

**SEASONS OF THE SPIRIT**  
**'NATIVITY'**

Choir: 'I saw three ships'

The trouble with Christmas is that it is over so quickly. After the build-up, which begins in October, things can feel very flat by the evening of Boxing Day. And yet much of the excitement of Christmas is in the anticipation. Just as it takes time, nine months, to prepare for a baby to be born, so we need to take time to prepare for the birth of Jesus, which we celebrate at Christmas.

And yet, so often, we want to ignore the preparation-time, as we rush on to the Christmas excitement: and in doing so we miss so much, because the meaning is in the waiting.....

Advent Carol

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|----|---|----|--|--|
| 1. | <i>Sheep like stones<br/>In silent fold,<br/>Snow like ash<br/>Settling cold.</i> |    |  | <i>Tethered mules<br/>Crowd the byre.</i>  |
| 2. | <i>Walk a world<br/>Bereft as dream,<br/>Birdless wood,<br/>Standing stream.</i>  | 5. |  | <i>Stumble through<br/>The cattle-pens;<br/>Overhead<br/>Roosting hens.</i>            |
| 3. | <i>Bethlehem:<br/>The children whine;<br/>Travellers<br/>Wait in line.</i>        | 6. |  | <i>Spread with bales<br/>The reeking floor;<br/>Birthing bed:<br/>Sacks and straw.</i> |
| 4. | <i>Tired men ring<br/>The courtyard fire,</i>                                     | 7. |  | <i>Trim the lamp;<br/>Bemused and numb<br/>Watch and wait:<br/>Soon, a son.</i>        |

Choir: Villette: Hymn a la Vierge

In that middle-eastern world, two thousand years ago, one woman knew the true meaning of waiting...

Luke 1: 26-38

And here's her story, told this time by a modern poet and writer, MadeleineL'Engle: -

'O Simplicitas'

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|----|---|----|---|
| 1  | <i>An angel came to me<br/>And I was unprepared<br/>To be what God was using.<br/>Mother I was to be.<br/>A moment I despaired,<br/>Thought briefly of refusing.<br/>The angel knew I heard.<br/>According to God's word<br/>I bowed to this strange<br/>choosing.</i>                      | 3. | <i>God's Word, child so small,<br/>Who still must learn to speak,<br/>Lay in humiliation.<br/>Joseph stood, strong and tall.<br/>The beasts were warm and<br/>meek<br/>And moved with hesitation.<br/>The Child born in a stall?<br/>I understand it: all.<br/>Kings came in adoration.</i> |
| 2. | <i>A palace should have been<br/>The birthplace of a king<br/>(I had no way of knowing).<br/>We went to Bethlehem;<br/>It was so strange a thing.<br/>The wind was cold and<br/>blowing,<br/>My cloak was old, and thin.<br/>They turned us from the inn;<br/>The town was overflowing.</i> | 4. | <i>Perhaps it was absurd:<br/>The stable set apart,<br/>The sleepy cattle lowing;<br/>And the incarnate Word<br/>Resting against my heart.<br/>My joy was overflowing.<br/>The shepherds came, adored<br/>The folly of the Lord,<br/>Wiser than all men's knowing.</i>                      |

Choir: Warlock: Bethlehem Down

So Christmas needs waiting, anticipation, the excitement of things looked forward to, things prepared for, through the buying of presents, the decoration of the tree, the singing of carols, as in this description of a Christmas Eve on a Derbyshire farm in the 1890's:-

The Carols Singers: Alison Uttley 'The Country Child'

*She hung up her stocking at the foot of the bed and fell asleep. But soon singing roused her, and she sat up, bewildered. Yes, it was the carol singers...*

*Outside under the stars she could see the group of men and women with lanterns throwing beams across the paths and on to the stable door. One man stood apart beating time, another played a fiddle, and another a flute. The rest sang in four parts the Christmas hymns, 'While Shepherds watched', 'Come all ye Faithful', and 'Hark, the herald angels sing.'*

*There was the star. Susan could see it twinkling and bright in the dark boughs with their white frosted layers, and there was the stable. She watched the faces half lit by the lanterns, top-coats pulled up to their necks. The music of the violin came thin and squeaky, like a singing icicle, blue and cold, but magic, and the flute was warm like the voices.*

*They stopped and waited a moment. Tom's deep voice came from the darkness. They trooped, chattering and puffing out their cheeks, and clapping their arms round their bodies, to the front door. They were going into the parlour for elderberry wine and their collection. A bright light flickered across the snow as the door was flung wide open. Then a bang and Susan went back to bed.*

*Christmas Eve was nearly over, but tomorrow was Christmas Day, the best day in all the year. She shut her eyes and fell asleep.*

*And then the waiting is finished: the moment has come. The nine-month period of gestation is over and the baby is born. Every birth is a life-changing experience, and every birth gives us a glimpse of the wonder and mystery of God's creativity:*

A baby for Christmas: Geraldine Kaye

*(Cross, unhappy Angelica Cobb, who is not looking forward at all to having a new baby brother, is outside the hospital when she meets the ward Sister.)*

*You'd better come inside and see them,' Sister said. Angelica followed her through the swing doors and along the shining corridor. 'I thought I wasn't allowed in?' she said.*

*'It's Christmas,' said Sister, going through another swing door. 'Everything's different at Christmas.'*

*Angelica found herself in a small ward. There were cots all round. Twelve cots. And a baby in every cot...And every baby was wearing a plastic bracelet with its name on.*

*'Which is my baby?' Angelica said.*

*'Look at the bracelets,' Sister said, bustling away between the cots. 'I've got things to do.' ...*

*Angelica walked slowly along looking at the names. 'Christopher Cobb, this is our baby,' she said, looking at the wrist sticking out of the white bundle. She looked at the baby then, his faced wrinkled and purple-red, like the new skin when you pick a scab, Angelica thought. Christopher Cobb had new skin all over. He wasn't beautiful, he wasn't as beautiful as her baby doll for instance. He didn't have shining blue eyes and he didn't have any eyelashes at all. 'Hallo,' Angelica whispered.*

*'Come along now,' Sister said.*

*'He smiled at me,' Angelica said and there was a funny feeling in the back of her throat.*

*'That's wind,' said Sister. 'Off you go now.'*

*A lady in a red dressing-gown came through the door. It was mummy.*

*'Angelica?' she said. 'How on earth did you get here?'*

*'I just walked,' said Angelica and then she flung her arms round her mother and buried her face in the red dressing-gown. 'He smiled at me,' Angelica said, he smiled at me.'*

And we celebrate Christmas because one baby changed everything for all time.

Luke 2: 1-7

Choir: Tallis: Videte Miraculum

And so behind all the tinsel and present giving and commercialism of Christmas, there lies this secret, the secret of Nativity, God made man, born for us on Christmas Day. And we are none of us too poor, too great, too rich, too young or too old, to discover this secret and find, amidst the Christmas celebrations, the Son of God.

BC: AD: U.A. Fanthorpe

*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.*

Choir: Willcocks: Tomorrow shall be my dancing day