



# Choral Evensong



*Sunday After Ascension Day*

*Farewell to*  
**Dean John Witcombe**

**17<sup>th</sup> May 2026 at 4pm**

# **Welcome to Coventry Cathedral**

*We gather to mark the final service of The Very Reverend John Witcombe following thirteen years of ministry as Dean of Coventry.*

*Over more than a decade, John's leadership has helped shape and reimagine this Cathedral as a place that is both deeply rooted and courageously open, a living and breathing community of prayer, hospitality and encounter. Through his vision, creativity and deep commitment to the gospel, this place has continued to grow as a Cathedral that welcomes generously, creating space for all who enter here to be held, challenged, inspired and transformed.*

*John has nurtured and strengthened our Cathedral's vocation as a place where worship is offered with imagination and depth, where liturgy and music draw us more fully into the mystery of God, and where ancient faith is expressed with freshness and integrity for the world we inhabit today.*

*His ministry has also deepened our identity as a Cathedral shaped by reconciliation, renewing our commitment to peace-making, justice and the healing of wounds, both close to home and across the world.*

*As we gather for this final evensong in John's ministry as Dean, we do so with profound gratitude for all that has been shared, created and made possible in these years, and with prayer for John and Ricarda and for all that lies ahead. Above all, we gather to worship God, from whom every good gift comes, and to whom all glory belongs.*

*We are especially pleased to welcome civic guests, ecumenical partners, members of the wider diocese and city, as well as friends from near and far who join us this evening.*

*The service will be led by the Very Reverend John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry. The Reverend Canon Nitano Muller, Canon for Worship and Welcome, is the cantor. The Choir is directed by Rachel Mahon, Director of Music. The organists are Liam Condon, Assistant Director of Music and Adam Heron, Organ Scholar. The responses are by Humphrey Clucas (b. 1941) and the canticles from Collegium Regale by Herbert Howells (1892-1983).*

## The Gathering

Before the service, The Very Reverend John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry, offers a welcome from the Great Pulpit.

We remain SEATED as the choir sings the introit.

### Introit

*This is the record of John. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to ask him: "who art thou?" And he confessed and denied not, and said plainly. "I am not the Christ." And they asked him: "What art thou, then? Art thou Elias?" and said, "I am not." "Art thou the prophet?" And he answer'd: "No." Then said they unto him: "What art thou? That we may give an answer unto them that sent us. What say'st thou of thy self?" And he said: "I am the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord."*

*from John 1:19-23  
Music by Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625)*

We STAND.

### Hymn

**Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,  
to his feet thy tribute bring;  
ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
who like me his praise should sing?  
praise him, praise him,  
praise him, praise him,  
praise the everlasting King.**

**Praise him for his grace and favour  
to our forebears in distress;  
praise him still the same for ever,  
slow to chide, and swift to bless:  
praise him, praise him,  
praise him, praise him,  
glorious in his faithfulness.**

**Father-like, he tends and spares us,  
well our feeble frame he knows,  
in his hands he gently bears us,  
rescues us from all our foes:  
praise him, praise him,  
praise him, praise him,  
widely as his mercy flows.**

**Angels, help us to adore him;  
ye behold him face to face;  
sun and moon, bow down before him,  
dwellers all in time and space:  
praise him, praise him,  
praise him, praise him,  
praise with us the God of grace.**

*Words by Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847) cf. Psalm 103  
Tune CP 555 Praise my Soul John Goss (1800-1880)*

*We remain STANDING as Dean John, from his stall, introduces and leads  
the Coventry Litany of Reconciliation.*

## **The Litany of Reconciliation**

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

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class  
from class,  
**Father, forgive.**

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not  
their own,  
**Father, forgive.**

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste  
the earth,  
**Father, forgive.**

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,  
**Father, forgive.**

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

**Father, forgive.**

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

**Father, forgive.**

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

**Father, forgive.**

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

**Amen.**

## **The Opening Responses**

*The Reverend Nitano Muller, Canon for Worship and Welcome, and the choir sing these versicles and responses*

∇ O Lord, open thou our lips;

℞ And our mouth shall show forth thy praise.

∇ O God, make speed to save us;

℞ O Lord, make haste to help us.

∇ Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Ghost;

℞ As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be:  
world without end. Amen.

∇ Praise ye the Lord;

℞ The Lord's name be praised.

*The congregation SITS while the choir remains standing to sing the Psalm.*

## **The Word of God**

### **Psalm 47**

1. O Clap your hands together, all ye people ♦

O sing unto God with the voice of melody.

2. For the Lord is high, and to be feared ♦

he is the great King upon all the earth.

