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## ADVENT CAROLS AND HYMNS

### Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols

#### Background

There is little justification for any extended set of reflections on the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols. The whole point is to allow the carols and readings to speak for themselves. Extensive commentary can actually intrude. Nonetheless, there is always a danger that such services can take one back into some imaginary childhood and appeal overmuch to the child that still exists within us and not only fail to speak to the world as it is but actually encourage a temporary flight from it. This was hardly the intention of the Scriptural writers or – at least in some cases – the composers and compilers of the carols.

The challenge is to make the link but in a non-obtrusive way. This can be done in the opening words of welcome, the prayers, the notes prepared for the service, etc.

#### Origins and Background of the Festival

The format of nine lessons and carols is said to derive from the church's traditional service of Matins, with its three sets of psalms, readings and responsorials. The adaptation of these for a "Festal Service for Christmas Eve" consisting of "nine carols and nine tiny lessons" was in 1880 – nearly 40 years before the first performance at King's (1918). It was undertaken by the first Bishop of Truro, Edward White Benson, although the suggestion is said to have come from G.H.S. Walpole, later Bishop of Edinburgh. It took place in a temporary wooden cathedral. The present cathedral had not even been built. The two foundation stones had just been laid by the Prince of Wales only a few months earlier.

#### Shape of the Service

Although the carols vary from year to year, the basic plan of the Festival is to trace the story of Christ's coming from God's act of creation, humanity's fall, and God's promise of a redeemer who would restore all things.

#### King's College Current Lessons

|                |                          |
|----------------|--------------------------|
| <b>First</b>   | Genesis 3: 8–15, 17–19   |
| <b>Second</b>  | Genesis 22: 15–18        |
| <b>Third</b>   | Isaiah 9: 2, 6–7         |
| <b>Fourth</b>  | Isaiah 11: 1–3a, 4a; 6–9 |
| <b>Fifth</b>   | Luke 1: 26–35, 38        |
| <b>Sixth</b>   | Luke 2: 1, 3–7           |
| <b>Seventh</b> | Luke 2: 8–16             |
| <b>Eighth</b>  | Matthew 2: 1–12          |

#### Truro Cathedral Original Lessons

|                |                        |
|----------------|------------------------|
| <b>First</b>   | Genesis 3: 8–15, 17–19 |
| <b>Second</b>  | Genesis 22: 15–18      |
| <b>Third</b>   | Numbers 24:15–18       |
| <b>Fourth</b>  | Isaiah 9: 2, 6–7       |
| <b>Fifth</b>   | Micah                  |
| <b>Sixth</b>   | Luke 2: 8–16           |
| <b>Seventh</b> | John 1: 1–14           |
| <b>Eighth</b>  | Galatians 4: 4–8       |

#### Truro Cathedral Original Music

|                |                                                                   |
|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>First</b>   | The Lord at first had Adam made                                   |
| <b>Fourth</b>  | Handel's Messiah: For unto us a Child is born                     |
| <b>Sixth</b>   | Handel's Messiah: "There were shepherds abiding in the fields..." |
| <b>Seventh</b> | O Come All Ye Faithful                                            |

#### Further Information

King's College website:

<http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel/ninelessons/>