

Plymouth Unitarian Church Steve's Nativity Special Sunday 7th December 2025

Opening video/music 'Hark, the Herald Angels Sing' – violin cover by Daniel Jang 2mins 51 sec
<https://youtu.be/VWixCEK2AMY>

Welcome + Introduction

Today's service is a nativity special written by Steve, and he asked the congregation to deliver it for him.

The service will be in three parts and includes a prayer, a bible reading from the New Testament, and some appropriate music.

It is based on Luke Chapter two verses 8 to 14 where the birth of Jesus is announced to the shepherds by a host of angels

The opening music was that wonderful nativity hymn, 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing' written in 1739 by Charles Wesley, a prolific hymn writer and one of the leaders of the Methodist movement.

Chalice is lit.

We start our service as usual with the lighting of our chalice as a symbol of our free religious faith.

Introduction

The nativity of Jesus refers to the birth narratives found in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke in the New Testament.

It's one of the oldest and most beloved Christmas traditions.

It is now December after all, and so we begin our annual descent into that crazy season we so lovingly call the festive period – also known as four weeks of eating too much, drinking too much, and spending too much.

There are several Christmas songs that will haunt you in every shop you go into from now until January. Steve's Top of the Pops from hell's playlist include 'Mistletoe and Wine' by Cliff Richard, 'Simply having a wonderful Christmas time' by Paul McCartney, Mariah Carey's 'All I want for Christmas is You', but top of the list is, 'I wish it could be Christmas everyday' by the glam rock band WIZZARD released in 1973.

I am sure you have a few yourself that you hate.

However, the music chosen for this service has been carefully selected to lift your spirit, not torment your soul, and none of the afore mentioned songs will be making an appearance.

Many of us have mixed feelings about Christmas and dislike the high expectations, commercialism and the pressure to spend.

It is meant to be a magical, joyful, and picture-perfect occasion, often idealised by movies, social media, even family tradition.

For many people Christmas can instead be a messy reality of stress, disappointment, loneliness, emotional chaos, and debt.

The Christmas Financial Burden is a term referring to the extra costs we incur at this time of year. The pressure to buy gifts, decorate homes, host family and friends, and travel to visit loved ones can quickly escalate into overdraft, credit, or even dipping into savings. Many feel obligated to meet these social and commercial pressures resulting in a debt hangover that lasts long after the holidays have ended.

For lower income families especially, this time of year can be even harder, as the desire to provide children with gifts and a festive experience may conflict with the need to cover basic living expenses. Banks and other lending institutions target people at this time of year with the offer of extra credit, leading many to succumb to temptation.

The Christmas economic culture starts early in Britain, and we all groan when we see the first mince pies and chocolate tins in the shops. It seems to sneak in earlier each year, and once Halloween is over, it's nonstop advertisements and sales promotions to buy, buy, buy, intensifying the message that love, and happiness can only be measured by material gifts.

Many retailers make around 60 per cent of their yearly profit at Christmas. On Christmas Day around late afternoon, the sales adverts begin.

Everything you bought as presents is now half price. You need a new kitchen as well, don't you? And you certainly need a new sofa.

And you simply must book that summer 2026 holiday right now, or you'll miss out on your best holiday ever.

Then it's the new year, now you advert enticing you to join the gym to lose those 10 pounds you gained stuffing all those chocolates and mince pies you were forced at gunpoint to eat.

Diet starts January 1st, promise.

One study shows that 80 per cent of people who join a gym as a new year's resolution will quit by February. Another study that four out of five will quit within five months.

Before long, the shops are full of Easter eggs.

This is not really what the real spirit of Christmas is about; it's about gratitude, togetherness, and compassion for those less well off.

This year, maybe set a small budget per person, sticking to that budget, and refusing to feel any guilt about the amount.

Guilt is a wasted emotion – it's you who will be paying off the cost, not them!

Perhaps only buy presents for the younger members of your family. Christmas means more to them than adults.

Or perhaps a thoughtful rather than expensive gift, something you've cooked like a cake, their favourite meal, or a nice photo and frame.

Something for the foodbank, a small chocolate box that might really make a child's Christmas special.

Or perhaps next year we could as a congregation support a Christmas shoebox appeal to Samaritans Purse UK or a small giftbox to the foodbank full of toiletries or small toys.