3. He shall subdue the people under us ♦  
and the nations under our feet.
4. He shall choose out an heritage for us ♦  
even the worship of Jacob, whom he loved.
5. God is gone up with a merry noise ♦  
and the Lord with the sound of the trump.
6. O sing praises, sing praises unto our God ♦  
O sing praises, sing praises unto our King.
7. For God is the King of all the earth ♦  
sing ye praises with understanding.
8. God reigneth over the heathen ♦  
God sitteth upon his holy seat.
9. The princes of the people are joined unto the people of the God  
of Abraham ♦  
for God, which is very high exalted, doth defend the earth, as it  
were with a shield.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Ghost;  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be:  
world without end. Amen.

## **The First Lesson**

*Read by Bishop Oliver Schuegraf, Chairperson of the German Board of  
the Community of the Cross of Nails.*

The First Lesson is from the Book of the Prophet Samuel.

Now these are the last words of David:  
The oracle of David, son of Jesse,  
the oracle of the man whom God exalted,  
the anointed of the God of Jacob,  
the favourite of the Strong One of Israel:  
The spirit of the Lord speaks through me,  
his word is upon my tongue.  
The God of Israel has spoken,  
the Rock of Israel has said to me:

One who rules over people justly,  
ruling in the fear of God,  
is like the light of morning,  
like the sun rising on a cloudless morning,  
gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.

Is not my house like this with God?  
For he has made with me an everlasting covenant,  
ordered in all things and secure.  
Will he not cause to prosper  
all my help and my desire?

*2 Samuel 23:1-5*

Here ends the first lesson.

*Everyone STANDS.*

## **The Magnificat**

My soul doth magnify the Lord ♦  
and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

For he hath regarded ♦  
the lowliness of his handmaiden.

For behold, from henceforth ♦  
all generations shall call me blessed.

For he that is mighty hath magnified me ♦  
and holy is his Name.

And his mercy is on them that fear him ♦  
throughout all generations.

He hath showed strength with his arm ♦  
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

He hath put down the mighty from their seat ♦  
and hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things ♦  
and the rich he hath sent empty away.

He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel ♦  
as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, for ever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Ghost;  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be:  
world without end. Amen.

*Everyone SITS.*

## **The Second Lesson**

*Read by The Reverend Kate Massey, Canon for Arts and Reconciliation.*

I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love towards all the saints, and for this reason I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

*Ephesians 1:15-end*

Here ends the second lesson.

*Everyone STANDS.*

## The Nunc Dimittis

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace ♦  
according to thy word.

For mine eyes have seen ♦  
thy salvation,  
Which thou hast prepared ♦  
before the face of all people;

To be a light to lighten the Gentiles ♦  
and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Ghost;  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,  
world without end. Amen.

*Everyone remains STANDING.*

## The Apostles' Creed

*Dean John begins, and everyone joins in saying*

I believe in God  
**the Father almighty,**  
**maker of heaven and earth:**  
**And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord,**  
**who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,**  
**born of the Virgin Mary,**  
**suffered under Pontius Pilate,**  
**was crucified, dead and buried.**  
**He descended into hell;**  
**the third day he rose again from the dead;**  
**he ascended into heaven,**  
**and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father almighty;**  
**from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.**  
**I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic Church;**  
**the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins;**  
**the resurrection of the body,**  
**and the life everlasting. Amen.**

# The Prayers

## The Lesser Litany

*Canon Nitano and choir sing*

☩ The Lord be with you;  
℞ And with thy spirit.

☩ Let us pray.

*The congregation SITS or KNEELS.*

℞ Lord, have mercy upon us.  
Christ, have mercy upon us.  
Lord, have mercy upon us.

## The Lord's Prayer

*The choir sings the Lord's Prayer*

Our Father, which art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name:  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
in earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive them that trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
Amen.

## The Responses

*Canon Nitano and choir sing these versicles and responses*

☩ O Lord, show thy mercy upon us;  
℞ And grant us thy salvation.  
☩ O Lord, save the King;  
℞ And mercifully hear us when we call upon thee.  
☩ Endue thy ministers with righteousness;  
℞ And make thy chosen people joyful.

∇ O Lord, save thy people;  
℞ And bless thine inheritance.  
∇ Give peace in our time, O Lord;  
℞ Because there is none other that fighteth for us,  
but only thou, O God.  
∇ O God, make clean our hearts within us;  
℞ And take not thy Holy Spirit from us.

