



## Christmas carols – some background on their origin

This Christmas issue of our newsletter provides a perfect opportunity to pull together some background on our beloved and familiar carols. So I asked Mr Google who, of course, told me, at the click of a key, all the things I did not know! So, with many thanks to the website why Christmas.com, I offer you the following;

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 around December 22 as people danced round stone circles – the word Carol means a dance or a song of praise and joy. Carols used to be sung during all four seasons, but only the tradition of singing them at Christmas has survived.

Early Christians took over the pagan solstice celebrations for Christmas and gave people Christian songs to sing instead of pagan ones. In the year 129 a Roman bishop said that a song called *Angels Hymn* should be sung at a Christmas service in Rome, and gradually other composers all over Europe started to write Christmas carols, which were not especially popular as they were all written and sung in Latin. By the Middle Ages in the 1200s, most people had lost interest in celebrating Christmas altogether. St Francis of Assisi in 1223 began to change this when he started his Nativity plays in Italy which included songs, or Canticles which told the story in native languages. The new carols spread across Europe, with one especially notable example written in 1410 about Mary and Jesus meeting different people in Bethlehem – sadly only a very small fragment of this exists. Such songs were usually sung in homes rather than in churches, with travelling singers changing the words for local people – one such example is *I saw three ships*.

With Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans, the celebration of Christmas and the singing of carols was stopped in 1647, with people singing them in secret. Carols remained mainly unsung until Victorian times when William Sandys and Davis Gilbert collected lots of old Christmas music from villages in England. Before Carol singing in public became popular there were some groups called **Waits** who sang on Christmas eve, also called the watch night or wait night because the shepherds were watching their sheep when the Angels appeared to them and the Christmas celebrations began. Also many orchestras and choirs were being set up in cities at this time and people wanted Christmas songs to sing, so carols once again became popular and new ones such as *Good King Wenceslas* were written in the Victorian period. New Carol services were created, such as Carols by Candlelight and the custom of singing carols in the streets began at this time.

Habits and fashions change, one can only wonder what may come next for the Christmas Carol!

Linda Banwell

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## DEC 2017– FEB 2018 SERVICES & MEETINGS

3 Dec	10.30 Café Style Advent Service—Sara, Claire.
10 Dec	No morning service
	6.00pm Rev Sarah Simpson - Candlelight Carol service
17 Dec	10.30 Bernard Crabb & Junior Church
24 Dec	10.30 Rev Sarah Simpson - retelling of the Nativity
25 Dec	10.30 Rev. Sarah Simpson Christmas Communion
31 Dec	10.30 Rev Sarah Simpson
07 Jan	10.30 Café Style Service Sara & Claire
09 Jan	7.30pm Elders Meeting
14 Jan	10.30 Bernard Crabb
21 Jan	10.30 Rev Sarah Simpson & Junior Church
28 Jan	10.30 Rev Sarah Simpson H/C
04 Feb	10.30 Café Style Service Sara and Claire



## Murmurings from the Manse

'At Christmas, each one of us is an Innkeeper who decides if there is room for Jesus'. A comment made on social media 12 months ago and one which has remained with me.

As we journey through Advent to Christmas we are aware of the themes of hope, peace, love and joy which mark this season and guide our thinking.

Those themes speak to me of a time of great anticipation, of promise, a time of change for a world which seems to live constantly with the realities and challenges of darkness in its many forms.

Then we arrive at Christmas, the great celebration of the Incarnation, we thrill in the traditional carols, we hear once again the gospel stories that we know off by heart and we thank God for the miracle of His love come to earth. It is a time to be together, a time for family and friends, a time to open both our hearts and doors.

However, surely it is more than that?

The Innkeeper found a space for a young couple who were strangers in a strange land; they had been rejected by others and sent on their way, despite their obvious need. In so doing that Innkeeper found his small part in the story recorded forever, his place in history assured and his actions a reminder to future generations that this story has an edge. In recent years refugees have come to our country and found a welcome; communities have decided to welcome them and make room for them as the Innkeeper did that first Christmas.

But there are many others who knock on doors only to be rejected- There are many who ask for help, only to be told to go away – At Christmas charities are overwhelmed by those needing their help, their limited resources cannot cope.

We rarely sing *The poor and the humble* (R&S 165) these days, but it reminds me so starkly that the Christmas story is for all people and about all people; we cannot pick the parts we like, we need to be real about what took place, what Mary and Joseph endured and in our re-telling of the story we need to understand that we are a part of its ongoing impact and as a result we need to evaluate our role within that.

As you journey through Advent please think about its great themes, use them as part of your Advent study and then put them into YOUR Christmas story, so that they shape and influence the decisions you make this Christmas and beyond, into the year to come.

In the name of the Babe, born in a stable in Bethlehem, who had no home and was reliant on the kindness of strangers.

Sarah

## CHRISTMAS CARDS

IF YOU WISH THE MONEY YOU  
WOULD HAVE SPENT ON CHURCH  
CHRISTMAS CARDS TO GO INSTEAD  
TO **BANGLADESH APPEAL -  
COMMITMENT FOR LIFE**  
PLEASE SIGN SARA'S POSTER AT  
THE BACK OF THE CHURCH.

## DEC BIRTHDAYS

5th Jane Jones      9th David Simpson  
21st Chris Stoodley      25th Carol Allnatt  
26th Joan Cutler

## JAN BIRTHDAYS

1st Dave Spray      3rd Bella Douglas  
6th Ann Thomas      14th Rev. Sarah Simpson  
18th Carol Smith      25th Eileen Grist  
26th Mildrid Ainscow

## CHRISTMAS EVENTS

### ADVENT MEETINGS

4th December

11th December

**2.30pm at Burnham Court**

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### CANDLELIGHT

**SERVICE 6.00pm**

10th December

***Please invite a friend***

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### TODDLERS PARTY

**Wednesday morning**

13th December

**Please join us as Rev. Sarah  
leads our time of  
*Christmas Celebration.***

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### CHRISTMAS DAY

**Communion**

**10.30am**

## MEMBERSHIP AND ORDINATION SERVICE **10.30am 31st December**

This may be the last day of the old 2017 but for this Church it is a new step forward into the future for several new members and for a new elder.

Please put the date in your diary and join them and the congregation for an end of year celebration service.

## NEW YEAR'S DAY WALK

Anyone interested in a walk in

**Westonbirt Arboretum**

**starting at 11.00am ?**

Bring any two legged or four legged friends.

See Sarah, David,  
Graham or Carol