Grief becomes rawer at Christmas, as we remember loved ones no longer sharing the day with us.

The cold short days don't help either, and I am sure we have all had Christmases and New Years where we have thought, thank goodness that's over for another year.

Hymn One

'O, little town of Bethlehem' from the GREEN hymnbook – number 85

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 street 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 throughout the 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 peace and joy of 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.

*Music: 'Forest Green' English Traditional melody Coll., Adapt and arr Ralph Vaughan Williams
1872 – 1958*

Words: from Phillips Brooks, 1835 - 1893

Bible reading

We now have a short bible reading from the Gospel of Luke Chapter two, Verses one to seven from the New International Version.

The Birth of Jesus

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.

This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria. And everyone went to their own town to register.

So, Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David.

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.

She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

Part A

In the first part of our service, we are going to look at the main characters in a traditional nativity play and set the scene so to speak.

Well, the scene is of course 1st century CE Bethlehem in the province of Judaea in what we now call Israel-Palestine.

Bethlehem is about six miles from Jerusalem, the holiest city for the Jewish people and site of their primary shrine for worship, the second or what is sometimes called, Herod's Temple. Bethlehem at the time of Jesus was part of the mighty Roman Empire and ruled by Herod the Great, a Roman client king.

Roman taxation and occupation were significant burdens for the population, and the political atmosphere was one of fear, violence, and rebellion.

The people wanted a Messianic salvation figure to arise and fulfil God's promise to His people. A golden age would then be ushered in, ruled by a King from the line of David, not Rome.

This eventually led to a catastrophic war with Rome, the destruction of the Second Temple, the nation, and exile for nearly two thousand years.

The correct pronunciation is BEIT-LEHEM, which means House of Bread, a reference to the fertility of the area.

It was a small agricultural village, likely to have a few hundred residents only.

The surrounding hills would have been used for pasturing sheep and according to tradition the lambs from this area were used for temple sacrifices in Jerusalem including the Passover festival.

Passover, sacrifice, and Jesus all have significant links in Christianity. There are several bible stories in the Old Testament, or what we now call the Hebrew Bible featuring Bethlehem and these include the story of Ruth, the burial site of Rachel the beloved wife of Jacob, but more importantly as the birthplace of King David, Israel's greatest king.

Therefore, Bethlehem was associated with messianic significance, the reason why Jesus being born here was so important.

Mary, Joseph, and baby Jesus, the holy family need no introduction of course.

The holy family are on route to Bethlehem for a Roman census described in the gospel of Luke which we just had read.

Caesar Augustus ordered this census for taxation and military purposes, although the Jews were in fact exempt from military service.

Joseph was required to return there for the census, and they embark on this 70-to-90-mile journey from Nazareth in Galilee on foot and donkey.

They arrive exhausted but there's no room at the inn due to the census crowds. So, they end up in a stable, most likely a cave, and the romanticised nativity scene of so many a Christmas card is now set in place.

Romanticised it truly is, as giving birth in this period was the most dangerous experience in a woman's life and one in about 10 would die in their reproductive lives from childbirth-related causes. These could include haemorrhage, infection, or obstructed labour, especially in younger mothers. Infant mortality was also high and one in three babies did not make age one.

Even today, two thousand years later in some third world countries, childbirth-related deaths remain high. This is due to conflict, poverty, infrastructure breakdown, and lack of access to proper health care.

Mary's birth went smoothly though, a sign of divine protection in the narrative.

The Church of the Nativity was built in the fourth century CE by Emperor Constantine and his mother Helena over the site believed to be where Jesus was born. It is now a UNESCO World Heritage Site and has been a pilgrimage site for over two thousand years.

Bethlehem relies heavily on tourism due to its ties as the birthplace of Jesus. There are major Christmas celebrations each year around the church and Manger Square attracting visitors from across the world, although this is impacted depending on whether the conflict with Israel is either escalated or reasonably calm.

Who are the other main characters?

The Magi are probably the most well-known of the supporting cast. Otherwise known as the Wise Men, or the Three Kings. The word Magi is from the Greek MAGOI, a class of priests or astrologers from Persia or Babylon. They are from the East and symbolise the Gentiles, the non-Jews.

Their act of worship in bowing to Jesus symbolises him as the King of Kings, the saviour for all nations, not just the Jews.

