



The Anglican tradition has inherited many ancient pieces of liturgy, so it may be a bit surprising to learn that our Service of Lessons and Carols is only a little over one hundred forty years old.

Historically, up until the late 19th century, the singing of Christmas carols was excluded in Christian worship - they were considered secular - and usually carollers would visit people's houses. However, hymns gained popularity during the Victorian Era, and church musicians were thus encouraged to include carols in the services, especially after the publication of an 1875 book of carols, *Carols for Use in Church During Christmas and Epiphany* (Chope & Baring-Gould).

St. Paul's Cathedral in London was the first to introduce carols into their Christmas Choral Evensong services in 1878, and other cathedrals began to include carols at Christmastide, including Truro.

According to the county newspaper, the *Royal Cornwall Gazette*, the choir of Truro Cathedral was presenting a service of carols at a 10 pm Christmas Eve:

The Choir of the Cathedral will sing a number of carols in the Cathedral on Christmas Eve, the service commencing at 10pm. We understand that this is at the wish of many of the leading parishioners and others. A like service has been instituted in other cathedral and large towns, and has been much appreciated. It is the intention of the choir to no longer continue the custom of singing carols at the residences of members of the congregation. (December 20, 1878)

Two years later the Bishop of Truro, the Right Rev. Edward White-Benson, conducted the first formal service of "Nine Lessons and Carols" to encourage pub revellers to celebrate Christmas Eve in church by offering a religious celebration rather than spending the evening drinking! The service included carols and Bible readings that illustrated the Christians' story of faith from the fall of humanity to the promise of a Messiah to the birth of Jesus to the Incarnation.

The modern arrangement of Lessons and Carols was introduced in 1918 by Rev. Eric Milner-White, chaplain of King's College Cambridge, and this order of service is the one most often followed today.

Rev. Milner-White felt that people's faith needed to be rekindled due to the grief and loss of what was then called 'The Great War,' which had ended only six weeks before Christmas Eve in 1918. He had volunteered as a military chaplain, and witnessed trench warfare on the Western front.

Decorated for courage under fire in combat, he was released after what he called “a battle of special horror” in early 1918 and returned to King’s College, where he was appointed Dean and Fellow.

After the war ended on November 11<sup>th</sup>, Dean Milner-White wanted to honour the young men who died and didn’t come home, including two hundred and two members of King’s College. He also wanted to create a special Christmastide service “as a gift to the city of Cambridge,” a liturgy of Christian worship whose simplicity and beauty would shine through and attract those who had lost their faith in the horrors of the war, whether serving in it or watching it take place. In Rev. Milner-White’s own words, “the main theme is the development of the loving purposes of God” as viewed “through the windows and the words of the Bible and [focusing on] colour, warmth, and delight.”

Since 1928 and with readings from the 1611 Authorized King James Version of the Bible, the Christmas Eve Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols held in King’s College Chapel is broadcast to millions of people around the world. The Lessons are read by representatives of the College and of the City of Cambridge, with the singing divided into "carols" which are sung by the choir and "hymns" sung by the choir and congregation.

There are many modern variations of Lessons and Carols presented at Christmastide, with different readings and number of lessons. For the last couple of years our service at Christ Church presents seven lessons ~ from the Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Micah foretelling Jesus' birth and Kingdom and the glory of little Bethlehem to St. Luke's account of the announcement made by the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary about the impending birth of Jesus, then continuing with the story of Mary and Joseph travelling to Bethlehem where the baby Jesus is born, and the shepherds leaving their fields to find the child after the angels announced the good news of Jesus' birth. St. Matthew relates the search by the Magi to find the babe and pay him homage and their realization of King Herod's treachery. Finally, St. John reveals the mystery of the Incarnation.

Congregational carols and choir Anthems are sung throughout the service.

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*Sources include [anglicancompass.com](http://anglicancompass.com); [reformedworship.org](http://reformedworship.org); [ottawacathedral.ca](http://ottawacathedral.ca); [classicalmusic.com](http://classicalmusic.com). *Common Praise**

Broadcast information <https://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel/a-festival-of-nine-lessons-and-carols>