



St Marylebone  
Parish Church

## Midnight Mass 2020

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*“God our Father, on this night thy Son Jesus Christ wast born of the Virgin Mary for us and for our salvation; + bless this crib . . .”*

*“On this night”, not ‘at a convenient time part way through the day’, but ‘on this night’.*

It was at night, that Christ was betrayed by a kiss and the inexorable wheels of execution were put into motion. It became night when Christ died on Calvary, as the sky darkened, and the veil of the Temple was torn into two.

Night – the time and place of our most awful fears and our greatest anxieties; night, the place of terror and nightmare and the seeming triumph of evil and death; night, the time and place of restlessness.

But it is into the night, into the darkness, that Mary births Jesus, the world’s Light, the Light that will enlighten the Gentiles and be Israel’s glory; Jesus, the Light that no darkness can ever extinguish; the Light that is the Life of not only of Man, but the Life and Being of all that is or ever can be; the Light and the Life that nothing can vanquish.

Christ the Morning Star has risen in the darkest places of our fears and forebodings. *“He that maketh the seven stars . . . has turned the shadow of death into the morning”*.<sup>i</sup>

“The night” is no longer the domain of demons and ghouls – of all the things that ‘go bump’, but the time angels’ songs; the moment when good news is sung by heavenly messengers to frightened and bewildered shepherds; a bright star illumines this night to direct the quest of sages to the eternal source Wisdom itself.

This is not a night of death or endings, but God’s eternal day, overflowing with birth and life and joy and hope.

In Genesis, Light is the first thing God creates<sup>ii</sup>. Light exists before the sun; the creation of Light is the moment of the beginning of all time; the source of all Life. The very Creator God who is eternally Emmanuel; the Light and Life giving God, who is ever with us, present from eternity to eternity, now lies living, breathing, crying, thirsting in a manger cradle and banished, for eternity, is what Margaret Atwood<sup>iii</sup> has called *“the sensed absence of God”*.

Well, here in the manger cradle is no *“sensed absence”* but living, breathing, crying, thirsting humanity: the very presence of the very God who is eternally Emmanuel, the God who is with us, present from eternity to eternity and because of this night, this *“Most Holy Night”*, all nights are transformed from *“the dead day’s requiem”* into the eternal *“day-dawn”*.<sup>iv</sup>

*“Come we shepherds”*, writes Richard Crashaw<sup>v</sup>, *“whose blest sight hath met love’s noon in nature’s night”*.

May we see what they saw, *“sweet day”*, *“sweet day rising not from the east, but his eyes”*.

So, *“Welcome all wonders in one sight! Eternity shut in a span; summer in winter; day in night; Heaven in earth, and God in man.”*

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> Amos 5.8

<sup>ii</sup> Genesis 1.3

<sup>iii</sup> Attwood, M., *In the Secular Night, from Morning in the Burned House*, 1995, Houghton Mifflin

<sup>iv</sup> Belloc, H., *The Night*

<sup>v</sup> Crashaw, R., *In the Holy Nativity of our Lord*