

Ever Ancient, Ever New



An evening of Lessons and Carols
St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church
7:30pm, December 22, 2020

Ever Ancient, Ever New

I am continually overwhelmed by the truth of God Incarnate. This year, when so little has been done “incarnate”, the mystery of Christmas and the reality that God is still among us is keener than ever. And yet, in our fragility and destitution, how rarely He is recognized!

Bishop James D. Conley writes in his essay, “Ever Ancient, Ever New: the Role of Beauty in the Restoration of Catholic Culture”, that “the mystery of the Incarnation changes everything.” How natural, then, to be surrounded by beauty this time of year. We are drawn to the beauty of music, especially at Christmastime, and to the richness of the texts that are frequently set to music. We are hit with nostalgia when we see Christmas trees and lights, when we smell the familiar scents of home and family, and when we come together to worship Christ during Christmas mass. Beauty is so important.

“O Beauty ever ancient, ever new! Late have I loved you!” St. Augustine writes in his *Confessions*. In the program this evening, we have a little of both. *Veni, veni Emmanuel* is an 8th Century chant, so beloved to have been passed down from generations for over more than a millennium! The text of *Adam Lay Ybounden* is from the 15th Century, although this rendition of it was composed in 2009! In this strange text, we hear of the fall of man. Adam, in bonds with the other patriarchs, waits in Limbo until Christ’s crucifixion, 4,000 “winters” later. There is a sense of astonishment that “all was for an apple”, as written by “clerkes” (the Vulgate, or first Latin text of scripture) in their books. It does, however, conclude on a positive note—Aquinas’ concept of “felix culpa”, the “happy fault” that we hear about in the *Exultet* at Easter Vigil. For, if Adam had not fallen, then we would not have our Lady as the Heavenly Queen, the New Eve, nor her Son, the New Adam. *Lift Up Your Heads* is a wonderful introit, with a call to “fling wide the portals of your heart”, in preparation for the arrival of Jesus. In *Nunc Dimittis*, the Song of Simeon, we hear of the Light of the World, coming to dwell with us. Simeon and the baby Jesus—another meeting of ancient and new.

Mary is splendidly celebrated during Christmas, and rightfully so, as who radiates more beauty than the Mother of God? *Maria durch ein Dornwald Ging* is a German folksong for Advent. We hear of Mary carrying the Christ child under her heart, referring to Mary’s visit to Elizabeth. We hear also about the thorns, a symbol of fertility and death, and the roses blooming in G Major as Mary and Jesus pass the bush. *There is No Rose* is one of my favorite Christmas texts, particularly the line: “for in this rose, contained was Heaven and Earth in little space”. That God should be so infinitely small, as to dwell in the womb of a woman, and yet King of the Universe! *Res miranda*...a marvelous thing.

O magnum mysterium is another text frequently heard at Christmas, dating back to over a thousand years ago as a part of the chant for the Matins of Christmas Day. There are so many beautiful settings of this text, but Gjeilo’s “Serenity” has become a favorite of mine, and we are so fortunate to have Gerall Heiser play with us this evening.

Hark! The Herald Angels Sing

Hark! The herald-angels sing
"Glory to the newborn king;
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled"
Joyful all ye nations rise,
Join the triumph of the skies
With the angelic host proclaim
"Christ is born in Bethlehem"
Hark! The herald-angels sing
"Glory to the new-born king"

Christ, by highest heaven adored
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
Late in time behold Him come
Offspring of a Virgin's womb:
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail the incarnate Deity
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel
Hark! The herald-angels sing
"Glory to the newborn King"

Hail the Heaven-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Son of Righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Risen with healing in His wings;
Mild He lays His glory by
Born that man no more may die
Born to raise the sons of earth
Born to give them second birth
Hark! The herald angels sing
"Glory to the new-born king"

Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day

Tomorrow shall be my dancing day;
I would my true love did so chance
To see the legend of my play,
To call my true love to my dance;
*Sing, oh! my love, oh! my love, my love, my love,
This have I done for my true love.*

Then was I born of a virgin pure,
Of her I took fleshly substance
Thus was I knit to man's nature
To call my true love to my dance.

*Sing, oh! my love, oh! my love, my love, my love,
This have I done for my true love.*

In a manger laid, and wrapped I was
So very poor, this was my chance
Betwixt an ox and a silly poor ass
To call my true love to my dance.