The Gospel of Matthew doesn't say three; it has become assumed there were three due to the three gifts they bought to Jesus which were gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

They add a bit of mystery, and majesty to the nativity and have captured the imagination of theologians and especially artists over the centuries.

How many Christmas cards have you seen in your lifetime with the Wise Men on?

As a result, many myths and legends have been added across the years. Their names, CASPAR, MELCHIOR, and BALTHAZAR being one of them.

Then of course the shepherds. How many nativity plays have you seen with tea towels used for the shepherds' headscarves?

In Luke's nativity version the shepherds are the first to hear the news about the birth of Jesus, not the Magi. It's a radical reversal in a society that ranked people by status, and shepherds would have been way down the list.

This shows that Jesus came for the lowly and the outcast, not just the elite.

The angels are also players in the nativity. The angel Gabriel appearing to Mary in Nazareth telling her she will conceive a son by the Holy Spirit and name him Jesus.

An angel appearing to Joseph in a dream.

And then to the shepherds – a multitude of heavenly hosts.

There must be something big going on for this level of angel overload.

Then there is the Star of Bethlehem.

The star is mainly linked to the Magi, to guide them to Bethlehem.

Divine guidance, a heavenly sign. A symbol of a major spiritual event.

And finally, every pantomime needs a villain and in the nativity it's Herod the Great.

All we need now are the ugly sisters.

Infamous for his paranoia and ruthlessness, Herod doesn't get a good press; after all, in the nativity he tries to kill baby Jesus, but he is without doubt a fascinating and remarkable character.

He was an exceptional builder and visionary, expanding and enhancing the Second Temple in Jerusalem to become the largest sanctuary in the ancient world.

When the sun rose, the huge white limestone blocks dazzled so brightly that you could barely gaze upon it.

People seeing the Temple for the first time would have experienced awe, reverence, even disbelief.

The Western Wall, one of the retaining walls from this structure still stands today, the holiest site for the Jewish people.

Then there's the fortress-palace of Masada in the Judean desert atop a plateau.

An architectural marvel and must-see site for tourists, this is the site where 960 besieged Jewish rebels and their families committed mass suicide rather than surrender to Rome.

Herod also created a deep-water port on the coast at Caesarea Maritima and reshaped a mountain near Bethlehem into a fortified palace renaming it HERODIUM, where he is believed to have been buried.

Herod was a highly efficient ruler and Rome held him in higher esteem than his subjects ever did.

He was never accepted by the people as he didn't have a legitimate Jewish pedigree.

The nobility was especially hostile, so he had 45 of the most eminent and wealthy nobles executed and confiscated their wealth in response. His attempt to marry into the legitimate Jewish royal family, the Hasmoneans ended in murder and madness.

It's truly Shakespearean. The stuff of legend, like a real-life biblical Othello or Titus Andronicus.

Surrounded by court intrigue and manipulation he had his Hasmonean wife Mariamne murdered and according to legend embalmed in honey. At night he would during his frequent bouts of remorse and rage go down and speak to her corpse.

His sons with Mariamne, Alexander and Aristobulus were executed after he believed they were trying to overthrow his rule. His eldest son by his first wife was also executed on Herod's orders, his mother-in-law, his uncle, and a brother-in-law drowned in a swimming pool in Jericho, the site of Herod's winter palace complex.

The Emperor Augustus said of Herod that it is better to be Herod's pig than his son.

So, in summary, the nativity tells of the miraculous circumstances in which Jesus is born and against incredible odds, survives.

We now have a short clip about modern day Bethlehem which is surrounded by Israel's security barrier built in the early 2000s.

'Bethlehem BANKSY – SHOWCASE – Banksy's Walled Off Hotel' –

YOUTUBE 3.22 minutes.

Prayer

We move into a time of reflection and prayer for the Holy Land.

Let's not get into politics, and we should consider the whole region and all peoples in the Holy Land.

The Palestinian Israeli conflict is NOT a religious one, it's about land.

Jews and Muslims are united by the patriarch Abraham, a common father to both.

Even Iran, Israel's most bitter enemy states their conflict is not with Jews, but Zionism.

It should also be remembered that prior to 1948, Jews were treated far better in Muslim countries than they ever were in Christian ones, including Iran which had a thriving Jewish community. Israel has a large Arab population, Christian and Muslim; about 20 per cent of the population.

