



A SERVICE OF LESSONS AND CAROLS

ALTERNATE HYMNS AND CHORAL IDEAS

This year, two options for “lessons and carols” are provided. One, with “story” in the file name, makes greater use of Christmas prophecy and gospel accounts. The other, “thematic,” provides three alternate lessons meant to amplify the meaning of “God so loved the world” for Christian life and witness. Since Christmas hymns and carols are featured in both options, both have a strong Christmas character.

Both options include only seven lessons rather than the traditional nine to allow enough time for a brief sermon or commentary. A message on the John 3 lesson will provide rich gospel content in either option. (Listen to Daniel Deutschlander’s sermon, posted with C19 resources, for some inspirational thought-starters.) While the story option uses more familiar Christmas texts, the thematic option addresses some themes important both to faithful members and for those who are infrequent in worship.

The two options for a service of lessons and carols can be used as is. But for most congregations those plans are just rough roadmaps. The most obvious way to customize is to substitute a choir or vocal solo selection for one or more hymns. Some newer ideas are listed below. When making such a substitution, create also a new “connection comment” preceding the choir piece. For alternate congregational hymn ideas below, the “connection comment” is already provided.

Some of the lessons below are found only in the “story” option, but similar substitutions in the “thematic” option can also be made.

Some “choral anthem ideas” also work for a vocal soloist.

First hymn, Once in Royal David’s City (CW 50)

CHORAL ANTHEM IDEAS:

[Once In Royal David’s City](#)

[Once In Royal Bethlehem](#) (combining Once In Royal David’s City with O Little Town of Bethlehem)

[On Christmas Night](#) (unison, upbeat)

(This document is formatted as “book fold” if you want to print it for those planning worship.)

Second hymn, “Creator of the Stars of Night”

While the tune is not difficult, it is not well known. It is best for a soloist or choir to sing the first three stanzas or stanzas 1 and 3. Or: 1 – soloist, unaccompanied; 2 – all choir trebles, soft accompaniment; 3 – full choir. If one of these is not possible, use a more familiar hymn.

Handbells with “Creator of the Stars of Night”: Ring the lowest E-flat during the lesson (or an open 5th: E-flat, B-flat), after the words **noted** below. Coordinate with the lector so that there is a very brief pause after the bell rings.

⁸ Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹ But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are **you**?”

¹⁰ He answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I **hid**.”

¹¹ And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?”

¹² The man said, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate **it**.”

¹³ Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I **ate**.”

¹⁴ So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your **life**.”

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his **heel**.”

After the lesson ends, begin a soft random ringing of a pentatonic bell chord (Eb, F, G, Bb, C). Let this random ringing continue for 8-10 seconds before the choir or soloist begins singing the first stanza. If you are unfamiliar with random ringing, see: [ringing randomly](#) or [bell ideas](#).

A chord cluster may be rung at the end of the stanza, falling on the quarter note pulse after the last word is sung. Both the character of this hymn’s plainsong melody and the mood of the text (“stars of night”/“dark of night”) are reinforced by the mysterious bell accompaniment.

Keyboard instead of handbells: If handbells are not available, experiment with different sounds from a digital keyboard to achieve a similar effect. Use whatever “sustaining/fading” sound works best, not necessarily a bell sound. Or just use the hymnal setting, CW31, or have the choir or soloist sing the first stanza unaccompanied.

Accompanying the congregation: A 4-part setting is provided, CONDITOR ALME SIDERUM. (The version in CW is 3-part.) If this hymn is less familiar, the 4-part version will lead singing better than the 3-part.

Stanza 3: If only a soloist or the choir trebles sing stanza 1, the entire choir may sing stanza 3. Accompaniment options include CW31 (especially if the 4-part version is used for the congregation)

or, again, the handbells. An option different than random ringing is to ring all pitches (cluster chord) at the beginning of the stanza and at the end of each phrase.

FIRST LESSON, Genesis 3:8-15

One of the following hymns and “connection comments” may replace Creator of the Stars of Night. The formatting is the same as the worship folder.

HYMN

Now Sing We, Now Rejoice (CW 34)

Each generation has suffered from the fall into sin; “death o’er us had reigned” (stanza 3). How great our joy to be rescued, looking forward to “heavenly joy and light” (stanza 4)!



1 Now sing we, now re - joice, Now raise to heav'n our
2 Come from on high to me; I can - not rise to
3 Now through his Son doth shine The Fa - ther's grace di -
4 Oh, where shall joy be found? Where but on heav'n - ly



voice; He from whom joy stream - eth Poor
thee. Cheer my wea - ried spir - it, O
vine. Death o'er us had reign - ed Through
ground? Where the an - gels sing - ing With



in a man - ger lies; Not so bright - ly
pure and ho - ly Child; Through thy grace and
sin and van - i - ty; He for us ob -
all his saints u - nite, Sweet - est prais - es



beam - eth The sun in yon - der skies.
mer - it, Blest Je - sus, Lord most mild,
tain - ed E - ter - nal joy on high.
bring - ing In heav'n - ly joy and light.



