



**St Marylebone**  
*Parish Church*

**Christmas Day, 2018 10am Choral Eucharist**

I didn't grow up in church. I was baptized as a baby, but that was pretty much 'it' for me Jesus-wise growing up. As I may have said before, I was a convinced atheist all through my teens. It was only studying philosophy and then history at university that brought me to the Christian faith.

All this means that I was most certainly not a chorister as a boy. I assume some of us here were?

It means that I have only learnt the Choristers' Prayer since ordination. It's a simple but powerful prayer, said by boys in ruffs and girls in polyester cassocks, and old ladies limping down the nave with their handbags and walking sticks all over the country...

'Bless, O Lord, us Thy servants who minister in Thy temple. Grant that what we sing with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.'

And what is it that we sing with our lips? ‘O Come let us adore Him! O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord!’

‘What we sing with our **lips** we may believe in our **hearts**, and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our **lives**.’

Anyone who is celebrating Christmas this year with a new baby in the family will do plenty of adoring. I’ve got two little nieces. There’s been plenty of adoring the babies in the last few years. This year we shall be ‘adoring’ party dresses and glitter pictures and kitchen floor ballet. Pray for me in a few hours time... No, it’s all good fun!

We today have come to adore a child.  
O Come let us adore Him.

Think about the last time you held a baby. Those tiny hands, barely open eyes, delicate hairs, tiny veins – too tiny, too fragile looking – serving that tiny beating heart. Each new life is a miracle. One cannot but feel that when holding a new, tiny baby. I’m sure you’ve felt it too.

O Come let us adore Him.

But those tiny hands, just touching for the first time, feeling the scratch of straw, closing those tiny perfect fingers around the smooth wood of the trough-edge. Those are the hands that flung stars into space. The eyes, barely open in the dim light, they are the eyes that looked upon the universe at its birth and saw that ‘it was good’. As John Betjemen puts it ‘the maker of the stars and sea become a child on earth for me’

O Come let us adore Him.

That is what we sing with our lips. That is the *wonder* that today's stunning music is pointing to. What our music is always pointing to – not competing with the beauty of the Christ but sharing in it: pointing to that beauty which is beyond all telling. That is what we sing with our lips. O Come let us adore Him.

John Betjemen again:

‘And is it true? For if it is, No loving fingers tying strings /  
Around those tissueed fripperies, / The sweet and silly Christmas  
things, / Bath salts and inexpensive scent / And hideous tie so  
kindly meant, / No love that in a family dwells, / No carolling in  
frosty air, / Nor all the steeple-shaking bells / Can with this  
single Truth compare’

God did not become an Emperor, a perfect dictator, or just warrior. Not grand or wise or superman or rich or generous or *useful* or kind or helpful or *anything*: He just slept, fed, filled his swathing bands, cried. *Some* of those things He would become, Some people would despise Him for *not* becoming. But before He was kind and generous and the rest, first He became a baby: vulnerable, beautiful, in need of love and protection – his mother's milk and kisses, St Josph's tender embrace.

Eternal. Omnipotent. Alpha and Omega – sleeping, feeding, pooing, crying.

‘And is it true’ says Betjemen?

O Come let us adore Him.

And if we ‘believe in our hearts’ what of ‘showing forth in our lives’?

Betjemen here too [although I suppose you could also quote the artist formerly known as Prince for the first line...]:

Nothing 'Can with this single Truth compare -  
That God was man in Palestine  
And lives today in Bread and Wine.'

O Come, let us adore Him.

In his most Holy Sacrament of the altar

O Come, let us adore Him.

In every tiny fragile new, miraculous life.

In the love we share – the love for which this child will, as a man,  
die.

O Come, let us adore Him.

In the outcasts, like those He spent his time with. The beggars  
and cheats and despised that He befriended.

O Come, let us adore Him.

Today and in the year to come, Sunday by Sunday and day by  
day: O Come, let us adore with our lips and hearts and lives.

Because indeed nothing 'Can with this single Truth compare -  
That God was man in Palestine  
And lives today in Bread and Wine.' Nothing else is so worth our  
lives, and in no other place, no other person is true life to be  
discovered. Now and for ever-lasting – O Come let us adore  
Him!