### **A Collect for the Day**

Almighty and everlasting God,  
whose mercies are new every morning  
and whose faithfulness endureth from one generation to another:  
We give thee humble thanks  
for all thy goodness shown in this place in years past;  
and beseech thee so to guide us by thy Holy Spirit,  
that with thankful hearts and steadfast faith  
we may trust thee for all that is yet to come;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **A Collect for Peace**

O God, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just  
works do proceed: give unto thy servants that peace which the  
world cannot give; that both our hearts may be set to obey thy  
commandments, and also that by thee we being defended from the  
fear of our enemies may pass our time in rest and quietness;  
through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

### **A Collect for Help**

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great  
mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the  
love of thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The congregation remains seated and the choir sings the anthem.*

## The Anthem

Verbe égal au Très-Haut, notre  
unique espérance,  
jour éternel de la terre et des  
cieux;  
de la paisible nuit nous rompons  
le silence,  
Divin Sauveur, jette sur nous les  
yeux!

Répands sur nous le feu de ta  
grâce puissante,  
que tout l'enfer fuie au son de ta  
voix;  
dissipe le sommeil d'une âme  
languissante,  
qui la conduit à l'oubli de tes  
lois!

O Christ, sois favorable à ce  
peuple fidèle  
pour te bénir maintenant  
rassemblé.  
Reçois les chants qu'il offre à ta  
gloire immortelle,  
et de tes dons qu'il retourne  
comblé!

*Word, equal to the Most High, our  
only hope,  
eternal day of the earth and the  
heavens,  
we break the silence of the  
peaceful night.  
Divine Saviour, cast your eyes upon  
us!*

*Spread upon us the fire of your  
powerful grace,  
that all hell might flee at the sound  
of your voice;  
dispel the languishing soul's torpor  
which has caused it to forget your  
laws!*

*Oh Christ, show favour to this  
faithful people  
now gathered to bless you.  
Receive the songs it offers to your  
immortal glory,  
and may it return filled with your  
gifts!*

*Music by Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)*

*The congregation remains SEATED.*

## The Address

*Given by The Very Reverend John Witcombe, Dean of Coventry.*

*A brief silence is kept following the address.*

*We STAND.*

## The Coventry Hymn

Be in our midst, and gather us together,  
and let your loving-kindness be our guide,  
Help us discern your image in each other,  
and walk with humble footsteps by your side.  
Send us to work, O Lord, Almighty Giver,  
'till all who thirst and hunger now are filled,  
Let justice thunder like a mighty river,  
And let the storms of strife and conflict now be stilled.

When all the world's great sorrows overtake us,  
and we are crushed by centuries of pain,  
lend us your strength, and lovingly remake us  
that by your grace we may be whole again.  
And when the sins of passing generations  
make all the wounds of hist'ry still feel raw,  
send out your healing power among the nations,  
and fill this broken earth with heaven's peace once more.

And if the cross, the site of such destruction,  
a sign of violence, suffering and sin,  
can be redeemed to witness resurrection,  
and be a place where life can still begin,  
then iron and wood and stone can sing their stories:  
'Father, forgive' these very walls have prayed,  
that what was lost could birth still brighter glories,  
and what was hurt can be transfigured and remade.

Grant us that peace beyond the mind's discerning,  
Help us to live the truth that sets us free.  
And may the Spirit's fire within us burning  
help us become who we are called to be.  
In eager longing for your new creation,  
a world reshaped by love and hope and grace,  
with Christ the Prince of Peace as our foundation,  
we'll build your kingdom now, in this and every place.

*Original hymn by © Ally Barrett ([www.reverendally.org](http://www.reverendally.org))  
Tune: Londonderry Air*

## The Prayers of Intercession

*We SIT or kneel as The Reverend Ricarda Witcombe leads the prayers, adding other intercessions as necessary.*

Let us pray.

Eternal God,  
whose faithfulness is from one generation to another,  
we give you thanks for the life of this Cathedral,  
for its witness to resurrection in the heart of this city and Diocese,  
and for its calling to reconciliation, peace and hope.

We thank you for all who have worshipped here,  
all who have served here,  
and all whose lives have been shaped by this holy place.

Continue to make this Cathedral  
a house of prayer for all people,  
a place of welcome and encounter,  
and a beacon of Christ's peace in the world.

*Silence is kept.*

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Loving God,  
we give you thanks for John,  
for his years of ministry in this place and within the Community of  
the Cross of Nails,  
for wisdom given,  
for courage in leadership,  
for imagination in mission,  
and for faithfulness in prayer and service.

As this season of ministry comes to its close,  
grant him grace in the laying down of responsibility,  
joy in all that has been shared,  
peace in all that is now entrusted to others,  
and hope for all that lies ahead.

