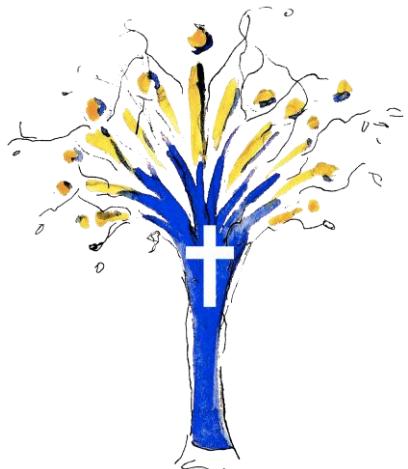
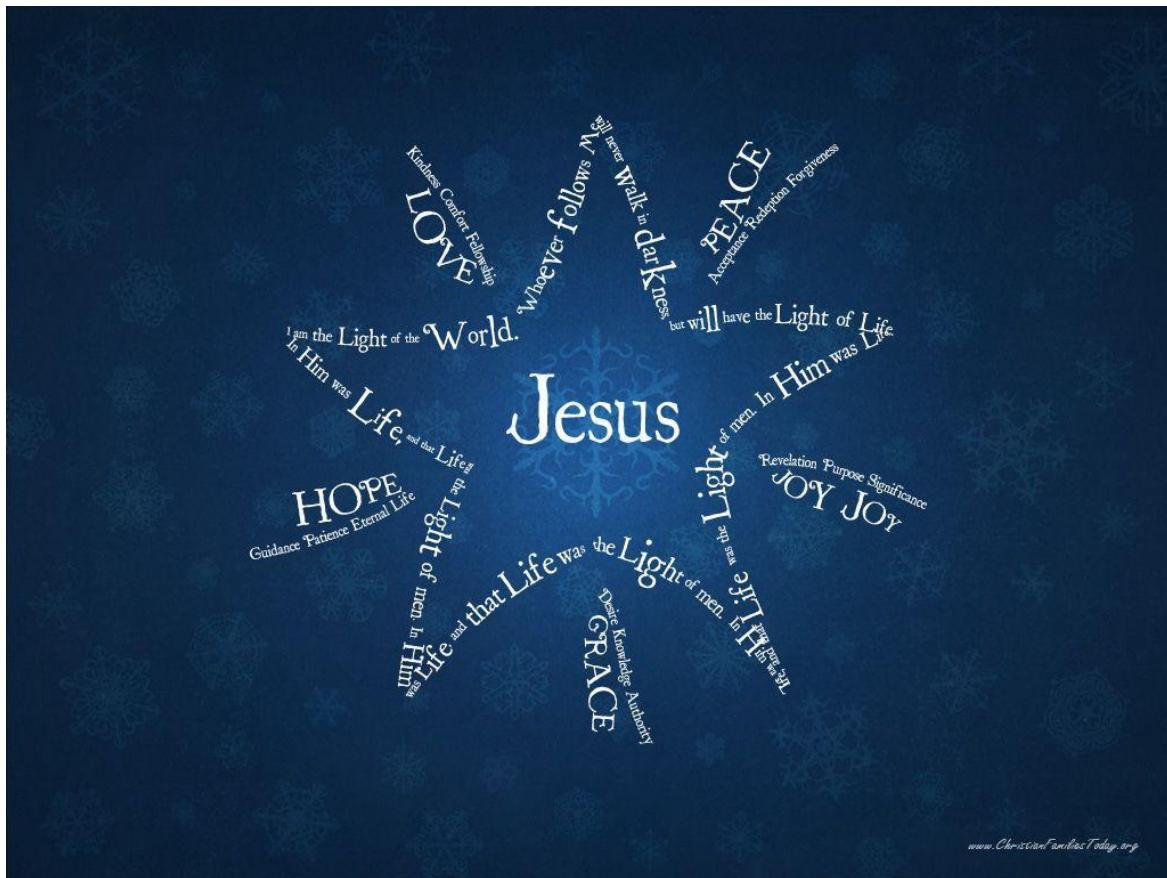


Off the Record



From **MAGOR**
BAPTIST CHURCH

***Growing and sharing
in God's love***



www.ChristianFamilyToday.org

CHRISTMAS 2025

(1) Christmas : the pre-season



The Word became fresh



Advnt is an awesome time of year. Christmas trees, office parties, dinners, family events, and excited children. Yet Advent is not just a festive countdown to Christmas; it is a season rich with meaning and significance for Christians.

