



# Christmas Worship Plan

## *A Light in the Darkness*

### TWO OPTIONS FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

**Option A: a modified *Lessons and Carols* format (recommended).** The format—using a series of lessons and Christmas carols to tell the story of the fall of humanity and the birth of Jesus—was first used in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. It has been widely adapted: the number of lessons varied, as did the chosen texts. The most famous version was first held at King's College in Cambridge on Christmas Eve in 1918.

Even irregular church attenders have possibly heard a Christmas service of *Lessons and Carols*. Thus, the service itself can serve as a draw. Americans love Christmas music, and not just Sinatra's *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas* or Mariah Carey's *All I Want for Christmas Is You*. They love the religious carols. Spotify and Pandora are pushing Christmas music earlier each year for one simple reason—there is a huge demand. In December 2017, the magazine *Vogue* published an article titled *Why Do Millennials Love Christmas Music So Much?* Having an order of service that stresses the use of Christmas carols might potentially provide appeal to the unchurched.

Our order of *Lessons and Carols* is modified to include only seven lessons. Why? If you have a good number of prospects at a worship service, it is important that they hear a sermon. Yes, the gospel is proclaimed in the read word and in song. But it is important to have that gospel applied to the lives of those worship visitors,

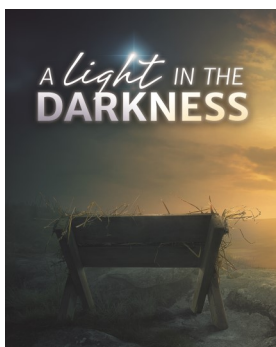
and the sermon is the best tool for accomplishing that goal. With only seven lessons and a judicious selection of hymn verses, the pastor can include an 18-minute sermon, and the service will still be around one hour. Note that we selected some lessons from outside the King's College tradition, in order to better articulate the theme *A Light in the Darkness*.

**Option B: a traditional three-lesson service.**

There is something to the notion of having special services be somewhat similar to what a “normal” Sunday service looks like. Thus, we provide this as an option as well.

**No children's service suggestion is offered.** C18 has encouraged holding such a service at an earlier time. For churches that don't offer a full-blown children's service, the plans below suggest places where a children's choir anthem and/or an adult choir anthem can be inserted.

**Holy Communion is not included.** It is easy to get prospects to come to a Christmas Eve service. Our prayer is that many of the worshipers in your church on Christmas Eve will be unchurched guests. It is challenging, however, to get guests to attend Christmas Day worship. (It can be challenging to get members to attend that day too!) December 25<sup>th</sup> is the historic day for *Christ's Mass*, so we recommend celebrating Holy Communion then.



## Option A: Lessons and Carols Service

### OPENING

Exhortation and prayer

**CAROL:**      **CW55:1,2 — *Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful***

*Once in Royal David's City* is the traditional opening carol for the King's College version of *Lessons and Carols*. However, it is not that well known to unchurched visitors. *Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful* has been recorded by multiple artists and is played frequently on holiday stations. The call to worship is fitting for the opening of the service. Verse 2 mentions light, recalling the theme of the evening.

**LESSON 1:**    **Genesis 1:1-5,26-28; 3:1-7**

**CAROL:**      **CW65:1,3,4 — *O Little Town of Bethlehem***

The introduction to the first lesson states “mankind created the spiritual darkness known as sin.” Verse 3 of this well-known carol recalls “this world of sin.”

**OPTIONS:**    Have verse 3 be sung by the choir, *a cappella* in four-part harmony. It is one of the CW tunes that is identical to the TLH setting.

**LESSON 2:**    **John 3:16-21**

**CAROL:**      **CW67:1,2 — *What Child Is This***

Look at any list of “most popular Christmas hymns” and *What Child Is This* ranks in the top five. It has been recorded by artists such as Josh Groban, Bing Crosby, the Trans-Siberian Orchestra, and Faith Hill. Even Kenny G has a saxophone rendition of *GREENSLEEVES* that is in heavy rotation on the radio during the holidays.

More importantly, this carol brings up Christ's passive obedience in straightforward language: “*nails, spears shall pierce him through; the cross he'll bear, for me, for you.*” The previous lesson said that God sent his son to save the world. Those words from the carol explain how he did that.

