Dear friends,

Welcome to Advent and Christmas at Washington National Cathedral!

The past year has been different in so many ways. Most of us, along with our family and friends, have faced new challenges and changes to our daily lives and normal routines. The powerful message of this season is the reminder that either in times of great joy or deep sadness, Jesus always arrives at Christmas.

We may not see you in person this year, but we are eager to welcome you to our online services. This small companion explains some of the traditions and stories you will see and hear during the services. Be on the lookout for them when you are watching. You will also find prayers that you can say with your family.

This is a special time of year, and we at YOUR National Cathedral are glad to share it with you!

Merry Christmas,

THE REVEREND CANON ROSEMARIE LOGAN DUNCAN, DMIN PHD
CANON FOR WORSHIP

Information about all Cathedral Advent and Christmas services, including our Family Christmas Service on Christmas Eve, is available at cathedral.org/christmas.
Advent is a time when we watch and wait for Jesus to arrive.

We light the Advent wreath to count down the time until Christmas. The wreath has five candles. The four candles on the outside of the wreath mark the four Sundays of Advent. Three of these candles are blue and one is pink. A white candle at the center of the wreath is for Christmas Eve.

We light a blue candle on the First Sunday of Advent and continue to light an additional candle each Sunday of the season. On the Third Sunday of Advent we light the pink candle.

The light of the wreath grows brighter as the days grow shorter and the birth of Jesus nears. When Christmas finally arrives, we light the Christ candle at the center to celebrate the good news of Jesus’ birth.

BLUE — also on the altar and the priests’ vestments during Advent. Like the color of the sky at night just before the sun rises, it reminds us to be hopeful that the light of Christ is coming soon.

PINK — reminds us to be joyful as we wait for Jesus to arrive.
Advent Prayers

If your family has an Advent wreath at home, you can say one of these prayers when you light the candles:

Lord Jesus, light of the world, born in David's city of Bethlehem, born like him to be a king: be born in our hearts at Christmas, be King of our lives today. Amen.

Lord Jesus, light of the world, blessed is Gabriel, who brought good news; blessed is Mary, your mother and ours. Bless your Church preparing for Christmas; and bless us your children, who long for your coming. Amen.

The Cathedral Advent Wreath

See the candles glowing on the Cathedral Advent wreaths:

Wednesday, December 16, 7:00 pm ET
Blue Christmas Service

Friday, December 18, 6:00 pm ET
Gospel Christmas Service: O Holy Night

Sunday, December 20
11:15 am ET: Holy Eucharist
6:00 pm ET: Advent Evening Service

Wednesday, December 23, 6:00 pm ET
Christmas Lessons and Carols

Thursday, December 24, 8:00 pm ET
Festival Holy Eucharist
Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. 

(Luke 2:7)

The Gospels of Luke and Matthew in the Bible tell us about the birth of Jesus. They tell us of Joseph and Mary’s trip to Bethlehem, the angel’s message to the shepherds, and the arrival of the three kings.

Crèches help bring the story of Jesus’ birth to life. They are a model of the place where Jesus was born. Crèches show Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus and often include the shepherds, wise men, animals, and angels.

The Cathedral has over 700 crèches from all over the world. You can see some of the Cathedral’s collection at cathedral.org/visit-us/creche. If you have a crèche at home, see how it compares to those at the Cathedral.

These crèches often show the cultures and landscapes of the locations where they were made.

If you were to make your own creche what would you include to reflect your family or culture?
**Blessing of the Cathedral crèche**

*Join us on Christmas Eve at 8:00 pm ET to see the blessing of the Cathedral crèche.*

The Cathedral crèche was created in 1994 by Barbara Hughes, an artist who went to the National Cathedral School.

The crèche shows a joyful scene of the Holy Family surrounded by shepherds and animals. The three kings visit while the townspeople stop their daily tasks to watch the incredible scene.

The crèche shows the scene with a series of multicultural figures, some based on real people. For example, one of the kings is based on the likeness of Desmond Tutu, former Archbishop of Cape Town.

The figure of the Christ Child is placed in the scene on Christmas Eve.

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**A Crèche Prayer**

If your family has a crèche, you can gather around to offer this prayer:

Lord, by the song of the angels
you disclosed your birth to your own people,
and by the leading of a star
you revealed your glory to strangers.
Teach us to know you now,
and to make you known to all.
Amen.
Singing is one of the best parts of Christmas! Many Christmas songs celebrate the story of Jesus’ birth. They help us get ready for the arrival of the Christ Child. Singing these songs together every year creates Christmas memories.