Advent is when we remember "the Word made flesh" and contemplate it so that "the Word will be made fresh" to us - and we LOVE FRESH.

🎁 Freshly baked bread - hmmmm!

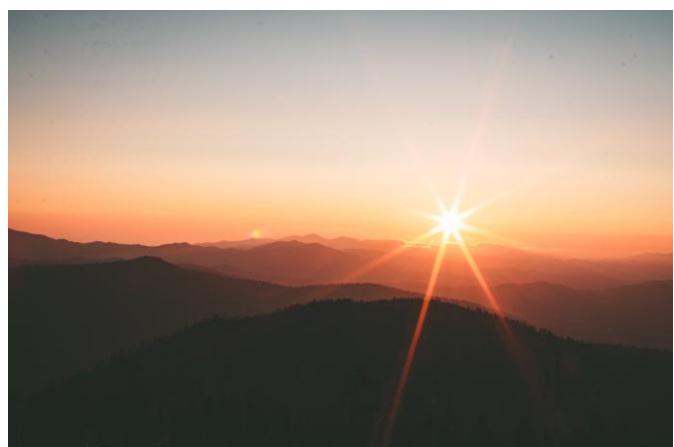
🎁 Freshly based biscuits - hmmmm!

🎁 Freshly brewed coffee - now you're talking!

As the days grow shorter and the air grows crisp, the season of Advent quietly emerges from the shadows of late November, inviting Christians into a rhythm of waiting and longing. Advent is the prelude to Christmas, but it is also about waiting with hope, grounded in the knowledge that God's promises are sure. It's a waiting for the fulfilment of God's promises, a waiting that trusts in God's timing.

🎁 A Season of Hope in a World of Despair

In a world that often seems marked by despair, Advent offers a powerful message of hope. It reminds us that God's story is not over. Despite the brokenness of the world, the chaos of our lives, and the darkness that sometimes threatens to overwhelm us, God is still at work. Advent calls us to look forward, not with passive resignation, but with eager expectation for the coming of the One who will make all things new.



It's easy to become cynical or jaded, to lose sight of hope when things seem bleak. But the message of Advent is that hope is not dead.

🎁 Living Between the "Already" and the "Not Yet"

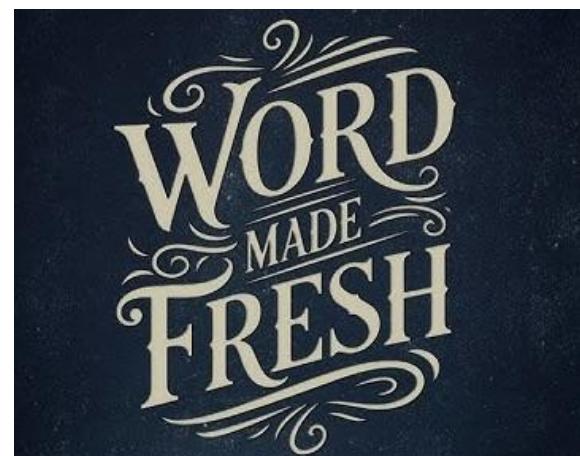
Advent is also a season that highlights the tension between what God has already accomplished in Christ and what he has yet to bring to completion. Jesus has already come, bringing salvation, redemption, and hope. His life, death, and resurrection have secured for us the promise of eternal life, forgiveness, and the defeat of death itself.

