

Nativitas

The Christmas Story in Renaissance Music

The Annunciation

Ave Maria Tomás Luis de Victoria (c. 1548–1611)
Alleluja: A nywe werk is come on honde Fifteenth-century English carol

The Visitation to Elisabeth, and the Song of Mary

Übers Gebirg Maria geht Johannes Eccard (1553–1611)
Magnificat, from the Service 'In medio chori' William Mundy (c. 1528–1591)

The birth of the Christ child

O magnum mysterium Giovanni Gabrieli (c. 1555–1612)
Videte miraculum Thomas Tallis (c. 1500–1585)
Joseph lieber, Joseph mein Hieronymus Praetorius (1560–1629)

The shepherds and the angels

Gloria, from Missa Puer natus est nobis Tallis
Quem vidistis pastores? Victoria

INTERVAL of 15 minutes

The Magi and the star

Thys endere nyghth I saw a sythth Sixteenth-century English carol
Stella quam viderant Magi Philippe de Monte (1521–1603)
Reges Tharsis John Sheppard (c. 1515–1558)

The slaughter of the innocents

Coventry carol Sixteenth-century English

The Purification and the Song of Simeon

Maria wallt zum Heiligtum Johannes Eccard (1553–1611)
Nunc dimittis, from the Service 'In medio chori' William Mundy

The Word made flesh

Verbum caro Duarte Lobo (c. 1565–1646)

The Cambridge Taverner Choir

Director: Owen Rees

sopranos: Andrea Blakesley, Diana Baumann, Josie Dixon, Helen Garrison,

Rachel Godsill, Bernadette Nelson, Tanya Wicks

altos: William Budd, Claire Eadington, Simon Godsill, Zara Wright, Helen Zimmer

tenors: Paul Baumann, Mark Dourish, Edwin Simpson, David Thomson, Brent Whitted

basses: James Durran, Stephen Jones, Frank Salmon, Gary Snapper, Paul Watson

Tonight's concert is presented by kind permission of the Master and Trustees of the Hospital of St Cross.

Particular thanks are due to Cath Secker, John Casson, and Josie Dixon.

Tonight's concert traces through Renaissance music the elements of the Christmas narrative as commonly pieced together from the different elements found in Matthew's and Luke's gospels. We begin with the Archangel Gabriel's annunciation to Mary, from St Luke. Victoria sets the *Ave Maria* for two choirs, the antiphonal repetitions reinforcing each line of the text, and he changes to triple time at 'pray for us sinners'. We then turn to a very different musical world: *Alleluia: A nywe werk is come on honde* is one of the finest pieces in the rich English repertory of carols from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, celebrating the conception and Mary's virginity. Luke's Gospel next recounts Mary's journey into the hill country to visit her cousin Elizabeth. At Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's baby (John) leapt for joy in the womb. Mary's response to Elizabeth is the *Magnificat*, one of the most frequently set texts of the period. The story of the visitation to Elizabeth, and the opening words of the Magnificat, are heard in Jacob Handl's *Übers Gebirg Maria geht*. Among the grandest of all Renaissance settings of the Magnificat itself is that from William Mundy's Evening Service 'in medio chori'. Mundy writes for the sonorous and thrilling textures of pre-Reformation English music, with high trebles and means, and further subdivides his basic six-voice choir to produce an extraordinary richness and variety of soundscape.

None of the gospels tell us much regarding the birth itself, but the mystery and strangeness of the scene as conventionally represented (with the animals looking on) is powerfully evoked in Gabrieli's *O magnum mysterium*. Tallis likewise evokes the miraculous in his six-voice responsory *Videte miraculum*, founded upon the steady tread of the chant sung by the tenors, and reaching its climax at the name 'Maria'. Then we here a well known Christmas melody, and a more domestic scene, as Mary addresses her husband at the beginning of Hieronymus Praetorius's polychoral *Joseph lieber, Joseph mein*.