Bless him with rest,  
renewal in body, mind and spirit,  
and delight in the freedom of a new chapter.

*Silence is kept.*

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

Gracious God,  
we pray for those closest to John in this new season:  
for family, friends, and all whose lives are deeply woven with his.

Grant to those of us who will share these coming days with him  
renewed joy, deeper companionship,  
and the blessing of time to be together in new ways.

May our home be filled with laughter  
and may those whom John loves most  
continue to know your goodness and care.

*Silence is kept.*

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

God of all times  
we pray for this Cathedral as it enters a new chapter.  
Grant wisdom to those who will lead in the interregnum,  
faithfulness to those who serve,  
and courage to all who are called to imagine what comes next.

Keep us rooted in Christ,  
open to your Spirit,  
and faithful to the ministry of reconciliation entrusted to us.

Lord, in your mercy,  
**hear our prayer.**

**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
and the love of God,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost,  
be with us all evermore. Amen.**

We STAND.

## **An Organ Voluntary**

*Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier BWV 731 - J.S Bach*  
*During which Dean John moves from his stall to the High Altar.*

## **The Laying Down of Office**

*We remain STANDING as the Dean, standing before the altar, removes his Reconciliation Red cope and places it upon the altar, along with other symbols, as a sign of the laying down of office and ministry as Dean of Coventry.*

*In silence, he bows before the altar, turns, and walks down from the sanctuary to the chancel step where the Bishop of Coventry, The Right Reverend Sophie Jelley, invites senior clergy to pray alongside her for Dean John and Ricarda.*

*Dean John then takes his place seated among the congregation beside Ricarda.*

*The congregation is SEATED.*

## **Words of Thanksgiving**

*The Bishop addresses the Dean and congregation.*

*The Lord Mayor of Coventry, Cllr Rachel Lancaster, is invited to offer words of thanksgiving.*

*Bishop Oliver Schuegraf, representative of the Community of the Cross of Nails, is invited to offer words of thanksgiving.*

## **The Blessing**

*We STAND as Bishop Sophie pronounces the blessing, from the Chancel.*

May God,  
who has been your guide in times of change  
grant you grace to cherish what has been,  
courage to embrace what is to come,  
and joy in the knowledge that all things rest in God's hands.  
And the blessing of God almighty,  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
be among you and remain with you always. **Amen.**

## Hymn

*During the hymn, the choir and ministers process to the West Screen, Dean John and Ricarda join the procession. The Congregation turns as the procession passes.*

**All people that on earth do dwell,  
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;  
him serve with fear, his praise forth tell,  
come ye before him, and rejoice.**

**The Lord, ye know, is God indeed;  
without our aid he did us make;  
we are his folk, he doth us feed,  
and for his sheep he doth us take.**

**O enter then his gates with praise,  
approach with joy his courts unto;  
praise, laud, and bless his name always,  
for it is seemly so to do.**

**For why? the Lord our God is good;  
his mercy is for ever sure;  
his truth at all times firmly stood,  
and shall from age to age endure.**

**To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
the God whom heaven and earth adore,  
from mortals and from angel-host  
be praise and glory evermore.**

*Words by W. Kethe (d. 1594)*

*Tune CP 369 Old Hundredth Genevan Psalter (1551)*

*At the conclusion of the hymn, with Dean John and Ricarda standing at the Chi-Rho, the congregation is invited to offer sustained applause in thanksgiving for their ministry.*

## Final Organ Voluntary

*Nun Danket Alle Gott - Karg-Elert*  
*Played by Liam Condon, Assistant Director of Music.*

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### **“The Kingdom”**

*It's a long way off, but inside it  
there are quite different things going on:  
Festivals at which the poor man  
is king and the consumptive is  
healed: mirrors in which the blind look  
at themselves and love looks at them  
back: and industry is for mending  
the bent bones and the minds fractured  
by life. It's a long way off, but to get  
there takes no time and admission,  
is free, if you will purge yourself  
of desire and present yourself with  
your need only and the simple offering  
of your faith, green as a leaf.*

*RS Thomas*

**All are warmly invited to share in refreshments  
and conversation at the back of the nave following  
the service.**

***Special thanks to the Diocesan Mother's Union.***

*We invite you to contribute to the work and ministry we do here. Please use the cash or contactless donation points anywhere in the building, or the QR code below. This will take you to the Cathedral's page for the Parish giving Scheme which will enable you to make a one-off donation, or set up a regular gift should you wish. Thank you so much for your support and generosity.*