But at the same time, we still live in a world that is broken. We still experience suffering, pain, injustice, and sin. We still long for the day when God's kingdom will be fully realised, when Christ will return and make all things new.

So, hold on to hope even when the world seems to be unraveling, and it encourages us to live faithfully in the present while looking toward the future with expectation.

🎁 Advent as a Microcosm of the Christian Life

In the end, Advent is more than just a countdown to Christmas. It's a microcosm of the entire Christian life: a life of waiting, hoping, and preparing for what is yet to come. It's a reminder that as Christians, we are not merely celebrating a historical event in Bethlehem; we are anticipating the culmination of God's great story in the return of Christ.



In this Christmas pre-season (aka Advent) may the wonder of the 'Word made flesh' become fresh to you.

(2) Christmas : the post-season

God showing up uninvited

By the time you've got to Christmas Day many people have had enough of Christmas! It feels as though you've been doing Christmas for months and maybe you have, or at least for two months, since the beginning of November for many.

What a shame that the moment it arrives you want it to stop. It certainly stops when it comes to advertising. Once the shops can't sell you Christmas stuff anymore they move on very quickly (i.e. on Boxing Day) to sell you holidays.

I'm just relieved that I get to write this before Christmas, whilst I'm still in the mood, as Christmas is SO WONDERFUL - for it's the story of God showing up uninvited.

 **C**hristmas is, for many people, the annual excuse to accumulate credit-card debt, and re-watch *Home Alone* or *Die Hard*. But for Christians, Christmas is not merely a festive interlude on the way to New Year's fireworks. It's the explosive announcement that God - the creator, sustainer, and promise-keeper - has crashed the human party dressed in swaddling clothes. And let's be honest: nobody at the time asked Him to.

❖ God arrived in humility, not power

THE BACKSTORY NOBODY EXPECTED

You might say that the godly people of the time were looking for God to visit them, in the form of a messiah-figure. They wanted deliverance from oppression (who wouldn't) and were looking for someone to be their commando-style warrior king. They were not looking for a newborn with questionable parentage and a feeding-trough for a bed.

The Son of God didn't arrive in Rome with pomp and pageantry or in Athens with philosophical ideas accompanied by rhetorical swagger, but in a Judean village where the sheep likely outnumbered the people. It's vintage God: surprising, underwhelming, and world-altering.

❖ It's vintage God:
surprising, underwhelming, and world-altering.

GOD SHOWING UP

Christmas is not the gentle idea that God is vaguely "with us"—it is the shocking claim that *the Word became flesh* (John 1v14). The infinite became infant. The One who spun galaxies into being chose to be carried in the arms of a teenage mother very likely overwhelmed by the assignment.

The incarnation isn't a divine cameo appearance—it's full immersion into the human condition for God refused to love us from a distance.

❖ Heaven's invasion begins not with a trumpet blast, but with the cry of a newborn."

THE JOY OF SUBVERSIVE HOPE

We celebrate not because the world is tidy or peaceful—it isn't. We celebrate because Christmas is God's decisive announcement that history is not spiralling into despair. In Christ, God declares a resounding *Yes* to His creation and a firm *No* to the forces that distort it.

So, don't wish Christmas away too quickly. Enjoy every moment, for it is SO WONDERFUL.

Rev. Mark D Thomas

Christmas and New Year Dates

December

Sunday 14th	4.00 pm	Christingle Service
Sunday 21st	11.00 am	Family Nativity
	6.00 pm	Carols by Candlelight
Thursday 25th	10.00 am	Christmas Celebration
Sunday 28th	11.00 am	Deacons service

January 2026

Thursday 1st	3.00 pm	New Year Meditation
	4.00 pm	Communion
Sunday 11th	6.00 pm	Joint Service with Caldicot

Fellowship News



The annual gift service on Sunday 30th November was very well supported by all in the church and enabled a van load of Christmas goodies and essentials to be handed to Raven House Trust for distribution to those less fortunate this Christmas.



