



Christmas Star festival, Lviv, Ukraine

A great light

Heather Smith *reflects on* Isaiah 9:2-7

In the depth of winter, a light has burst into our lives and dispelled the darkness. Perhaps you attended a midnight Mass and the church was ablaze with the light of candles and of rejoicing. The Lord is truly here! Whatever time of year Jesus was actually born, the celebration of his birth at the darkest time of the year (at least in the northern hemisphere) is a wonderful metaphor for the light that Christ brings into the world. He illuminates the darkness in our own souls as he brings his hope and his love to a world struggling with darkness and despair.

For the Israelites, the darkness referred to the grave. They had been experiencing a time as dark

as death. Oppressed by enemies – in this case probably the Assyrians – they were crushed and struggling to survive. But there is hope – the darkness will be dispelled by a great light.

“For a child has been born for us, a son given to us.” To those who heard Isaiah’s words, they probably suggested the birth of a son to the king, but to us they speak of the birth of Jesus. What hope they bring – endless peace, justice and righteousness.

The hope is not only for the whole community, but for each of us individually. We have all lived in the darkness of death, but today the light of Christ has extinguished it. We have much to celebrate! 😊

God of light, as we celebrate the birth of your son, help us to turn towards the light, to experience all its power and to live in it with joy. Amen.

Once in Royal David’s City

by David Weedon

This Christmas carol was originally written as a poem by Cecil Frances Alexander, who also wrote “All Things Bright and Beautiful” and “There Is a Green Hill Far Away”. It was first published in 1848 in *Hymns for Little Children*, a collection of poems designed to teach children about parts of the Apostles’ Creed.

A year later, the English organist Henry John Gauntlett discovered the poem and set

it to music. Since 1919, the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols at the King’s College Chapel, Cambridge, has begun its Christmas Eve service with the carol as the Processional hymn. The first verse is sung by a boy chorister as a solo, the second verse is sung by the choir accompanied by the organ, and the congregation joins in the third verse.

For those of us who watch or listen to the King’s Carols each year, the swelling tide of voices brings a lump to the throat. Alexander’s beautiful words are uplifting, poignant and deeply moving all at once. 😊

Christmas in the hospital

by Ricarda Witcombe

Christmas in the hospital is, in some ways, just a normal day. People are still sick and accidents still happen. Neither birth nor death changes pace, even as the angels sing. And yet there are clues that point, however faintly, to that heavenly chorus – porters wearing Santa hats, nurses with reindeer ears, desks covered in food and gifts, tinsel on the drugs cabinets.

The corridors are quiet – until the Salvation Army band strikes up with “Once in Royal”. The Chairman of the Trust visits all the wards, bringing chocolates and cheer, the cameras are there for the first Christmas baby. And in the chapel a small gathering sings carols and shares bread and wine – afterwards, we share communion at bedsides and try to visit those who are alone. Into this world, with all its intense humanity, the Word is made flesh and dwells with us. Good news indeed. 😊

“Not in that poor lowly stable, with the oxen standing by, we shall see him, but in heaven, set at God’s right hand on high. Where like stars his children crowned, all in white shall wait around.”

Cecil Frances Alexander (1818-1895), Anglo-Irish hymnwriter and poet