

Chiswick Choir

December 2020 special concert



On Christmas Night by Bob Chilcott

Conductor Hilary Campell - Organist Ben Lewis-Smith

This is the truth (I)
Adam lay ybounden
A spotless Rose
The Cherry Tree Carol
O little town
Sweet was the song
Rejoice and be merry
This is the truth (II)

The Chiswick Choir gave this performance on 5th December 2020 - one of the few days that the Coronavirus restrictions allowed a limited number of singers to gather together behind closed doors in St Michaels and All Angels Church in Bedford Park, West London. Until then, Choir members had rehearsed the piece at home, using online Zoom technology, but, following all the necessary risk assessments and suitably spaced out around the church, a group of singers was able to perform in a real space for the first time in several months.

Bob Chilcott (b.1955) composed *On Christmas Night* in 2010. It is a sequence of eight carols telling the Christmas story: the fall of Adam, the promise of a child, the journey to Bethlehem and the birth of Jesus. It is intended for concert or liturgical use, allowing for scriptural readings (suggested by the composer) between each piece to make a service of lessons and carols. Since each movement is autonomous, the carols may also be performed individually.

The carol texts range from medieval to modern, some better known than others. Chilcott's musical settings show a variety of original styles and moods: reflective, 'folksy', exuberant. In a number of cases he juxtaposes his own melody with a recognisable traditional tune, e.g. in the middle of *This is the truth* the upper voices sing 'Once in royal David's city' in its standard form.

Christopher May

1. This is the Truth (I)

This is the truth sent from above
The truth of God, the God of love;
Therefore don't turn me from the door,
But hearken all, both rich and poor.

*Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed,
Where a mother laid her baby
In a manger for his bed:
Mary was that mother mild,
Jesus Christ her little child.*

The first thing that I will relate,
That God at first did man create;
The next thing which to you I tell,
Woman was made with him to dwell.

Thus we were heirs to endless woes
Till God the Lord did interpose;
And so a promise soon did run:
That he'd redeem us by his Son.

2. Adam lay ybounden

Adam lay ybounden,
Bounden in a bond;
Four thousand winter
Thought he not too long.

And all was for an apple,
An apple that he took,
As clerkes finden written
In their book.

Ne had one apple taken been,
The apple taken been,
Ne had ne'er our Lady
Abeen heavene queen.

Blessed be the time
That apple taken was;
Therefore we moun singen:
Deo gracias!

3. A spotless Rose

A spotless Rose is blowing,
Sprung from a tender root,
Of ancient seers' foreshowing,
Of Jesse promised fruit;
Its fairest bud unfolds to light
Amid the cold, cold winter,
And in the dark midnight.

The Rose which I am singing,
Whereof Isaiah said,
Is from its sweet root springing
In Mary, purest Maid;
For through our God's great love and
might,
The Blessed Babe she bare us
In a cold winter's night.

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung
Of Jesse's lineage coming
As seers of old have sung.
It came, a blossom bright,
Amid the cold of winter,
When half-spent was the night.

4. The Cherry Tree Carol

When Joseph was an old man, and an old man
was he,
When he married Mary, the Queen of Galilee.

Joseph and Mary walked through an orchard
good,
Where was cherries and berries, so red as any
blood.

O then bespoke Mary, so meek and so mild:
"Pluck me a cherry, Joseph; for I am with
child."

"Go to the tree, Mary, and it shall bow to thee,
And the highest branch of all shall bow to
Mary's knee."

Then bowed down the tallest tree, it bent to
Mary's hand;
Then she cried: "See, Joseph, I have cherries at
command,"

"O eat your cherries, Mary, O eat your cherries
now!
O eat your cherries, Mary, that grow upon the
bough."

Then Mary plucked a cherry, as red as any
blood;
And she did travel onward, all with her heavy
load.

5. O little town

O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.

O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King,
And peace to men on earth;
For Christ is born of Mary;
And, gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wond'ring love.

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him still,
The dear Christ enters in.

6. Sweet was the song

Sweet was the song the Virgin sang,
When she to Bethlem Juda came
And was delivered of a Son
That blessed Jesus hath to name.
*Lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby,
lulla, lulla, lulla, lullaby.*

Sweet Babe, sweet babe, sung she,
'My Son, and eke a Saviour born,
Who has vouchsafed from on high
To visit us that were forlorn.'
*Lalulla, lalulla, lalullaby,
lalulla, lalulla, lalullaby.*
'Sweet babe', sang she,
And rocked him sweetly on her knee.

*Silent night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright;
Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace.*

7. Rejoice and be merry

Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, rejoice!
Rejoice and be merry in songs and in mirth!
O praise our Redeemer, all mortals on
earth!

For this is the birthday of Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation: his praises we'll
sing!

Rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, rejoice!

A heavenly vision appeared in the sky;
Vast numbers of angels the shepherds did
spy,
Proclaiming the birthday of Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation: his praises we'll
sing!

Likewise a bright star in the sky did appear,
Which led the wise men from the East to
draw near;
They found the Messiah, sweet Jesus our
King,
Who brought us salvation: his praises we'll
sing!

And when they were come, they their
treasures unfold,
And unto him offered myrrh, incense, and
gold.
So blessed for ever be Jesus our King,
Who brought us salvation: his praises we'll
sing!

Rejoice!

*On Christmas night all Christians sing,
To hear the news the angels bring
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.
Rejoice!*

8. This is the Truth (II)

And at this season of the year
Our blest Redeemer did appear,
And here did live, and here did preach,
And many thousands he did teach.

And our eyes at last shall see him,
Through his own redeeming love,
For that child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heav'n above;
And he leads his children on
To the place where his is gone.

Thus he in love to us behaved,
To show us how we must be saved;
And if you want to know the way,
Be pleased to hear what he did say.

God grant to all within this place true saving
faith,
God grant to all within this place, that
special grace
Which to his people doth belong:
And thus I close my Christmas song.
Not in that poor, lowly stable,
With the oxen standing by,
We shall see him; but in heaven,
Set at God's right hand on high,
When like stars his children crowned
All in white shall wait around.
And this I close my Christmas song.