On Saturday 25th October the church was packed with family and friends to see the wedding of Georgia Hampson and Nico Andreoletti. Friends continued to enjoy a buffet meal at the chapel afterwards. We pray that their life together will be greatly blessed.



One of our oldest members, Bill Whatley, recently celebrated his 97th birthday in Cherry Tree Nursing Home. During his long life of service to the church he has been a Deacon, Treasurer and Property Trustee.



The annual Remembrance Day service in the Square was well attended as usual. On our behalf Rod Lewington laid a wreath at the War Memorial.

The funeral for Arthur Hill was held on Friday 4th December, led by our minister. The service was well attended by friends and family who reflected on Arthur's long life. When in better health he was a regular at Munchies and coffee morning. We extend our sympathy to his family.



The annual Men's Curry Night took place on Friday 4th December and the men enjoyed the meal and fellowship at the Mango House.

As we look forward to the rest of the Christmas season we pray for all those who will have an empty space at their table this Christmas. We ask that God will put his loving arms around them and give them peace.

We pray for the whole Fellowship and ask God to meet them where they are at, to heal both bodies and relationships, and we look forward to serving him in the coming New Year.



Jean and Rachel Thomas wish all their friends in the fellowship a very merry Christmas and a happy and healthy 2026.

BMS 2025 Christmas Appeal –

Give a child the priceless gift of education this Christmas



This Christmas, you can help Syrian refugee children in Lebanon in the most life-changing way – through the gift of education at a BMS World Mission-supported learning centre.

For children like Lina and her brother, Ibrahim, your kind support for this education centre could make an entirely different future possible.

We were born in Syria, but we left when we were very young, after our father was killed in the war. We live in a small apartment. We have a room for my mother and us and there is a room for my grandparents. Before coming here, my brother never had an education. I studied a bit, but not in a real school. I used to go to someone's house where some people taught me to read and write. It is our first year in the education centre. We very much prefer coming here to the centre than staying at home.

Lina, aged nine

For children like Lina and Ibrahim (names changed), your gift of education could change everything.

The learning centre is run by BMS partner Thimar, headed up by Wissam Naseallah, himself a BMS-supported worker. It provides more than just an opportunity to gain an education, it also offers refugee children a safe space where they can heal from the trauma they've been through. Deeply rooted in Christian values, the centre also gives children the chance to experience God's unchanging love for them, some for the very first time.

UGANDA News



Stand for 1000 litre water tank in place to be filled from new borehole



Peter with pupils at the new nursery school at Nkudumali, with the school, pump house and teachers accommodation in the background



Teachers' accommodation with solar panels



Schoolchildren in front of their new school with water tanks in background

Pray today for hope that grows – part of Tearfund's Advent Reflections

'As for me, I shall always have **hope**; I will praise you more and more.'
(Psalm 71:14)

There will be great excitement for many children (and some adults – maybe you!) this morning as they open the first door on their Advent calendar, perhaps with expectant hope of finding a chocolate treat!

In today's reflection, Faith Tsungulo, Projects Manager for Tearfund in Malawi, shares her story of excitement and expectant hope for one particular community that she's been working with in rural Malawi.

'I was in rural Malawi visiting Mponela, a community where Tearfund's local church partner had been working through Transforming Communities training. (Transforming Communities is Tearfund's innovative Bible-based training programme helping churches worldwide to lead their local communities out of extreme poverty and into a sustainable future.)

'The community in Mponela was facing chronic poverty, food insecurity and limited opportunities to improve their income. Erratic weather, poor soil quality and a lack of modern farming techniques left many families struggling to grow enough food or earn a stable income. Children went hungry, school attendance dropped and child marriage became a survival strategy for some girls. Financial stress led to conflict in homes – and overall, there was a deep sense of hopelessness.