*Sing, oh! my love, oh! my love, my love, my love,
This have I done for my true love.*

Then afterwards baptized I was;
The Holy Ghost on me did glance,
My Father's voice heard I from above,
To call my true love to my dance.

*Sing, oh! my love, oh! my love, my love, my love,
This have I done for my true love.*

There is no good English translation for the word “*magnum*”. “O Great Mystery” seems woefully inadequate for a mystery that is utterly incomprehensible. . (As a director, I find this title appropriate as well as beautiful, as almost every singer in this group is singing a separate part in this song, and at times I am overwhelmed by “*magnum mysterium*” of this piece!)

In contrast to the complexity of this piece, we hear the beautiful simplicity of *My Lord Has Come*. Written in four voicings rather than 12, and with a modest text that is equally significant but less intimidating: “no place for me but a stable...my Lord has come...”

Here is the Little Door is an intimate, four-minute drama, as we are drawn through the door of the stable with the Magi, to present our gifts to the new-born King. This text was written by Frances Chesterton (yes, the wife of G.K.). Like her husband, she was a master of paradox, and wrote a poem each Christmas for her husband. She had a great devotion to the relationship between Mary and Jesus, and was frequently fixated on the tiny hands and feet of the Child. One can sense the feminine tenderness, and even longing, written by a woman who herself bore the sorrow of infertility. It is set beautifully by Herbert Howells, and we hear the devotion of the Magi in their defense of the safety of their Lord, followed soon by a singular note, gentle and intimate, “touched by such tiny hands, and oh, such tiny feet”.

Tomorrow Shall be My Dancing Day is another old text, possibly dating back to the Middle Ages. We hear some archaic text and metaphors, but the key takeaway is Christ's love for His Church and mankind. This setting was written in 2003, another example of ancient and new coming together. It is challenging, intricate, and delightful to put together.

Finally, I would like to conclude with a conversation I had with a good friend, sometime in September. We were talking about the third verse of “Hark the Herald Angel Sing”. (Because, who *doesn't* talk about Christmas carols in September?)

“...mild, he lays His glory by, born that man no more may die, born to raise us from the earth, born to give us second birth...”

She pointed out to me: this is God's plan for our salvation in one half of one verse of one hymn. How poignantly music and beauty move us, and leave in our hearts and minds the imprint of God's love. Succinctly, beautifully, and hope-filled, this line presents to us Love Incarnate, Emmanuel, God-Hero, Father-Forever, Prince of Peace, made to dwell with us, that we might have eternal life.

Ever Ancient, Ever New

Magnificat

Elena Bird Zolnick, music director

Please refrain from applause

Processional: Veni, veni Emmanuel

With Marisa Minogue, Tony Cecere, Gerall Heiser

***all sing**

Opening prayer

Fr. Richard Carton

Genesis 3

Adam Lay Ybounden (Geoffrey Williamson, b. 1976)

Psalm 24: 7-10

Lift Up Your Heads (Olaf C. Christiansen, 1901-1984)

Isaiah 42: 1-7; John 1:9-14

Nunc Dimittis (William Byrd, 1539-1623)

Luke 1: 39-45

Maria Durch ein Dorwald ging (arr. Stefan Claas, 21st c.)

There is No Rose (Jonathan Lane, c. 2018)

Christmas Concerto, "Pastorale" (Archangelo Corelli, 1653-1713)

Gerall Heiser, cello, and Tony Cecere, horn

Luke 2:1-7

"Serenity", O Magnum Mysterium (Ola Gjeilo b. 1978)

With Gerall Heiser, cello

Ding dong! Merrily on high!

Ding dong! Merrily on high,

In heav'n the bells are ringing:

Ding dong! Verily the sky

Is riv'n with angel singing,

Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

E'en so here below, below,

Let steeple bells be swungen,

And "Io, io, io!"

By priest and people sungen.

Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

Pray you, dutifully prime

Your matin chime, ye ringers;

May you beautifully rime

Your evetime song, ye singers.

Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

Here is the Little Door

Here is the little door, lift up the latch, oh lift!

We need not wander more but enter with our gift;

Our gift of finest gold,

Gold that was never bought nor sold;

Myrrh to be strewn about His Bed;

Incense in clouds about His Head;

All for the Child that stirs not in His sleep,

But holy slumber holds with ass and sheep.

Bend low about His Bed: for each He has a gift;

See how His eyes awake, lift up your hands, oh lift!