**OPTIONS:**    Choir or children's anthem substituted for *What Child Is This*.

**LESSON 3:**    **Joel 2:1-3,10-13**

**CAROL:**      **CW35:1-3 — *Of the Father's Love Begotten***

The text and tune fit well after a heavy reading. However, this is a carol that will not be well-known by worship guests, which is why the recommendation is to let a soloist and/or choir introduce it. Have a soloist sing verse 1 *a cappella*. Have a choir sing two or four-part harmony on verse 2, with very light accompaniment. *The Lutheran Hymnal*, hymn 98, provides a simple four-part arrangement. Then have the accompaniment build for the third verse, with the congregation joining in. After hearing the first two verses modeled, the brave guest will try to join in.

**OPTIONS:**    Choir or children's anthem substituted for *Of the Father's Love Begotten*.

**LESSON 4: 1 John 1:5-9**

**CAROL: CW63 — *Angels We Have Heard on High***

This is one of the most popular Christmas hymns of all time. It does not necessarily expand on the reading. That is fine.

**OPTIONS:** Choir or children's anthem substituted for *Angels We Have Heard on High*

**LESSON 5: Psalm 27**

Normally, the Psalm of the Day for Christmas Eve is Psalm 96. However, the text of Psalm 27 fits perfectly with the theme of the day, *A Light in the Darkness*.

**CAROL: CW90 — *The People that In Darkness Sat***

This hymn will not be that well known to guests. However, it is included because of the close connection to the sermon text which will be read right after. Plus, it is a very simple tune to pick up. Even newcomers might be able to join in during the "women" or "men" verses.

**OPTIONS:** Instead of having "men" and "women" sing some of the verses (as it calls for in the worship folder template), have the choir sing one or two of these verses.

**LESSON 6: Isaiah 9:2-7**

This serves as the basis for the sermon.

**CAROL: CW61 — *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing***

Isaiah 9 states "Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end." The hymn connects with "Glory to the newborn King." "Prince of Peace" is found in both the text and hymn. However, the main reason to use this hymn is that it is an all-time favorite even among those who rarely go to church, largely because of its use in the Charlie Brown Christmas special.

**OPTIONS:** Because this is so well known, don't be afraid to let accompaniment drop out for either the second or final verse.

**THANK OFFERING**

Note that the worship folder calls for individual candles to be lit here, if your congregation utilizes this custom. After the ushers get three or four rows into the collection, acolytes then function, starting with the front row. They light the candle of the individuals sitting on the center aisle. The members then light the candle of the person sitting next to them.

This adds a few minutes to the offering, so plan the offertory accordingly. It can be a good place to insert a choir piece.

**CLOSING PRAYER**

**BLESSING**

**LESSON 6: Luke 2:1-20**

Putting these well-known words at the very end of the service *after* a well-delivered sermon on the Light that pierces the darkness will have emotional impact. Chose an especially good lector.

**CAROL: CW60 — *Silent Night***

A favorite of all.

**OPTIONS:** *Night of Silence* is a beautiful choral piece that pairs with *Silent Night*. The choir sings two verses of *Night of Silence*. The congregation then sings *Silent Night*. Both songs have the same underlying running piano accompaniment. When the congregation sings the final verse of *Silent Night*, the choir sings the final verse of *Night of Silence* on top of them. The two songs blend wonderfully. You can find *Night of Silence* at the following link — <https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/night-of-silence-silent-night-print-g5213>

However, this hymn is beloved just sung straight too. Sing it as a true bedtime carol, accompanied by strings (piano or guitar) and nothing else.

## Option B: Three Lesson Service

### OPENING HYMN:

#### **CW55 — *Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful***

*Once in Royal David's City* is the traditional opening carol for the King's College version of *Lessons and Carols*. However, it is not that well known to unchurched visitors. *Oh, Come, All Ye Faithful* has been recorded by multiple artists and is played frequently on holiday stations. The call to worship is fitting for the opening of the service. Verse 2 mentions light, recalling the theme of the evening.

### CALL TO WORSHIP

### HYMN OR PRAISE:

#### **CW63 — *Angels We Have Heard on High***

This is the top ten of every single "favorite Christmas carols" list. Also, the refrain calls to mind the canticle *Gloria*, traditionally sung at this point in worship.

OPTIONS: Have verse 1 and or 2 be sung by the choir. There are multiple settings readily available. However, it is pretty sung in unison as well.

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

### FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 9:2-7

### RESPONSE:

#### **CW90 — *The People that in Darkness Sat***

Simple concept: the lesson is read; the lesson is driven home in song. While this is not an extremely well known hymn/carol, it is eminently singable.

OPTIONS: The worship folder template calls for having men sing verse 3 and women sing verse 4. Another option is to have the choir (adult or children) sing most or the entire hymn. Another option is to insert adult or children's choir anthem with a similar theme.

