



The Lion

A Monthly News Sheet for St. Mark's Church, Basford

www.stmarksbasford.co.uk

Christmas 2019 and New Year Edition



Singing our way through Christmas

At our last Morning Prayer with the residents of Beechwood I talked (although somewhat incoherently, to everyone's great amusement) about St. Lucy. This third century saintly young girl brought provisions to Christians hiding in the dark catacombs of Rome during the persecution of the Emperor Diocletian. St. Lucy wore a wreath-like headdress bearing candles that kept her hands free to carry provisions. The sight of Lucy's candles approaching through the gloom meant that accompanying, life-giving gifts were at hand. What a welcome sight, and what a spiritual parallel we experience through Advent and into the Christmas season as we think of St. John's words in the prologue of his Gospel concerning the birth of our Lord. The Feast of St Lucy (11th December) is celebrated most fervently in Scandinavian Europe with church processions and songs. The song, "Santa Lucia" which most of us associate with Italian opera singers is in fact a carol sung on Lucy's feast day.

This caused me to think again as I did a few years ago about the origins of the carols we sing at this time of year. Carols were first sung in Europe thousands of years ago, but these were not Christmas Carols. They were pagan songs, sung at the Winter Solstice celebrations as people danced round stone circles. The Winter Solstice is the shortest day of the year; usually it's the 21st December but it's the 22nd this year it would seem). The word Carol actually means 'dance' or a 'song of praise and joy'. Carols used to be written and sung during all four seasons, but only the tradition of singing them at Christmas has really survived.

Early Christians took over the pagan solstice celebrations for Christmas and gave people Christian songs to sing instead of pagan ones. In AD129, a Roman Bishop said that a song called "Angel's Hymn" should be sung at a Christmas service in Rome. Another famous early Christmas Hymn was written in AD760, by Comas of Jerusalem, for the Greek Orthodox Church. Soon after

this many composers all over Europe started to write 'Christmas carols'.

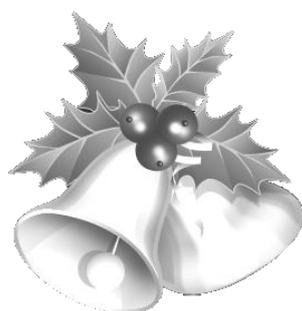
However, not many people liked them as they were all written and sung in Latin, a language that the normal people couldn't understand. By the time of the Middle Ages, most people had lost interest in celebrating Christmas altogether.

This was changed by St. Francis of Assisi when, in 1223, he started his Nativity Plays in Italy. The people in the plays sang songs or 'canticles' that told the story during the plays. Sometimes, the choruses of these new carols were in Latin; but normally they were all in a language that the people watching the play could understand and join in! The new carols spread to France, Spain, Germany and other European countries.

The earliest carol, like this, was written in 1410. Sadly only a very small fragment of it still exists. The carol was about Mary and Jesus meeting different people in Bethlehem. Most Carols from this time and the Elizabethan period are untrue stories, very loosely based on the Christmas story, about the Holy Family and were seen as entertaining rather than religious songs. They were usually sung in homes rather than in churches! Travelling singers or Minstrels started singing these carols and the words were changed for the local people wherever they were travelling. One carol that changed like this is 'I Saw Three Ships'.

When Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans came to power in England in 1647, the celebration of Christmas and singing carols was stopped. However, the carols survived as people still sang them in secret. Carols remained mainly unsung until Victorian times, when two men called William Sandys and Davis Gilbert collected lots of old Christmas music from villages in England.

Before carol singing in public became popular, there were sometimes official carol singers called 'Waits'. These were bands of people led by important local leaders (such as council leaders) who had the only power in the towns and villages to take money from the public (if others did this, they were sometimes charged as beggars!). They were called 'Waits' because they only sang on Christmas Eve (This was sometimes known as 'watchnight' or 'waitnight' because of the shepherds were watching their



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sheep when the angels appeared to them.), when the Christmas celebrations began.