It is once again St Luke who tells of the song of the angels to the shepherds, the opening words of the *Gloria*. Tallis's seven-voice *Missa Puer natus est nobis*, from which we sing this movement, is founded upon a Christmas plainchant, once again providing a slow-moving foundation in the tenor part around which he constructs rich textures including powerful antiphony for 'tu solus Dominus, tu solus altissimus'. Victoria's six-voice motet *Quem vidistis pastores* is a dialogue, with ourselves asking the shepherds to tell us what they have seen and heard.

The story of the star in the east, leading the Magi to the place where the child lay, is from Matthew's gospel. The sixteenth-century English carol *Thys endere nyghth* alternates a beautifully simple three-part refrain with solo verses in which we here a dialogue between Mary and the child concerning the coming of the Kings at Epiphany. We thence return to the grander world of liturgical Latin-texted music for Sheppard's six-voice *Reges Tharsis*. Herod's fury when the Magi fail to lead him to the Christ child leads, Matthew tells us, to his slaughter of all the male children in Bethlehem. The *Coventry carol*, from the sixteenth-century Pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors in the Coventry mystery plays, is the mothers' lullaby to keep quiet the child being hunted by Herod's men.

Luke's gospel recounts that when Jesus's parents brought the child to the temple Simeon took him in his arms and spoke the words we know as the *Nunc dimittis*, heard tonight in two very different forms: from Mundy's Evening Service 'in medio chori', and in Johannes Eccard's *Maria wallt zum Heiligtum*, better known in the English translation 'When Mary to the temple went'.

Finally, we turn to St John's famous explanation of the Incarnation, in which 'the Word was made flesh': *Verbum caro factum est* is the last responsory for Matins on Christmas morning, and we sing it here in an ebullient treatment for two choirs by the Portuguese composer Duarte Lobo.

TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

Ave Maria, gratia plena. Dominus tecum; benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui Jesus. Sancta Maria, regina caeli, dulcis et pia, o mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus, ut cum electis te videamus.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Queen of heaven, sweet and holy, O Mother of God, pray for us sinners, that with the elect we may see thee.

Alleluya. A nywe werk is come on hond throw might and grace of God ysonde to save the lost of every londe. Alleluya. By Gabriel by gunne hit was, ryght as the sunne shone thorwe the glas, jhesu Cryst conceived was. Alleluya.

Ubers Gebirg Maria geht zu der schwangern Elisabeth das kindlein hupft in ihrem Leib. Der Heliig Geist durchs Wort sie treibt das sie des Herren Nutter nennt. Maria ward frohlich und sang: Mein Seel den Herrn erhebet. Mein Geist sich Gottes freuet. Er is mein Heiland. furchtet ihn. Er will allzeit barmherzig sein.

Over the hills did Mary go, in haste to greet Elizabeth, whose babe within her womb did leap. Inspired then by the Holy Ghost, she named her Mother of the Lord. Then Mary with joy did sing: My soul the Lord doth magnify. My spirit in God rejoiceth. He is my Lord, so fear thou him, he will always be merciful.

O magnum mysterium et admirabile sacramentum, ut animalia viderent Dominum natum, iacentem in praesepe. Beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt portare Dominum Christum. Alleluia.

O great mystery and wonderful sacrament, that beasts should see the new-born Lord lying in a manger. Blessed be the Virgin, whose womb was deemed worthy to carry our Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia.

Videte miraculum Matris Domini: concepit virgo virilis ignara consortii, stans onerata nobili onere Maria, et matrem se laetam cognoscit, quae se nescit uxorem.

Haec speciosum forma prae filis hominum castis concepit visceribus, et benedicta in aeternum Deum nobis protulit et hominem.

R. Stans onerata ... V. Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto. R. Et matrem ...

Behold the miracle of the Mother of the Lord: a virgin has conceived though she knows not a man, Mary, standing laden with her noble burden; and she knows herself to be a joyful mother, though she knows not herself to be a wife.

She has conceived in her chaste womb one who is fair beyond the sons of men, and being blessed for ever she has brought forth for us God and man.

R. Mary, standing laden ... V. Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.

R. And she knows herself to be...

Joseph lieber, Josph mein, hilf mir wiegen das Kindelein. Gott der wird dein Lohner sein im Himmereich, der Jungfrau Kind Maria. Eya. Virgo Deum genuit quem divina voluit clementia. Omnes nunc concinite, nato regi psallite, voce pia dicite: sit Gloria Christo nato infantulo. Hodie apparuit in Israel, quem praedixit Gabriel est natus rex.

