



THE CHURCH OF
SAINT LUKE
IN THE FIELDS
487 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014

The Choir of Saint Luke in the Fields
David Shuler, *Director of Music*

Sopranos: Danielle Buonaiuto, Melissa Fogarty
Altos: Catherine Hedberg, Elizabeth Merrill
Tenors: Christopher Preston Thompson, David Root
Basses: Steven Eddy, Phillip Cheah

Thursday, December 10, 2020 at 8 o'clock p.m.

A Sixteenth-Century Roman Christmas

Dies sanctificatus	Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c.1525-1594)
Hodie Christus natus est	Palestrina
Missa Hodie Christus natus est Kyrie Gloria	Palestrina
Gaude virgo mater Christi	Josquin Desprez (c.1440-1521)
Missa Hodie Christus natus est Sanctus & Benedictus	Palestrina
O magnum mysterium	Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611)
O regem coeli	Victoria
Missa Hodie Christus natus est Agnus dei	Palestrina
Hodie nobis de coelo	Peter Philips (c.1560-1628)
O beatum et sacrosanctam diem	Philips

PROGRAM NOTES

Most of the music on tonight's program could easily have been heard at Renaissance and Baroque Christmas celebrations at the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. Dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the early fifth century, the basilica honors the mystery of the Incarnation with a shrine beneath the high altar containing relics of the manger in which the new-born Christ child was laid. Christmas was an especially important feast at Santa Maria Maggiore. The relics were carried in solemn procession, the pope celebrated mass there, and, as special indulgences could be earned by attendance, the faithful would converge on the basilica from all over Rome.

Many miracles have been associated with Santa Maria Maggiore from the date of its foundation. The site itself was chosen after an extraordinary snowfall in the month of August, whence the church's alternative name, "Our Lady of the Snows." In 1517, St. Cajetan received a vision of the infant Jesus while praying in front of the manger-relic on Christmas night, further enhancing the basilica's prestige. Another legend relates that once, while Pope Gregory was celebrating mass, the angels answered the *Pax Domini* ("The peace of the Lord be always with you."); for this reason, the response *Et cum spiritu tuo* ("And also with you.") was always omitted when popes subsequently celebrated mass there.

The basilica also had a rich music tradition. G.P. da Palestrina was probably a choirboy there and served as *maestro di cappella* for ten years beginning in 1561. The large work on tonight's program is Palestrina's *Missa Hodie Christus natus est*. Movements of ordinary settings were not heard one after another but rather at their appointed place in the liturgy. While the program is not designed as a liturgical reconstruction, we have placed motets and organ pieces between the various movements. (The *Gloria* always followed the *Kyrie* immediately however.)

Palestrina's double-choir motet *Hodie Christus natus est*, one of the first Roman works in the polychoral style, was published in 1575. In it the composer fully exploits the dramatic potential of the two contrasted groups (a mixed choir of two sopranos, alto and bass and a low choir of alto, two tenors, and bass). The mass of the same name, closely modeled on the motet and scored for the same forces, was probably composed shortly after but was first published in 1601, seven years after Palestrina's death.

To expand a motet lasting less than two minutes into a full-fledged mass might have challenged lesser composer. Even though the mass is in a mode characterized predominantly by "major" triads, Palestrina dispels any potential monotony by expanding the polychoral dialogue and reducing the number of voices to four for whole sections. As befits the feast, the overall mood is one of radiance and *joie de vivre*: even the *Crucifixus* section in the *Credo* is dignified rather than anguished.

The great Flemish composer Josquin Desprez was active in Rome towards the end of the fifteenth century. Revered throughout sixteenth-century Europe as the finest of all polyphonists, his music remained at the core of the sacred repertoire in Rome for well over a century after his death. The motet *Gaude virgo mater Christi* is a Marian sequence that was apparently assigned to the Feast of the Purification, the last feast of the Christmas season. In both structure and texture, Josquin's *Gaude virgo* resembles his most famous motet *Ave Maria...virgo serena*. One special feature is a closing Alleluia section that presents a motive derived from the opening, culminating in a harmonically spectacular cadence.

Although he eventually returned to his native Spain, much of Tomás Luis de Victoria's career was spent in Rome. The famous four-voice setting of *O magnum mysterium* born in Tuscany was published in 1572, when he maestro at one of the city's Spanish churches. It is a masterpiece of subtlety and a marvelous expression of the wonder of Christ's birth. *O regem coeli* is one of four motets for high voices include in a book of motets published by Alessandro Gardane in Rome in 1583.

Peter Philips began his career as a boy chorister at St Paul's Cathedral in London, but in 1582 left England for good, like so many others for reasons of his Catholicism. He stayed briefly in Flanders before travelling to Rome where he entered the service of Alessandro Farnese (1520-1589), with whom he stayed for three years, and was also engaged as organist at the English Jesuit College. Philips left Rome in March 1585, travelling over several years to Genoa, Madrid, Paris, and Antwerp, finally settling in Brussels. Philips's music was extraordinarily popular in his time, with publications continuing well after his death. His church music demonstrates at once a deft handling of conservative counterpoint and a brilliant ability to paint images of the texts in music. Philips's setting of the Christmas Responsory *Hodie nobis de caelo* is written for eight voices divided into two equal choirs, following the grand Venetian precedent of polychoral composition. *O beatum et sacrosanctum diem* is for five-voice choir.

TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

Dies sanctificatus illuxit nobis;
venite gentes et adorate Dominum,
quia hodie descendit lux magna in terris;
hæc dies quam fecit Dominus.
Exultemus et lætemur in ea.

*A holy day has dawned for us;
come, nations, and worship the Lord,
for today a great light has descended to earth.
This is the day the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.*

Hodie Christus natus est

Hodie Christus natus est, noe, noe.
Hodie Salvator apparuit, noe, noe.
Hodie in terra canunt Angeli,
laetantur Archangeli, noe, noe.
Hodie exsultant iusti dicentes:
Gloria in excelsis Deo, noe, noe.

*Today was Christ born, noe, noe.
Today the Saviour appeared, noe, noe.
today on earth the angels sing
and archangels rejoice, noe, noe.
today the just exult saying:
Glory be to God in the highest, noe, noe.*

Missa Hodie Christus natus est: Kyrie

Kyrie eleison
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

*Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.*

Missa Hodie Christus natus est: Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo, et in terra pax
hominibus bonæ voluntatis.
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te. Adoramus te.
Glorificamus te. Gratias agimus tibi
propter magnam gloriam tuam.
Domine Deus, Rex cælestis,
Deus Pater omnipotens.
Domine fili unigenite Jesu Christe.
Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe
deprecationem nostram. Qui sedes ad
dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.
Quoniam tu solus sanctus. Tu solus
Dominus. Tu solus altissimus, Jesu
Christe, cum Sancto Spiritu, in gloria
Dei Patris. Amen.

*Glory to God in the highest, and peace
to his people on earth.
We praise you, we bless you, we worship you,
we glorify you, and we give thanks to you
for your great glory.
Lord God, heavenly King,
God the Father almighty.
Lord, the only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ;
O Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father,
who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
You that take away the sin of the world:
receive our prayer. You are seated at the right
hand of the Father: have mercy on us.
For you alone are the Holy One; you alone
are the Lord; you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory
of God the Father. Amen.*

Gaude virgo mater Christi

Gaude virgo, Mater Christi, quae per aurem
conceptisti, Gabriele nuntio.
Gaude, quia Deo plena peperisti sine poena,
cum pudoris lilio.
Gaude, quia tui nati, quem dolebas mortem
pati, fulget resurrectio.
Gaude, Christo ascendente, et in coelum te
vidente, motu fertur proprio.
Gaude, quae post ipsum scandis, et est honor
tibi grandis, in coeli palatio.
Ubi fructus ventris tui nobis detur per te frui in
perenni gaudio. Alleluia.

*Rejoice, O virgin, mother of Christ, who
conceived by hearing the messenger Gabriel.
Rejoice, for full of God, you gave birth without
pain, retaining the lily of modesty.
Rejoice, for your son, whose death you
mourned, shines in the resurrection.
Rejoice, for as Christ ascends, while you look
on, into heaven, he is borne of his own accord.
Rejoice, you who ascend after him, for there is
great honour for you in the palace of heaven.
May the fruit of your womb, through you, be
given to us in everlasting joy. Alleluia.*

Missa Hodie Christus natus est: Sanctus & Benedictus

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus
Sabaoth. Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

*Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of hosts, heaven
and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the
Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*

O magnum mysterium

O magnum mysterium
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum
jacentem in praesepio.
O beata Virgo, cujus viscera meruerunt
portare Dominum Jesum Christum. Alleluia.

*O great mystery
and wonderful sacrament
that animals might see the Lord's birth
lying in a manger.
O blessed virgin, whose womb was worthy
to carry Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia.*

O regem coeli

O regem coeli, cui talia famulantur obsequia!
Stabulo proponitur qui continet mundum:
Iacet in praesepio, et in caelis regnat.

Alleluia.

Natus est nobis hodie Salvator,
qui est Christus Dominus, in civitate David:
Iacet in praesepio, et in caelis regnat.
Alleluia.

*O King of heaven, who served with such obedience!
He is laid in the stable, he who holds the world:
He lies in the manger and reigns in heaven.
Alleluia.*

*Today unto us is born a Savior,
who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David:
He lies in the manger and reigns in heaven.
Alleluia.*

Missa Hodie Christus natus est: Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona nobis pacem.

*Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the
world, have mercy upon us.
Lamb of God, who take away the sins of the
world, grant us peace.*

Hodie nobis de coelo

Hodie nobis de caelo
pax vera descendit:
Hodie per totum mundum
melliflui facti sunt caeli.

Hodie illuxit nobis
dies redemptionis novae,
reparationes antiquae
felicitatis aeternae.
Hodie per totum mundum
melliflui facti sunt caeli.

*Today for us
true peace came down from heaven.
Today for all the world
the heavens rained sweetness.*

*Today for us hath dawned
the day of our redemption,
and of the restitution
of ancient everlasting bliss.
Today for all the world
the heavens rained sweetness.*

O beatum et sacrosanctam diem

O beatum et sacrosanctum diem,
in qua Dominus noster de Virgine Maria
pro nobis nasci dignatus est.
Gaudeat itaque universus orbis,
et cantemus illi,
in sono tubæ, cithara,
psalterio et organo.
Congratulemur cum multitudine
angelorum exercitus,
semper suas laudes cantantibus. Noe.

*O blessed and most holy day
on which our Lord was born of the Virgin
Mary for our sake.
Let the whole world therefore rejoice,
and let us sing to him
to the sound of the trumpet, strings,
the harp and the organ.
Let us rejoice with the numerous
hosts of angels,
ceaselessly singing his praise. Noel.*

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