### SECOND LESSON: 1 John 1:1-9

### CHOIR ANTHEM

Either the adult or children's choir sings, or perhaps a vocal soloist. Your congregation likely has a choir repertoire with some Christmas favorites. Insert one here.

CW42 is included in the worship folder template only as a placeholder. If you do not have a choir or soloist, this hymn allows use of the camera-ready PDF.

OPTIONS: If you prefer to use the Psalm of the Day, place it after the First Lesson and move CW 90 to this location as a substitute for the Verse of the Day. The appointed Verse of the Day is also available for free download, a setting for soloist or choir.

## **GOSPEL: Luke 2:1-20**

### **HYMN OF THE DAY**

#### **CW61 — *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing***

Isaiah 9 states “Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.” The hymn connects with “Glory to the newborn King.” “Prince of Peace” is found in both the text and hymn. However, the main reason to use this hymn is that it is an all-time favorite even among those who rarely go to church, largely because of its use in the Charlie Brown Christmas special.

### **SERMON**

### **THANK OFFERING**

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This adds a few minutes to the offering, so plan the offertory accordingly. It can be a good place to insert a choir piece.

### **PRAYER OF THE CHURCH**

### **LORD’S PRAYER**

### **BLESSING**

### **CLOSING HYMN:**

#### **CW60 — *Silent Night***

A favorite of all.

**OPTIONS:** *Night of Silence* is a beautiful choral piece that pairs with *Silent Night*. The choir sings two verses of *Night of Silence*. The congregation then sings *Silent Night*. Both songs have the same underlying running piano accompaniment. When the congregation sings the final verse of *Silent Night*, the choir sings the final verse of *Night of Silence* on top of them. The two songs blend wonderfully. You can find *Night of Silence* at the following link — <https://www.giamusic.com/store/resource/night-of-silence-silent-night-print-g5213>

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# Christmas Day: The Nativity of Our Lord

A detailed outline is not provided at this time (October 12). See worship folders that will be posted by November 12.

The readings are from *Christian Worship*, Year C.

Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1:1-9, John 1:1-14

62 — Joy to the World

35 — Of the Father's Love Begotten (Hymn of the Day)

34 — Now Sing We, Now Rejoice

49 — Rejoice, Rejoice, This Happy Morn

The following are available for free download (permission granted for use) at the C18 website:

- Psalm 98 — from *Christian Worship Supplement*, provided so that congregations that do not have CWS can use this setting. The refrain is from John 1, "The Word became flesh and lived among us. Alleluia!"
- A Verse of the Day, for soloist or choir.

If Holy Communion is offered on Christmas Day, consider for a distribution hymn #38, From Heaven Above to Earth I Come.

**The following information is repeated/adapted from information first shared October 5.**

## Worship Folders

Worship folders will be available in three formats: Word, Publisher, PDF. Camera-ready PDF versions include blank pages for inserting local information. Since customs for offering Holy Communion vary (first and third, second and fourth, etc) and since CW and CWS offer four different communion services, adaptations will be necessary for communion services.

Files will be available on:

November 7: Advent Sunday worship folders

November 12: Christmas worship folders

Worship folder cover art for Advent and Christmas is already posted available in the [C18 Worship Resources package](#).

## Special Music

Congregations large and small will serve members and guests well by dressing up some of the hymns with arrangements suitable to their resources. This can be as simple as vocal soloists singing some stanzas to a variety of alternate accompaniments. But if you're blessed with a strong choir and brass ensemble, we know that you're already planning to use them!

The worship folders provided by C18 do not specify how to involve a variety of musicians. But in every congregation Christmas music is likely one of the strongest parts of the music library. A choir or children's song can replace any hymn. Or a choir, children, soloist can sing select stanzas of several hymns. The settings available to you likely include options for other instruments to join piano and organ. If a choir/solo song is accompanied by an ensemble (keyboard, guitar, instrument, hand percussion), consider using that ensemble also to accompany an entire hymn or select stanzas.

For hymns 35 and 90 see from CPH [Hymns for the Contemporary Ensemble - Advent, Christmas](#) by Phil Magness. (This collection was also mentioned in the Advent plan, above.)

For Christmas Day the setting of Psalm 98 from *Christian Worship Supplement* will appear in the C18 worship folder. An alternate, something being considered for the new hymnal project, is a Marty Haugen arrangement of a David Haas setting, available for [purchase from GIA](#). Instrumentation for this psalm is similar to the Magness hymn settings. For both the hymn and psalm settings it is not necessary to use every instrument specified.