



Adult

# ALL SAINTS' CHURCH

*"Our mission is to bring the good news of Jesus Christ's love to our entire community through traditional Anglo-Catholic worship, fellowship, outreach, and Christian formation."*

**Our Vision:** *"We strive to be a haven of healing, reconciliation, joy and peace in service to our wider community and beyond, so that our example in prayer and practice may reflect Christ's love for us all."*

## THIS SUNDAY — December 31, 2023

### “To Tremble with Glee”



The Cherry Tree Carol has roots in medieval mystery plays and, ultimately, an apocryphal story about the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, in which a cherry tree bows low so that Mary can gather cherries from its branches. The carol has many variants, both in text and

tune. Many Anglicans will be familiar with the arrangement by David Wilcocks. The Cherry Tree Carol I know and love is an Appalachian folk version by Alice Parker and Robert Shaw. This version, uniquely, ends with Joseph asking the unborn Jesus when his birthday will be, with Jesus responding, from his mother's womb, thus:

The sixth day of January  
My birthday will be,  
When the stars in the elements  
Shall tremble with glee.

“When the stars in the elements shall tremble with glee.” It is a striking image, isn't it? Stars, like little children, trembling with glee. They can hardly contain their excitement, their little bodies move and pulse with joy. And it is this image — of the stars trembling with glee at the birth of the Lord Jesus — that has prompted these reflections, which I offer on the Tenth Day of Christmas.

“The stars in the elements shall tremble with glee.” We are not accustomed to thinking of stars in this way. Views from the Webb Space Telescope may fill us with

awe, but we do not imagine the stars as capable of anything analogous. But what, really, do we know of the stars? They, too, are creatures — why should they not “tremble with glee” at the Nativity of their Lord, or respond in some analogously appropriate way? After all, when the Lord laid the foundations of the earth, “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). And day and night “the heavens declare the glory of God,”

Although they have no words or language,  
and their voices are not heard,  
Their sound has gone out into all lands,  
and their message to the ends of the world.  
(Ps. 19:1, 3–4)

Must we understand all this language to be merely figurative?

Dante spoke of “the Love that moves the sun and the other stars” (*Paradiso* 33.145). In speaking thus, he included himself among the creatures moved by the Lord. He wrote:

... my desire and will were moved already —  
like a wheel revolving uniformly — by  
the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.  
(*Par.* 33.143–45)

If our very desires and our wills are moved by the God who is Love, then why should we imagine the movement Love causes in the stars to be constrained to movements describable by astrophysics? Is it only human creatures who cry out, in the presence of that Love, “did not our hearts burn within us” (Luke 24:32)? Might not the stars, too, burn for Love?

David Bentley Hart has written in his dreamlike *Roland in Moonlight* (reviewed on Covenant) of a longing “for a world that speaks,” “for a world that feels ... that’s conscious and alive” (p. 53). In context, Hart — or, rather, his dog Roland (did I mention the work is dreamlike?) — is describing his “great uncle” Aloysius’s pagan beliefs, which he interprets as a response to the modern view of the cosmos as dead matter. But I think we can also say (as Hart would surely agree) that the picture of “a world that speaks, a world that feels ... that’s conscious and alive” — is one closely akin to that of the Bible. Holy Scripture, we have seen, understands the whole created order as revelatory, as filled with the glory of God; a world in which every creature is at least potentially responsive (in its own way) to its Creator. Night and day, “the heavens declare the glory of God.” “The morning stars sang together” at the creation of the world. The psalmist calls on every creature to rejoice in the coming of the Lord:

Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad;  
let the sea thunder and all that is in it;  
let the field be joyful and all that is therein.  
Then shall all the trees of the wood shout for joy  
before the LORD when he comes,  
when he comes to judge the earth.  
(Psalm 96:11–12)

In the biblical imagination, the world is full of the speech of non-human creatures. The serpent speaks. The angels speak. Balaam's donkey protests (Num. 22:21–34). The mountains and the hills are on the verge of singing, and the trees of the fields about to burst into applause (Isa. 55:12). And, if necessary, even the stones will shout out, in praise of Christ their coming King (Luke 19:40). If this is so, might not the stars indeed tremble with glee at the birth of the Lord?

But what do we know of the stars? What matters in the end of these speculations is how we ourselves respond to the coming of our Lord. Whether *we* tremble before this *magnum mysterium* (“great mystery”) of the birth of the Lord. Whether our hearts burn within us.

Christopher Yoder

(The Rev. Christopher Yoder serves as rector of All Souls' Episcopal Church in Oklahoma City. He is a contributor to Living Church's Covenant blog. Fr. Carlos is on vacation this week.)

Readings for the First Sunday after Christmas Day

Isaiah 61:10-62:3 Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7 Psalm: 147:13-21 John 1:1-18

## CALENDAR

Note: We worship in our historic church. The service will also be on Zoom. The service time is 10am. Tuesday Noon Mass and Friday Morning Prayer at 10:00am are held in All Saints' St. Mary Chapel

**SUNDAY December 31, 2023 The First Sunday after Christmas Day**

**10:00am Mass in All Saints' Church**

Join Zoom Meeting from our web site at [www.allsaintschurch.org](http://www.allsaintschurch.org)

Recording of Mass available before noon at [www.allsaintschurch.org](http://www.allsaintschurch.org)

**Christian Formation and First Communion Instruction for Children**

Ages 5-12 in the Parish Hall from 10:00am-10:45am

**Adult Christian Formation** Meets next on Sunday, January 14 at noon in the Rector's Office and the Library

**TUESDAY** Noon Mass in St. Mary Chapel

**THURSDAY** Spanish Class will recess for the remainder of the month of December and resume on Thursday, January 11.

**FRIDAY** 10:00am Morning Prayer in St. Mary Chapel

**SUNDAY** **January 7, 2024** **The First Sunday after the Epiphany**

**10:00am Mass in All Saints' Church**

Join Zoom Meeting from our web site at [www.allsaintschurch.org](http://www.allsaintschurch.org)

Recording of Mass available before noon at [www.allsaintschurch.org](http://www.allsaintschurch.org)

**Christian Formation and First Communion Instruction for Children**

Ages 5-12 in the Parish Hall from 10:00am-10:45am

**Adult Christian Formation** Meets next on January 17 at noon in the Rector's Office and the Library

**OUR CORE VALUES:**

- Welcoming strangers like old friends
- Embracing the Anglo-Catholic tradition
- Being dependable members of a caring community
- Respecting each other's differences
- Being faithful stewards of God's gift
- Remembering that God loves everyone unconditionally

An Anglo-Catholic Parish in the Episcopal Diocese of San Diego

[www.allsaintschurch.org](http://www.allsaintschurch.org)