These are full Israeli citizens and are not the Palestinians who live in the West Bank, Gaza, or East Jerusalem.

Some even serve in the Israel Defence Forces or IDF. These include the Druze, a small ethnic Israeli Arab community of about 150,000.

Muslim Bedouins, also Israeli citizens, often serve as trackers in special IDF desert reconnaissance units.

The city of Haifa in the north of Israel is often cited as a model for Arab Jewish coexistence. It has a significant population of mixed Muslim and Christian Arabs who live alongside Jewish residents. It is a city renowned for that fact and is often referred to as the San Francisco of Israel.

Tel-Aviv in a nod to New York's nickname The Big Apple is sometimes called The Big Orange.

The most populous Israeli Arab Christian town or city in Israel is Nazareth. Then it's Jerusalem.

The town in the Palestinian territories with the highest Christian population is called Beit Jala just west of Bethlehem.

It's estimated there's about 1,000 Christians in Gaza, making up less than one per cent of the population of the strip.

Pope FRANCIS began calls to the Holy Family Parish Church in Gaza besieged by Israel since its war with Hamas following the October 7th attack of 2023.

These conversations continued almost every night until his final days.

Many Palestinian Christians are leaving both the West Bank and Gaza, and it is safe to say the last chapter of Palestinian Christianity is being written.

And now our prayer.

Divine Spirit

We lift to you the people of the Holy Land.

We particularly hold in our thoughts the tiny Christian community of Gaza.

We ask for Your divine presence to bring peace, healing, and hope.

Bless the land where Jesus once walked.

Where ancient prayers of all three Abrahamic faiths still echo in the streets.

May Your grace surround those who suffer, and Your compassion be felt in every heart.
Grant comfort to the grieving, strength to the weary, and courage to those seeking justice and peace.
Protect the innocent, heal the wounded, and unite the children of this divided land.
May You bring reconciliation and restore the dignity of every soul.
Guide the leaders of this land with wisdom, that they may choose the path of peace.
And may all people, regardless of faith or heritage live in harmony.
We pray for an end to violence and the dawning of a new day, where justice and mercy flow freely, and the Holy Land becomes a place of true peace, an example to the world. *Amen.*

Hymn 2 is from the Green Hymn Book and is number **226**– ‘The Song of Peace’

This is my song, O God of all the nations,
A song of peace for lands afar and mine;
This is my home, the country where my heart is,
here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;
But other hearts in other lands are beating
With hopes and dreams and true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,
And sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine;
but other lands have sunlight, too, and clover,
and skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
O hear my song, O God of all the nations,
a song of peace for their land and for mine.

Music by Jean Sibelius, words by Lloyd Stone. Used by permission of The Lorenz Corporation, Dayton, Ohio

Part B

The first nativity play is widely credited to St Francis of Assisi on Christmas Eve 1223 in the Italian town of Greccio. He wanted people to experience the birth narratives in a different way than what was currently available for them.

Most people in that medieval period were illiterate and would not have understood the Latin spoken by the priests in church.

Attending church would have been an intimidating, and probably quite a boring experience.

Imagine listening to a church service in a language you don't understand. You'd get nothing out of it spiritually. This is the reason medieval churches and cathedrals had stained glass windows depicting famous bible scenes in them. They were a form of education and entertainment for the illiterate congregation, visual bibles, tools for teaching and worship.

St Francis created a re-enactment of the nativity using a manger, including actual animals such as an ox and donkey, and people portraying the main characters like Mary, and Joseph.

The setting was in an actual cave as well for added ambiance.

It was a real-life devotional scene which would have made the gospel more accessible, fun, and powerful to those watching.

Songs would have been sung, which evolved into carols, and a mass held.

St Francis's nativity service in Greccio set a precedent which the Franciscan monks, named after St Francis, rapidly spread across Europe.

Then there is the York Mystery Plays, a type of medieval religious drama performed in the city of York during the Middle Ages into Renaissance times. They dramatized stories from the bible, from creation to the last judgement and included the nativity. Each play was performed by a trade or craft guild, and they are still performed today.

Other countries also have a tradition of nativity plays including Germany where they are called KRIPPEN-SPIEL or crib play.

Like in Britain, they're a cherished part of German Christmas culture and almost identical in style and content.

In Latin America there are PASTORELAS or little shepherd plays, mainly in countries with a strong Spanish influence such as Mexico.