Thou my Sav - ior art! Thou my Sav - ior art!
Draw me un - to thee! Draw me un - to thee!
May we praise him there! May we praise him there!
Oh, that we were there! Oh, that we were there!

HYMN

Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel (CW 23)

Old Testament believers from the centuries before Jesus was born and 21st century believers looking forward to his second coming have something in common. We plead for his presence, rescue, and redemption.



1 Oh, come, oh, come, Em - man - u - el, And ran - som cap - tive
 2 Oh, come, O Root of Jes - se, free Your own from Sa - tan's
 3 Oh, come, O Day-spring from on high, And cheer us by your
 4 Oh, come, O Key of Da - vid, come, And o - pen wide our



Is - ra - el That mourns in lone - ly ex - ile here
 tyr - an - ny; From depths of hell your peo - ple save,
 draw - ing nigh; Dis - perse the gloom - y clouds of night,
 heav'n - ly home. Make safe the way that leads on high,



Un - til the Son of God ap - pear.
 And bring them vic - t'ry o'er the grave. Re-joice! Re-joice!
 And death's dark shad - ows put to flight.
 And close the path to mis - er - y.



Em - man - u - el Shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

CHORAL ANTHEM IDEA to replace the hymn above: [Now Sing We Now Rejoice](#)

Additional CHORAL ANTHEM IDEAS to replace either hymn:

[Come, O Long-Expected Jesus](#)

[Comfort, Comfort, All My People](#)

[O Come, O Come, Emmanuel](#)

[Savior of the Nations, Come](#))

THIRD LESSON

Micah 5:2-4

CHORAL ANTHEM IDEA: [Once In Royal Bethlehem](#) (combining Once In Royal David's City with O Little Town of Bethlehem)

FOURTH LESSON

Luke 1:26-38

CHORAL ANTHEM IDEAS: [From Heaven Above to Earth I Come](#) (the words of CW 33 could be substituted, as used in both options); [Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent](#)

FIFTH LESSON

Matthew 1:18-25

The following hymn and "connection comment" may replace O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is.

CAROL

Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising (CW 42)

Imagine Joseph's confusion! And yet God's love for him—and angelic intervention—enabled him to believe this hymn's bold claim: "See how God . . . gave his Son!"—the same transforming assertion found in the next lesson. We too, in spite of our confusions and doubts, pray that Jesus will "gently lead us and be near us."



1 Come, your hearts and voices rais - ing, Christ the
2 See how God, for us pro - vid - ing, Gave his
3 Christ, from heav'n to us de - scend - ing, And in
4 Ja - cob's Star in all its splen - dor Beams with
5 Gra - cious Child, we pray you, hear us; From your



Lord with glad - ness prais - ing; Loud - ly sing his love a -
Son and life a - bid - ing; He our wea - ry steps is
love our race be - friend - ing, In our need his help ex -
com - fort sweet and ten - der, Forc - ing Sa - tan to sur -
low - ly man - ger cheer us. Gent - ly lead us and be



maz - ing, Wor - thy folk of Chris - ten - dom.
guid - ing, From earth's woe to heav'n - ly joy.
tend - ing, Saved us from the wi - ly foe.
ren - der, Break - ing all the pow'rs of hell.
near us Till we join th' an - gel - ic choir.

CHORAL ANTHEM IDEAS to replace either hymn: [Of the Father's Love Begotten](#); [Sleeping Adonai](#).

SIXTH LESSON

John 3:16-18

Love Caused Your Incarnation: A setting of HERZLICH TUT MICH VERLANGEN might strike some as unexpected in a Christmas service. But that's exactly the point—emphasizing the connection between Jesus' birth and his mission. Note also that this version of the tune is widely known among American Christians, causing someone to quip that some Evangelicals think it is an early American tune! The accompaniment file includes the text for a soloist or SATB choir to sing the first or all stanzas. Bach's original concept from the *Christmas Oratorio* is at time stamp :36 [here](#). The C19 version doesn't replicate the same degree of festivity, only the "happy/serene major key" effect.

CHORAL ANTHEM IDEAS to replace the hymn: [God Loved the World So That He Gave](#); [For He Loved Me](#).

SEVENTH LESSON

Luke 2:1-20

CHORAL ANTHEM IDEAS to replace the carol:

[Now Sing We Now Rejoice](#)
[Gentle Mary Laid Her Child](#)
[Sing We Now of Christmas](#)
[O Beauteous Heavenly Light](#)

MISCELLANEOUS DETAILS

Christmas Day: Some of the same hymns are scheduled for Christmas Day as for Christmas Eve. This is to assure that some of the most loved hymns are used in both services, recognizing the growing trend that most people pick just one service to attend. If many people in your church attend both, you will want to make some adjustments.

Image resolution: The worship folders and this document are set in Microsoft Word thus: File / Options / Advanced / Image Size and Quality: "Do not compress images in file; *and* Resolution: High fidelity." This is to avoid fuzzy music graphics. If you paste content into another Word file, be sure the target document has these settings before pasting into it.