What are your favorite songs to sing at Christmas? Why do you like these songs? Ask your parents, grandparents, or aunts and uncles what their favorite Christmas songs are. Do they remember singing them when they were your age?
Many Christmas songs, including those we sing together at the Cathedral, are very old. Here are the stories of two songs we will sing together this year.

**Angels We Have Heard on High**

Like many Christmas carols, this song was first written and sung in French. The English version was written in 1862. It tells the story of the shepherds from the Gospel of Luke. The angels reveal the news of Jesus' birth to the shepherds and they go to Bethlehem to adore him before sharing the good news with others.

Sing *Angels We Have Heard on High* with the Cathedral Choir

*Wednesday, December 23, 6:00 pm ET*

Christmas Lessons & Carols

*Christmas Eve*

12:00 pm ET: Family Christmas Service

8:00 pm ET: Festival Holy Eucharist

**Silent Night**

This song was first sung on Christmas Eve 1818 in St. Nicholas Church in the small Austrian village of Oberndorf. The church's priest Josef Mohr and organist Franz Xaver Gruber wrote the song to be played on a guitar because the church's organ was broken. A few weeks later, the organ repairman heard the song when he came to fix the organ. He liked it so much he shared it with other musicians, and it became very popular. In 1863, nearly fifty years after being first sung in German, *Silent Night* was translated into English.

Sing *Silent Night* with the Cathedral Choir

*Christmas Eve, 12:00 pm ET*

Family Christmas Service

Hear the Cathedral Choir sing *Silent Night* in German

*Wednesday, December 23, 6:00 pm ET*

Christmas Lessons & Carols
The Christmas Story Comes to Life

The shepherds went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.
(LUKE 2:16)

At this year’s Family Christmas Service, the animals from the manger gather in the Cathedral’s Bishop’s Garden. Grab your favorite animal costume, angel wings, or shepherd’s hat and join in from home!

You can be one of God’s creatures to help welcome Mary and Joseph to the manger, or the angel who brings the good news, or a shepherd traveling to Bethlehem to see the Christ Child. After the shepherds share the good news, don’t miss the arrival of the three Magi with their camel.

Hearing the story of how Jesus was born reminds us of the good news that arrives for us every Christmas!

What does the good news of Christmas mean to you?
How can you share that good news with others?
Family Christmas Service

Join us online to relive the Christmas miracle during the Cathedral’s Family Christmas Service on Christmas Eve at noon ET.

The First Nativity Scene

Tradition tells us that the first nativity scene, like the one in our service, took place almost eight hundred years ago! St. Francis of Assisi, known for his love of animals and nature, set up the first nativity scene in a cave in Italy. It included a donkey and a cow just like you see today.

A Prayer

After the service, ask your family to join you in this prayer.

God sent his angels from glory to bring to shepherds the good news of Jesus’ birth.
Amen. We thank you, Lord.

You have heard his story, the story of God’s own Son.
Amen. We thank you, Lord.

May he fill you with joy to bring this good news to others today.
Amen. We thank you, Lord.
People of God: shout and sing!
Tell the good news of peace on earth.
Lord, bring us today into
Christ's peace.
All God's people shout:
Amen!

Angels dance
and the bright star shines.
All creation bows to the Lord of all.
Lord, bring us today into Christ's light.
All God's people shout:
Amen!

One with us,
yet born to save,
he will show us the way to God.
Lord, bring us today into Christ's love.
All God's people shout:
Amen!

People of God: shout and sing:
Alleluia! Alleluia!
Amen.
A Chapel Dedicated to Christmas

Did you know that the Cathedral has an entire chapel devoted to celebrating Christmas all year long?

Bethlehem Chapel was the first portion of the Cathedral to be completed. Resting under the altar unseen is the Cathedral’s Foundation Stone, a single block of American granite embedded with a stone gathered from a field near Bethlehem.

What we can see in the chapel are stained glass windows and sculptures that tell the Christmas story and the needlepoint cushions that celebrate Christmas music.

We look forward to welcoming you for a visit to Bethlehem Chapel and the whole Cathedral when we reopen!

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CREDITS: Photos, Danielle E. Thomas; Crèche drawing, Kit Beeson, St. Albans School, Class of 2027.

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