Interestingly the Devil features in these versions as he tries to mislead the shepherds which would be interesting to see.

I wonder how the Devil in a children's nativity play would go down with British parents.

Probable comment from them would be – well that was different, wasn't it?

Nativity plays have evolved over the years, and this is due to cultural, social, and educational changes. For those in the church and on zoom, I think our average age would mean we participated in more traditional style nativity plays and would be quite amazed, perhaps mystified even at modern versions.

It is like humour. What is considered acceptable in one decade is not considered acceptable in another. Look at 1970s comedies for example. Some are banned now and if they are broadcast, carry viewer warnings about the content and language.

The earliest nativity plays were strictly religious and focused on the biblical story of Jesus's birth taken from the gospels.

The main characters would have been Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, the angels, shepherds, and the Magi.

They would have been performed in churches and religious schools only. They were solemn and scriptural, emphasising hope, peace, and light entering the world through Jesus.

As we moved into the mid 20 century, nativity plays became more common in secular school settings especially in western countries with a Christian heritage.

The plays became more simplified and aimed at a younger audience. Carol singing, and traditional Christmas hymns were incorporated into these services, like Silent Night, or Away in a Manger. Simplified, more musical, more school friendly.

Then as we go into the late 20th century, we notice a change to include modern dialogue and perhaps even humour.

Mixing humour and religion is quite a British thing, isn't it? Think of the Vicar of Dibley and the TV show REV. Or in Ireland, Father Ted.

New characters begin to appear like the innkeeper, perhaps talking animals like the donkey.

It enabled the whole class to appear in the play, instead of just a few main characters.

It also enabled the casting to be more inclusive and allow girls to play traditional male roles.

Humour, and flexible casting becomes the norm. It must be a real minefield for a school to put on a nativity play now. Cultural sensitivity in diverse classrooms means that participation is voluntary as non-Christian students or their parents might not want them to take part.

Other winter traditions are now sometimes considered as well, such as the Jewish festival of Hanukkah which is celebrated at the same time as Christmas, or even Diwali, and Lunar New Year.

Nativity plays are now more universal, inclusive, modern, and high tech.

Some even call them holiday plays now, or winter festivals as they are afraid the Christ in Christmas might offend someone.

In Britain we are now SO terrified of offending anyone. The wise men or is now wise women? Wise people?

Can girls be shepherdesses?

Sustainable gifts for Jesus instead of gold, frankincense or myrrh?

Scooters instead of camels?

Do we dare say the WOKE word? Woke nativity services often cause significant controversy.

I am sure some of us have been to modern nativity plays where we have inwardly groaned, or thought am I high? but smiled throughout the entire performance with a fixed wing grimace. It is what the British are renowned for.

It's part of the ongoing culture wars, with religious tradition going head-to-head against inclusive and modern interpretations of faith. The only place you're likely to see an old-fashioned traditional nativity play now is in churches, in more rural, less diverse areas of the country.

None of that nativity with a twist nonsense for them!

And what about nativity plays in say 50 to 100 years?

Well, religion in Britain might be illegal in schools by that stage, and the nativity banned altogether.

Augmented reality perhaps where viewers use smart glasses or devices to see for example angels appearing in the sky.

Maybe virtual reality where the nativity play takes place in a digital Bethlehem and the participants interact with the Magi, shepherds, and even Mary and Joseph. That would be amazing.

A.I. holograms of the angel Gabriel? The mind boggles.

We now have a short clip about donkeys in the Holy Land.

'Donkeys in the middle east – Safe Haven for Donkeys' – YOUTUBE 3.46 minutes.

https://youtu.be/ksqVb_mU4Qc

Instead of a time of silence we are going to listen to a recording of the hymn Silent Night sung in Arabic by the United Pentecostal Church of Jordan which borders the Holy Land.

Silent Night is originally a German hymn composed in 1818 and is one of the most popular Christmas hymns.

'SILENT NIGHT' – Arabic – YOUTUBE – 3.18 minutes.

Part C

The nativity has had such a huge impact culturally on Christianity and is such a huge part of Christmas tradition.

I would say the average secular Brit if asked where Jesus was born, would say Bethlehem, and have taken part as a child, or at least watched a nativity play.

Most of us have seen a Christmas card with a nativity scene or received one.

