

Rejoice!

Jubilant holy music for midnight mass

Joyous and uplifting music by four great Baroque composers, Bach, Handel, Alessandro Scarlatti and Schütz, telling the Christmas story through major works such as 'Messiah' and the 'Christmas Oratorio' or providing grand musical reflections on the subject.

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

Messiah

- 1 For unto us a child is born
- 2 Every valley shall be exalted
- 3 Rejoice greatly

Amadeus Ensemble conducted by Valentin Radu, David Price, tenor, Jennifer Lane, mezzo-soprano

Alessandro Scarlatti (1660–1723)

Christmas Pastoral Cantata

(Cantata Pastorale per la nativita di Nostro Signore Gesu Christo)

- 4 Introduction
- 5 Recitative. O Betlemme altera povertà venturoso
- 6 Aria. Dal ben seno d'una stella
- 7 Recitative. Preso d'uomo la forma, alle gelide tempre
- 8 Aria. L'autor d'ogni mio bene
- 9 Recitative. Fortunati pastori giacchè v'è dato in sorte
- 10 Aria. Tocco la prima sorte a voi, pastori

Mainz Chamber Orchestra directed by Günter Kehr, Gertraud Stocklassa, soprano

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Magnificat

- 11 Et exultavit spiritus meus (And my spirit shall rejoice)
- 12 Omnes generations (All generations shall be exalted)
- 13 Gloria patri (Glory to the Father, Son and Holy Ghost)

Stuttgart Figural Choir, Stuttgart Bach Orchestra conducted by Helmuth Rilling, Hildegard Rüttgers, alto

Heinrich Schütz (1585–1672)

14 Magnificat

Spandau Kantorei conducted by Helmuth Rilling, Elisabeth Speiser, soprano, Kurt Huber, counter-tenor, Josef Schmalhofer, tenor, Günther Willhelms, bass

Johann Sebastian Bach

Christmas Oratorio

- 15 Jauchzet frohlocket (Christians be joyful)
- 16 Ich will nur Dir zu Ehren leben (Thee alone I would praise)
- 17 Jesus richte mein Beginnen (Jesus guide my beginnings)

Vienna Symphony Orchestra and Academy Chamber Choir conducted by Ferdinand Grossman, Erich Majkut, tenor

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Jubilant Holy Music for Midnight Mass



Christmas Day is the only one on which mass is celebrated three times. This custom, which is peculiar to the Western Church, was established in the VIIIth century when the Pope celebrated the Christmas office in a number of churches around Rome. During Charlemagne's reign, this custom spread throughout his empire but it was only in the XIXth century that it became usual to celebrate the three masses consecutively.

In reference to the content of the respective Gospels in the Roman missal for these three masses, the faithful came to call the first mass the "Angels' Mass", the second the "Shepherds' Mass" and the third the 'Mass of the Divine Word'. The masses are better known under the names of: Midnight Mass, Dawn Mass and Christmas Day Mass.

The Midnight Mass was originally celebrated by the Pope towards midnight in the chapel of Santa Maria Maggiore Basilica in Rome before a small congregation. Pope Sixtus III had constructed this small chapel in the year 440 to house a crèche which faithfully reproduced the one in Bethlehem.

The celebration of mass at midnight at Santa Maria Maggiore is based on the ancient belief that Jesus was born precisely on the stroke of twelve. We owe this information to the thirteenth century Hungarian Saint Elizabeth. A fourth century Latin hymn, *Quando Noctis medium*, already reflected the belief that the Messiah was born on the stroke of midnight.

Solemn and impressive with the joyous sound of pealing bells, with light sparkling everywhere and with hymns of joy, Midnight Mass reached its high point with the procession of the Christ Child. Some churches have preserved this custom today, sometimes even conferring on a young couple and their baby the privilege of representing the Holy Family.

Custom has it that the youngest children who are unable to attend Midnight Mass are taken on Christmas Day to see the 'baby Jesus' and to leave their offering for the collection of the Infant Jesus with the 'beautiful angel'.

There are other charming traditions relating to the Procession of the Christ Child. Students at the Ursuline Convent in Quebec would dress in white robes and wear crowns, and these young girls (of whom the smallest had the honour of carrying the basket in which the effigy of Jesus lay) would form a procession and move slowly towards the crèche in the chapel singing. This custom ceased in 1935.

A British traveller in the late eighteenth century recounts his attendance at a Midnight Mass in Canada:

"Around 10 o'clock in the evening, a cradle was ceremoniously carried into the choir of the church. At midnight, a wax Jesus was placed in it with great ceremony and then rocked throughout the whole mass to the sound of carols." This ceremony still takes place in some Canadian provinces today.

There is a delightful custom emphasising the humanity of the Christ Child at Midnight Mass that originated in Germany. A manger scene would be set up in the church and the celebrant and altar boys would rock the cradle of the Holy Infant. Lullaby-like carols would be sung at the same time to help the infant Jesus sleep.

We celebrate the beauty and joy of this holy evening with some magnificent examples of great religious works that will inspire us all.