



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, traditionally with nine Lessons, is only a little over one hundred forty years old.

It was originally created in 1880 by the future Archbishop of Canterbury, the Right Rev. Edward White Benson, Bishop of Truro, apparently because he wanted to give the local people something to distract them from spending Christmas Eve in the pub!

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.

Rev. Milner-White 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, the Christmas Eve Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols held in King's College Chapel is broadcast to millions of people around the world.

Nancy Wright-DeKuyper, Lay Reader  
Christ Church

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

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