For gold, He gives a keen-edged sword

(Defend with it Thy little Lord!)

For incense, smoke of battle red,

Myrrh for the honoured happy dead;

Gifts for His children, terrible and sweet,

Touched by such tiny hands and oh such tiny feet.

There Is No Rose

There is no rose of such virtue
As is the rose that bare Jesu;
Alleluia.

For in this rose contained was
Heaven and earth in little space;
Res miranda. (A marvelous thing!)

By that rose we may well see
That He is God in persons three,
Pari forma. (Equal in form.)

The angels sungen the shepherds to:
Gloria in excelsis Deo:
Gaudeamus. (Let us rejoice.)

Now leave we all this worldly mirth
And follow we this joyful birth;
Transeamus. (Let us depart.)

O Magnum Mysterium

O great mystery,
and wonderful sacrament,
that animals should see the newborn Lord,
lying in a manger!
Blessed is the virgin whose womb
was worthy to bear
the Lord, Jesus Christ.
Alleluia!

My Lord Has Come

Shepherds, called by angels, called by love and angels:
No place for them but a stable.
My Lord has come.
Sages, searching for stars, searching for love in heaven;
No place for them but a stable.
My Lord has come.
His love will hold me, his love will cherish me, love will cradle me.
Lead me, lead me to see him, sages and shepherds and angels;
No place for me but a stable.
My Lord has come.

Luke 2:1-14

My Lord Has Come (Will Todd, b. 1970)

Ding dong! Merrily on High (arr. Carolyn Jennings, b. 1930)

Isaiah 60:1-6

Here is the Little Door (Herbert Howells, 1892-1983)

John 3:16

Tomorrow shall be My Dancing Day (Phillip Stopford, b. 1977)

Closing prayer

Fr. Richard Carton

Hark the Herald Angel Sing (Julian Wachner, b. 1969)

Marisa, Gerall, Tony, Magnificat

***all sing**

Thank you

First and foremost, a very special thank you to the singers of *Magnificat*, “Quarantine Army” edition. You blow me away and I am grateful beyond words to be a part of your club! Thank you to my friend Matt Siebenhuhner for being a co-captain this fall, and for your encouragement to get this up and running. Thank you to Fr. Richard for your support, without which none of this would happen, and for allowing us to come sing, especially during this time. Thank you to Rev. Victoria McGrath for the use of All Saints Church, which allows us to rehearse safely, and to Marisa for joining us on the organ this evening. To Gerall and Tony, a very special thank-you for lending your world-class talent to our cause!

Cover art: “Behold, Your Son” watercolor on archival watercolor paper, used with permission

Bernadette Gockowski

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Veni, veni Emmanuel

Veni, veni Emmanuel!
Captivum solve Israel!
Qui gemit in exilio,
Privatus Dei Filio,
*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
nascetur pro te, Israel.*

Veni, O Sapientia,
Quae hic disponis omnia,
Veni, viam prudentiae
Ut doceas et gloriae.

*Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
nascetur pro te, Israel.*

Adam Lay Ybounden

Adam lay ybounden
Bounden in a bond
Four thousand winters
Though he not too long
And all was for an apple
An apple that he took
As clerkes finden written in their book
Nay had the apple taken been
The apple taken been
Nay had never our lady
Abeen heavenly queen
Blessed be the time
That apple taken was
Therefore we bound singen
Deo gracias, deo gracias!

Lift Up Your Heads

Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates;
behold, the King of glory waits;
the King of kings is drawing near;
the Savior of the world is here!

O Blest the land, the city, blest!
Where Christ the Ruler is confessed
O Happy hearts, and happy homes,
To whom this King in triumph comes!

Fling wide the portals of your heart;
make it a temple, set apart
from earthly use for heaven's employ,
adorned with prayer and love and joy.

Redeemer, come, with us abide;
our hearts to thee we open wide;
let us thy inner presence feel;
thy grace and love in us reveal.

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

Maria Durch ein Dornwald Ging

Maria walks amid the thorn,
Kyrieleison!
Which for seven years no leaf hath born
She walks amid the wood of thorn
Jesus and Maria.

What 'neath her heart does Mary bear?
Kyrieleison!
A little child doth Mary bear
Beneath her heart he nestles there.
Jesus and Maria.

And as the two are passing near
Kyrieleison!
Lo! Roses on the thorns appear!
Jesus and Maria.