

Music by Harold Darke (1888-1976)

Reading

Read from the Great Lectern by the Reverend Mary Gregory, Canon for Arts and Reconciliation.

As if until that moment
nothing real
had happened since Creation.

As if outside the world were empty
so that she and he were all
there was — he mover, she moved upon.

As if her submission were the most
dynamic of all works: as if
no one had ever said Yes like that.

As if one day the sun had no place
in all the universe to pour its gold
but her small room.

*By Luci Shaw, inspired by Luke 1:38
in Accompanied by Angels: Poems of the Incarnation*

Prayer

After a short period of silence, Canon Mary Gregory prays:

Lord Jesus, friend to the weary,
be the strength of all who come to you;
Lord Jesus, friend to the sick,
be the healing of all who come to you;
Lord Jesus, friend to the poor,
be the dignity of all who come to you;
Lord Jesus, friend to the excluded,
be the freedom of all who come to you;
until all humans stand renewed before you
and the whole world lives to praise your name.

All: **Amen.**

Christian Aid

The Lord's Prayer

Rejoicing in the presence of God here among us,
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray:

All: **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 for ever.
Amen.**

Carol

Everyone STANDS to sing:

**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 all 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 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 Emmanuel.**

*Words by Phillips Brooks (1835-1893)
Forest Green Arr. David Willcocks (1919-2015)*

THE FORM OF A SERVANT

Everyone remains STANDING for a short period of silent reflection and prayer. The Right Reverend Ruth Worsley, Acting Bishop of Coventry, exchanges her pastoral staff for a simple shepherd's crook at the High Altar and is then conducted to the top of the Chancel Steps, where her cope and mitre are removed and she is vested with her stole in the style of a deacon, the sign of a servant.

A voice proclaims:

**Hark, hark, the wise eternal Word,
Like a weak infant cries!
In form of servant is the Lord,
And God in cradle lies.**

Thomas Pestel (1584-1659)

Reading

Read from the Chancel Steps by the Bishop Ruth Worsley:

God's Word is a lantern to our feet
All: **and a light to our path.**

A reading from the Letter of Paul to the Philippians:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5 – 11

Procession

David Rice plays 'In Dulci Jubilo' BuxWV 197 by Dieterich Buxtehude (1637-1707). The choirs process to the West Screen and the ministers process to the Chi Rho set in the floor to symbolise the name of Christ. Please turn to face the Great Cross as the procession passes.

Thanksgiving

The Bishop says:

Blessed are you, God of all glory,
through your Son the Christ.

His name is Jesus:

All: **because he saves his people from their sin.**

He will be called Emmanuel:

All: **God is with us. Alleluia!**

Let us praise the Lord, the God of Israel:

All: **he has come to his people and set them free.**

He gave up the glory of heaven

All: **and took the form of a servant.**

The Word was made flesh

All: **and we beheld his glory.**

In humility he walked the path of obedience

All: **to die upon the cross.**

God raised him to the highest place above
and gave him the name above every name:

All: **Jesus Christ is Lord!**

So all beings in heaven and earth will fall at his feet,
and proclaim to the glory of God:

All: **Jesus Christ is Lord!**

This night Christ is born:

All: **Alleluia!**

This night the Saviour comes:

All: **Alleluia!**

This night the angels sing on earth:

All: **Alleluia! Glory to God in the highest!**

Choir Carol

The congregation remains STANDING as the ministers kneel at the Crib and the choirs sing:

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.
God is with us.
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.
Hear ye people, even to the uttermost end of the earth.
God is with us.
Christ is born!

*Adapted from the Orthodox Great Compline for Christmas Eve
Music by John Tavener (1944-2013)*

The congregation SITS. Led by the Great Cross and candles, the choirs process to the East End of the Cathedral in silence. Please remain SEATED in silence until the procession has left.

You are welcome to stay a while and enjoy the peace of this holy place. The clergy and ministers will greet you at the West Screen doors as you leave.

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 Cathedral's Eucharist for Christmas Day will take place at 10:30am tomorrow. All are welcome to join us.

Please note that our opening hours from 26th December 2024 – 3rd January 2025 are 11am – 3pm, with the exception of weekends (10am – 4pm). We are closed on 1st January.

The Acting Bishop of Coventry and the Dean and Chapter of Coventry Cathedral wish you a Holy and Happy Christmas and a Blessed and Peaceful New Year!