A powerful sense of hope

But alongside that sorrow, I had a powerful sense of hope because this community didn't stay stuck in despair. With support, collaboration and faith, they turned things around.

'Tearfund and our local partners, Ministry of Hope, worked with church leaders to form the Yankho Cooperative, made up of members of the community, to invest in long-term change. The introduction of greenhouse farming and agricultural training enabled year-round farming - protected from climate shocks and pests. Crops like tomatoes and green peppers now thrive, with each plant producing up to 20kg of fruit.



'Life for members of the Yankho Cooperative changed dramatically. Once marked by hunger, poverty and hopelessness, families now experience food security, steady incomes and restored dignity. Parents who couldn't feed their children or pay school fees can now do both. Women, once dependent and vulnerable to early marriage, are now earning their own income, leading within the cooperative and making decisions at home. Household conflict has declined, as financial stress is reduced and replaced by cooperation and shared purpose.

'Families have diversified their livelihoods rearing livestock, farming more land and using greenhouses to grow crops year-round. These improvements have brought about peace, joy and hope, not just economically but spiritually, as members root their success in faith and prayer.

'What's most moving is how spiritual and practical transformation came hand in hand. The story shows that even in the face of deep need, when people come together in faith and action, real change is possible.

Are you looking for hope?

This Advent, remember that even in the hardest places, hope can grow. Like the community in Mponela, who faced hunger and despair, change is possible when people come together with courage, faith and the right support. Through innovative farming and shared vision, they moved from struggling to thriving, feeding their families, sending their children to school and building brighter futures.

'If you feel overwhelmed or hopeless, know this. Transformation often starts small through a seed planted, a community united, or a prayer shared. Hope is alive in the resilience of people who refuse to give up, and in the power of faith that sustains them.

'This Advent, hold on to that hope. **Believe that new life, abundance and peace can emerge even from the toughest seasons.** Just like the greenhouses protect crops through storms, your hope can shelter your heart through any challenge.'

Please pray for:

- the work of the Yankho Cooperative to flourish so the project will be a testimony of hope and transformation to others in the community.
- the resources needed to allow Transforming Communities training to be available more widely. Tearfund currently works with around 64,000 churches around the world but we have a bold vision to be working with 250,000 by 2030.
- God's hope to grow in even the most challenging situations and countries where Tearfund works.

Your faithful prayers for Tearfund's work in Malawi will make such a difference. Thank you!

With every blessing,

Bronwen Baxter
Tearfund Prayer Team

www.tearfund.org



World Day of Prayer Friday March 6th 2026
10am Caldicot Methodist Church
1.30pm St Mary's Church Magor
Written by the Christian women of Nigeria



The unexpectedness of Christmas

from Hazel Lucas

I wonder what memories of Christmas you have? Some of mine are memorable for very strange reasons. In one, I think I was in the middle of some kind of breakdown, but the person leading the service wanted us to dress up in tinsel, dance and sing joyfully. Which I did. It was the saddest Christmas of my life. In another, we were visiting our son and daughter-in-law, whom I didn't know very well. A storm caused a power cut over Christmas. No electricity or internet. We were out of touch with the world, had no light to play games or do puzzles, and conversation palled in the dark! We couldn't leave until fallen trees were cleared, and the defrosted turkey was thrown out! The year, we were so very grateful to be at home with light and power, we didn't miss our absent family at all! And then there was the Christmas my father died, and the first Christmas of lockdown. Christmas tends to settle into a pattern, which isn't always helpful, and these experiences shock us into thinking about the patterns afresh.

