Parnham Voices - Saturday 28 November 2026

St Martin of Tours, West Coker, Church Street, West Coker Yeovil, BA22 9DB,

From Darkness into Light - An Advent Journey in Music and Poetry

In the Darkness

Jesus Christ the Apple Tree - *Elizabeth Poston (1905–1987)*

Stir Up, We Beseech Thee, O Lord - *David Drinkell (1955–2019)*

Adam Lay Ybounden - *Boris Ord (1897–1961)*

The First Glimmer of Light

In the Stillness - *Sally Beamish (b. 1956)*

Hymne à la Vierge -*Pierre Villette (1926–1998)*

The Nativity

How Shall I Fitly Meet Thee - *Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)*

Here is the Little Door - *Herbert Howells (1892–1983)*

The Mystery Revealed

In the Bleak Mid-Winter - *Harold Darke (1888–1976), arr. Brian Earl*

O Magnum Mysterium - *Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548–1611)*

A World Rejoicing (in many ways)

Jingle Bells – *Traditional, arranged Ralph Allwood (b. 1954)*

The Twelve Days of Christmas – *Traditional, arranged John Rutter (b. 1945)*

O Holy Night – *Adolphe Adam (1803–1856), arranged Michael McGlynn (b. 1964)*

We Wish You a Merry Christmas – *Traditional, arranged Arthur Warrell (1883–1939)*

Before the celebration of Christmas comes a quieter journey: a time of expectation, longing and hope. For centuries composers, poets and congregations have reflected upon that journey, finding in it themes that remain as relevant today as they have ever been. We all know something of darkness, uncertainty and waiting. We all understand the human desire for light.

This evening's programme traces that path. It begins in darkness and expectation, moves through the first promise of redemption, pauses at the mystery of the Nativity itself and finally bursts into celebration as the Christmas story is proclaimed in music of joy, wonder and delight.

The opening section explores the world before Christmas. Elizabeth Poston's much-loved Jesus Christ the Apple Tree and Boris Ord's Adam Lay Ybounden draw upon ancient images of promise and redemption. Between them sits Stir Up, We Beseech Thee, O Lord, a setting of the traditional Advent collect by David Drinkell, a distinguished church musician and former Cathedral Organist of Belfast Cathedral. Drinkell was a friend of our Musical Director and this performance is offered as a tribute to his memory.

As the programme moves towards the Annunciation and Nativity, Sally Beamish's luminous In the Stillness and Pierre Villette's radiant Hymne à la Vierge capture something of the wonder and expectancy surrounding the coming of Christ. Herbert Howells' Here is the Little Door offers one of the most tender and intimate musical reflections on the Christmas story ever written, while Bach's How Shall I Fitly Meet Thee asks how humanity might respond to so extraordinary a gift.

The central mystery of Christmas is explored through two contrasting masterpieces. Harold Darke's beloved setting of In the Bleak Mid-Winter appears here in a new arrangement by Brian Earl, while Tomás Luis de Victoria's O Magnum Mysterium, composed more than four hundred years ago, remains one of the most profound expressions of awe and wonder in the entire choral repertoire.

The final section celebrates the many ways in which that joy finds expression: through exuberant Renaissance polyphony, traditional carols, festive humour, popular song and communal celebration. From the playful exuberance of The Twelve Days of Christmas to the grandeur of O Holy Night and the cheerful good wishes of We Wish You a Merry Christmas, the programme concludes not in quiet reflection but in shared rejoicing.

We hope that this evening's journey, from darkness into light, offers something of the hope, wonder and joy that lie at the heart of Advent and Christmas.