Also, at this time, many orchestras and choirs were being set up in the cities of England and people wanted Christmas songs to sing, so carols once again became popular. Many new carols, such as 'Good King Wenceslas', were also written in the Victorian period.

Carol services became popular, as did the custom of singing carols in the streets. Both of these customs are still popular today! One of the most popular types of Carols services nowadays are 'Carols by Candlelight' – these pick up rather well the Lucy idea.

The most famous type of Carol Service might be a Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, where carols and Bible readings tell the Christmas Story. The service was created and performed in 1880 by Edward Benson, who was the then newly appointed Bishop of Truro. Bishop Benson later became the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Service took place at 10.00pm on Christmas Eve in a large wooden building that was being used as a temporary Cathedral as the main Truro Cathedral was being rebuilt.

The idea travelled around the UK and became quite a popular service to hold on Christmas Eve. However, it was made very famous by the choir from King's College, Cambridge, which was reckoned to be the best Church choir in the world at the time.

The Service was first performed at King's College in 1918 as a way of the college celebrating the end of the First World War. The new college Dean, Eric Milner-White, who had been an Army Chaplain in WWI, wanted a different and more positive way of celebrating Christmas for the choir and people in the college.

In 1919 he changed the opening hymn/carol to be 'Once in Royal David's City' and set the main order and structure of the lessons/readings as it still is today. I hope you all enjoyed our Lessons and Carols this year. Please remember Adam's plea before the blessing which stressed the need to encourage new membership of the choir here at St. Mark's – it's important to retain this tradition, something I've very much appreciated during my 14 years with you.

Prayer Breakfast

Come and join us at Beechwood Shire Living (ST5 0RJ) on **11th January at 9.00am** for a fabulous time of fellowship over breakfast, followed by a short time of reflection and prayer. For more information and to pre order your breakfast please see Julie.

Children's Society

If you have a CS Box in which you save loose change, it's now time to bring them in so that Sue Morley can empty them, count the contents and bank the cash. Thanks.

Christingle Service

Please give a really big push with your families and friends for our Christingle service to be held at **9.30am on Sunday, 19th January**. This is a service which captures imaginations and is always thoroughly enjoyable. As ever, a special collection for the Children's Society will be taken. If you can help manufacture the Christingles on the day before, please join us at 10.00am in the choir vestry.

Worship Services during January

1 st	Wednesday	8.00am	No Service
		10.30am	No service
5 th	Epiphany	8.00am	Holy Communion (BCP)
		9.30am	Holy Communion
8 th	Wednesday	8.00am	Morning Prayer
		10.30am	Holy Communion (BCP)
12 th	Baptism of Christ	8.00am	Holy Communion (BCP)
		9.30am	Family Worship with Baptism
15 th	Wednesday	8.00am	Morning Prayer
		10.30am	Holy Communion (BCP)
19 th	2 nd of Epiphany [Christingle]	8.00am	Holy Communion (BCP)
		9.30am	Holy Communion
22 nd	Wednesday	8.00am	Morning Prayer
		10.30am	Holy Communion (BCP)
26 th	3 rd of Epiphany	8.00am	Holy Communion (BCP)
		9.30am	Holy Communion
29 th	Wednesday	8.00am	Morning Prayer
		10.30am	Holy Communion (BCP)

Diary Dates for January

11 th	Saturday	09.00am	Prayer Breakfast
12 th	Sunday	12.00pm	Parish meal
14 th	Tuesday	19.00pm	PCC Meeting
18 th	Saturday	10.00am	Christingle Manufacturing
21 st	Tuesday	19.30pm	PCC Meeting
24 th	Saturday		Tabletop Sale
29 th	Wednesday	19.00pm	Reading Circle

Early February Dates

8 th	Saturday	09.00am	Prayer Breakfast
27 th	Friday	18.30pm	Fish and chips plus film

Can I take this opportunity (also on behalf of Pat and Patrick) to wish you a blessed and peaceful Christmas. May the light which Christ brings into the world be our guide as we enter 2020 – a time of change for us all.

Terry



JANUARY
24TH 2020

Look out for details!