This year we've had sermons about the Second Coming of Christ, which I've always found a difficult concept. Probably because I'm a scientist and the biblical language is so different from our everyday experience that I can't understand it. But the characters at the first Christmas were not expecting what happened, not in the slightest, and they seemed to cope with the shocks amazingly well. Think about Mary. Surely it was bad enough being told you were going to have a baby when you hadn't gone through the normal actions which would make a baby happen. Then being misunderstood, undoubtedly by her parents and Joseph. Joseph, amazingly standing by her, yet taking her to Bethlehem where she had to give birth in a cowshed. Joseph has to be an outstanding example of male sainthood for what he did. Yet, having to flee into Egypt? It had to all make sense in God's plan somehow, yet it certainly wasn't a straightforward plan. Simeon and Anna recognized the baby as God's chosen Saviour the moment they saw him, but most people certainly didn't, and there was trouble right from Day 1.

So, I still don't understand the Second Coming, and there are still shocks and trouble. The unexpected is always just around the corner. But Jesus did come, the first time, in accordance with the Scriptures, and did things that nobody expected, including dying for us all. He does keep His promises, even in ways no-one wants or understands. Today, the world certainly needs sorting out, and earthly leaders, now as then, aren't doing a very good job. But we are Christ's body on Earth, and he's told us to watch and pray, to trust and obey. We have a part to play. So I am much reassured. He came once, as God promised, and it's His world. If we repent of unhelpful habits and follow Him, we may even be part of the solution and not just the problem.

December 1975

The December issue was combined with November 1975 and thus covered in my previous article. Nonetheless, there was still a Christmas Greetings magazine. That was the first to be in a new format. Instead of being an A5 portrait booklet, it was now A4 landscape, stapled on the left edge. As well as Christmas greetings, it included some fellowship news, reporting the baptism on 30 November of Davina Thomas (née Farmer) and Adrian Davies; also, the dedication of Victoria, the daughter of Ian & Nettie Craggs.

January 1976

Magazine format

As the only comments about the new format were favourable, it was decided to continue with it. The reason for the change was that a typical print run consisted of 4,000-5,000 pages, all of which had to be folded, collated and stapled by hand. A folding machine would cost £200 and an electric stapler about £30. The magazine received no money from church funds, it was financed entirely by gifts from about half the readership. In addition, costs of supplies had doubled in the previous three or four years and postage had rocketed.

Christmas services

They began on the first Sunday in December with the children's Gift Service, and '*more parcels than ever were accepted by an officer of the NSPCC to brighten the Christmas of the underprivileged children in this area*'. The following Sunday was the Pantry Service, when adults brought tea and sugar which was '*gaily wrapped and distributed to senior citizens by carol singers*' the week before Christmas. The third Sunday saw the Primary Department with their '*traditional tableaux of angels, shepherds and kings, and the other departments of the Sunday School contributing their items. The evening service of Carols by Candlelight was embellished by the choir, a double quartette, soloists, the oboe & guitars as well as Image and Coffee Bar with their usual way-out songs*'. The final meeting of the year saw about 40 people enjoying a social evening with a buffet supper and ended with a Watchnight Service - where they were joined by others who preferred a relaxing evening rather than '*fun and games*'.

Church land

In June 1975, the trustees had opposed a compulsory purchase order of Gwent County Council to take about a third of an acre of land at the back of the chapel. The Secretary of State for the Welsh Office upheld their

objection and the trustees have reopened negotiations with the Baptist Men's movement to use the land for a complex of homes for senior citizens.

February 1976

Links with the past

An article from GEBA, the magazine of the Gwent English Baptist Association, reported in its February issue that the '*Association held its Annual Assembly at Magor on 14 & 15 April 1875. Why were we not told this when we met at Magor in June 1975?*' Magor remained in that Association until about 1897 when it was received into membership of the Monmouthshire (Welsh) Association, not returning to the English Association until about 1961. '*The majority of the churches in our sister Association used the Welsh language in their pulpits and for most of their members it was also the language of the hearth. I wonder how many people living in Magor then spoke Welsh and how the delegates got along when they attended the Welsh Association Assemblies!*' In 1875 the Association annual report sold for 1d; in 1975 it cost 24 old pennies (10p) and didn't even contain the President's address as did the old penny version. The 1875 Annual Report said that Magor had 89 church members.