And Christmas Tree decorations. What goes on the top? An angel or a star usually.

And the amount of TV shows, films about the nativity is endless. It has even spread into mainstream secular entertainment. How many story lines have you seen when a baby is born at Christmas on a soap opera like Eastenders, Coronation Street, or Emmerdale. Or a drama like Call the Midwife for example.

Or if you've ever met someone born on Christmas Day, you'd likely comment on sharing a birthday with Jesus, or how many presents they must receive that day.

So, we Brits love the nativity. That's undeniable. But is it true?

Well, that depends on what truth you are asking about, historical, theological, or is it all just symbolic?

Historically, the likely answer is no. It is more symbolic rather than a factual account of the birth of Jesus.

The theological meaning to Christians is God becoming human. The word became flesh so to speak.

Jesus is born in humility, not grandeur as would be expected for the King of Kings, an important message for humanity.

It's more than anything else about God's intervention in human history.

The birth narratives only appear in the two gospels of Matthew and Luke, and there are many differences. For example, the Magi only appear in Matthew's version, and the shepherds only in Luke. This is because each gospel has a different message and target audience.

The concept of a virgin birth, a miraculous or divine conception is found in many religious and mythological traditions, not just Jesus. These include Ganesha in Hinduism, Horus from ancient Egyptian religion, Perseus in Greek mythology, and in some traditions Buddha.

There are no Roman records to confirm the census described in Luke during the reign of Caesar Augustus that would have required Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem.

Bethlehem is now even disputed as the correct destination as there is another Bethlehem, Bethlehem of Galilee just a short distance from Nazareth which archaeologists think may be the correct one.

A miraculous birth is often linked to a person said to have divine qualities, and angelic visitations, and guiding stars are common for other divine figures in antiquity.

For example, when the leader of the Democratic Republic of Korea or what we term North Korea, Kim Il Sung, the grandfather of the current leader Kim Jong Un was born, according to the state narrative, there were miraculous signs at his birth including a bright star and a double rainbow.

And poor old Herod the Great. He is ironically best known for an event that likely never happened. The massacre of the innocents – the killing of all boys under the age of two in Bethlehem and the surrounding areas on Herod's orders to ensure no rival could usurp his throne is unlikely to have happened.

He was capable of such an act, without a doubt, but it is meant to be symbolic.

Theological, rather than historical. Herod is the new Pharaoh and Jesus the new Moses.

Both escape a massacre from a powerful worldly leader by divine intervention, and both lead their people to a new promised land. It should also be noted that the massacre of the innocents is not corroborated by any other source other than the bible.

Artistically and culturally, it has inspired countless depictions in painting, literature, TV, and cinema. These slain children are the first Christian martyrs and a sobering reminder of the fear and ambition that can drive rulers to commit unspeakable acts.

So, in summary, Jesus, the greatest character in Christianity must also have the greatest birth narrative ever told, and this is exactly what the nativity delivers.

Thank you for listening

Hymn 3 - number 82 - People Look East.

People, look east! The time is near
of the crowning of the year.
Make your house fair as you are able,
trim the hearth, and set the table.
People, look east, and sing today:
Love, the guest, is on the way.

Furrows, be glad! Though earth is bare,
one more seed is planted there:
give up your strength the seed to nourish,
that, in course, the flower may flourish.
People, look east, and sing today:
Love, the rose, is on the way.

Stars, keep the watch! When night is dim,
one more light the bowl shall brim,
shining beyond the frosty weather,
bright as sun and moon together.
People, look east, and sing today:
Love, the star, is on the way.

French carol, Music: 'Besancon Carol, Har. John Stainer 1840 – 1901

Words Eleanor Farjeon, 1881 – 1965 from Oxford Book of Carols by permission of David Higham Associates, Ltd.

Music

Now to conclude our service we are all going to sing Little Donkey.

Steve found multiple versions on YOUTUBE but liked this one by Vera Lynn the most.

Join in if you want, even if you can't sing particularly well, it's Christmas after all and we are all going to get into the Christmas spirit.

In Britain, getting into the Christmas spirit is code for: you will have fun whether you like it or not.

It's not optional, it's mandatory.

Chalice is extinguished

Closing Music Vera Lynn – Little Donkey from YOUTUBE – 3.49 minutes

<https://youtu.be/2dk6n2aIHuU>