

CAROL SERVICE AT ST.DAVID'S CATHEDRAL
SUNDAY 22 DECEMBER AT 3.00PM

Over two hundred and fifty people attended the spectacular Carol Service sung by the choir of St. David's Cathedral in preparation for Christmas. It was followed by wine and mince pies in The Cornerstone to which all were invited. The service was opened with the choirs singing "A Proclamation of Christmas" by the composers John Tavener. Archbishop George spoke about this dramatic piece during his reflection at the service.

"I hope you have recovered from the shock of the Christmas Proclamation at the opening of this Service of Carols. It was composed by John Tavener in 1987. He died on 12 November this year. Just three days before his death he had appeared on the Andrew Marr Show on the BBC and spoke about death movingly. His deep faith and musical gifts had enabled him to compose the evocative "A Song for Athene" which many will remember being sung at the funeral of Princess Diana.

I am so grateful to Dominic Neville, our director, and the choir for singing "A Proclamation of Christmas". It is of quite a different musical style to everything else we sing in the Catholic Church of the West. It comes from the Eastern Orthodox service of Compline, the Office of Night Prayer. Nothing is more guaranteed to wake you up than hearing "A Christmas Proclamation". Tavener once said that we in the west sing hymns during Mass, almost like marching songs. We interrupt our prayer and the movement of the liturgy whilst we have a good sing song and then move on with the action of the Mass. Not exactly true, of course, but he contrasted our way with the Eastern way of the chanting, the rhythm, the underlying current of the Orthodox liturgy "carrying" our prayers and our actions up to God.

The interruption of the beautiful tenor solo by the loud organ in the Proclamation is a reminder to us that God "breaks into" human history in the most unexpected way. The prophet Isaiah preached at an extraordinary time in Jewish history. The people just returned from exile. The Temple destroyed. Soul searching as to where was God in the midst of all their suffering?

We have just listened to the prophetic words of Isaiah, looking forward to the coming of the Messiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Unto us a child is born. He shall be wonder counsellor. Mighty God. Prince of Peace".

We come together to prepare our minds and hearts for the celebration of the birth of Jesus at Christmas. We sing the carols, we say the prayers, we try to recapture the truth that God continually wants to break into our lives not necessarily in dramatic and loud ways, but ultimately in the silence of our hearts. We ourselves know what obstacles we put in the way of his coming. For a few moments, let us be silent and allow "...the dear Christ to enter in".

How silently, how silently,
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessing of his heaven.
No ear may hear his coming;
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls still receive Him, still
The dear Christ enters in.