There was a lot to include from the July 1974 issue so the following hymn was left out. However, I thought I would include it now. Many of you will remember the former minister, Rev. Clifford Hanson. He wrote a 'Good Companion' hymn to the tune *Finlandia* by Sibelius:

The day is ending, evening shadows falling,
And Good Companions from each other part.
O Heavenly Father, hear thy children calling,
And grant Thine own sweet peace to every heart.
O keep us safely in Thy love we pray,
Until the dawning of another day.

The night is near, our Father in Thy keeping,
We trust the story of this parting day.
Thou knowest all our smiling and our weeping,
The night is near – be nearer Lord we pray.
Though Good Companions from each other part,
Thou best Companion, ever with us art.

And when the sun shall set on this life's story,
When, tired children, to our sleep we come.
The night soon passed, we'll wake again in glory,
The glad new morning in our Heavenly home.
O keep us safely in Thy love we pray,
Until the dawn of that eternal day.

Do you remember singing it? Perhaps we should sing it again. CL.

The Sussex Carol

Long before the invention of the printing press (1440) or the bicycle (1817) people were singing Christmas carols.



The words they learnt for the carols were taught to them both by family members and by church leaders. This meant the words of many Christmas Carols were very local versions. The printing press meant that gradually different Carols were collected together and became more standardised. The bicycle meant that ordinary people could easily travel around their local area and hear what others were singing. Some carols were written down and named after the place or county where they were first recorded. The Wexford, Coventry and Sussex carols are all in the Oxford Book of Carols - the major work of Percy Dearmer, Martin Shaw and Ralph Vaughan Williams. It has become a widely used source of carols among choirs and church congregations in Britain.

The Sussex carol is possibly the best known of these "named" carols. The origin of the carol can be traced back to a book published in Ghent in 1684. The text comes from the "Small Garland of Pious and Godly Songs", a book written by the Irish Franciscan Luke Wadding who was the Bishop of Ferns in Ireland, and published in Ghent in 1684. It isn't clear whether Wadding wrote the words or merely noted an earlier composition, but his book became popular, and greatly revised editions were published in London in 1728 and 1731, introducing the contents to English Protestants.

Why is it known as The Sussex Carol? It gained its name when Ralph Vaughan Williams, one of Britain's greatest composers, first collected and documented it after hearing it being sung by Harriet Verrall of Monk's Gate near Horsham, West Sussex, in 1904.

Vaughan Williams along with Cecil Sharp had a great interest in the folk songs that were gradually being sung less and less, as printed music became more easily available across the country. They travelled the country collecting traditional songs and carols sung by local noted singers. The notes that they made were transcribed and this meant that both words and music were preserved.

As Harrett Verrall sang, Vaughan Williams wrote down the music and Cecil Sharp the words. These were then prepared for printing, and it was first printed in The Journal of the Folk-Song Society and later in English Folk-Carols (1911). Vaughan Williams' arrangement was published as part of his

Eight Traditional English Carols of 1919, and it was included in The Oxford Book of Carols of 1924. Since its first publication the Sussex Carol has become a favourite carol, both set as a choral work and sung as a congregational carol at concerts and church services each and every year.



1 On Christmas night all Christians sing
to hear the news the angels bring;
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.

2 Then why should men on earth be sad,
since our Redeemer made us glad?
Then why should men on earth be sad,
since our Redeemer made us glad,
when from our sin He set us free,
all for to gain our liberty?

3 When sin departs before His grace,
then life and health come in its place;
when sin departs before His grace,
then life and health come in its place;
angels and men with joy may sing,
all for to see the newborn King.

4 All out of darkness we have light,
which made the angels sing this night;
all out of darkness we have light,
which made the angels sing this night:
"Glory to God and peace to men,
now and forevermore. Amen."

Christine Miles



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