Dear Joseph, my Joseph, help me rock my darling child. God will reward thee in Heaven, child of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin gave birth to God as ordained by Heaven's mercy. All now sing together and play to the newborn King. With holy voice say: Glory be to the new born Christ child. Today he appears in Israel, he whom Gabriel foretold is born King.

Quem vidistis, pastores dicite, annuntiate nobis quis apparuit. Natum vidimus et choros angelorum collaudantes Dominum. Alleluia. Dicite quidnam vidistis et annuntiate nobis Christi nativitatem. (Natum vidimus...) Alleluia.

Whom did you see, shepherds? Tell us, proclaim to us: who has appeared?

We saw the newborn child and choirs of angels, together praising the Lord. Alleluia. Speak, what did you see? And proclaim to us the birth of Christ. Alleluia.

Thys endere nyghth I saw a syghth, a sterre as bryghth as day, and ever among a maydyn song: 'By by, baby, lullay'.

Thys Vyrbyn clere wythowtyn pere unto hur Son gan say: 'My Son, my Lorde, my father dere, why lyeest thou in hay? Ne thence by right thou kyng and knight shulde lye in ruche array. Yet neverthelesse, I wyll not cesse To syng "By by lullay".'

Thys Babe full bayne aunsweryd agayne and thus me thought he sayd: 'I am a Kyng above all thing, yn hay yff I be layd. For ye shall see that kynges thre shall cum on Twelfe Day. For thys behest, geffe me thy brest, and sing "By Baby lullay".'

Stella quam viderant Magi in Oriente antecedebat eos, donec veniret ad locum ubi Puer erat; videntes autem eum gavisi sunt gaudio magno; et intrantes domum invenerunt Puerum cum Maria matre eius, et procidentes adoraverunt eum; videntes autem eum gavisi sunt, gaudio magno.

The star which the wise men saw in the east went before them till it came and stood over where the young child was; and, when they saw it, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him: and seeing him, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.

Reges Tharsis et insulae munera offerent, reges Arabum et Saba Domino adducent, et adorabunt eum omnes reges, omnes gentes servient ei. Gloria patri...

The kings of Tharsis and the island will offer tribute, the kings of Arabia and Saba will bring gifts to the Lord: and all kings will adore him, and all nations will serve him. Glory be to the Father...

Lully lulla thow little tyne child, By, by, lully, lullay.

O sisters too, how may we do, for to preserve this day this pore yongling for whom we do sing 'By by lully lullay'?

Herod the King, in his raging, charged he hath this day his men of might, in his owne sight, all yonge children to slay.

That wo is me, pore child, for thee, and ever morne and say for thy parting, nether say nor singe, 'By by lully, lullay.'

Maria wallt zum Heiligtum und bringt ihr Kindlein dar; das schaut der greise Simeon, wie ihm verheissen war. Da nimmt er Jesum in den Arm und singt im Geiste froh: 'Nun fahr' ich hin mit Freud, dich, Heiland, sah ich heut, du Trost von Israel, das Licht der Welt.'

Hilf nun, du liebster Jesu Christ, dass wir zu jeder Frist an dir, wie auch der Simeon, all unsre Freude han und kommt die Zeit, sanft schlafen ein und also singen froh: 'Nun fahr...'

When to the temple Mary went and brought the holy child, him did the aged Simeon see, as it had been revealed. He took up Jesus in his arms and, blessing God, he said: 'In peace I now depart, my Saviour having seen, the hope of Israel, the light of men.'

Help now thy servants, gracious Lord, that we may ever be, as once the faithful Simeon was, rejoicing but in thee: and when we must from earth departure take, may gently fall asleep and with thee wake.

Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis, et vidimus gloriam eius, gloriam quasi Unigeniti a Patre, plenum gratiae et veritatis. Omnia per ipsum facta sunt, et sine ipso factum est nihil. (Et vidimus...)

Gloria patri... (Et vidimus...)

And the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us; and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. All was made through him, and without him, there was nothing made. Glory be to the father...

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