

WIGMORE HALL 125

Tuesday 23 December 2025
7.30pm

Christmas Folklore

Siglo de Oro

Patrick Allies director

Soprano

Hannah Ely

Sarah Keating

Isabella Gibber

Alexandra Kidgell

Alto

Rebekah Niesser-Jones

Katherine Nicholson

Lowri Bufton

Tenor

Paul Bentley-Angell

Chris Fitzgerald-Lombard

Daniel Lewis

Bass

Ben Rowarth

Jonathan Pratt

Sam Mitchell

Sam Gilliat

Tom Hollister percussion

Anon

The Wolf and the Lamb

Hanacpachap cussicuinin (pub. 1631)

Song of the Nuns of Chester (c.1425)

Es ist ein Ros entsprungen (1609) *harmonised by Michael Praetorius arranged by Melchior Vulpus*

Ríu, ríu, chíu (pub. 1558)

Anon

The Mystery Plays

Coventry Carol (c.1580)

As I Rode Out (2014)

Peter Foggitt (b.1984)

Traditional

The Beasts on Christmas Eve

The Nailsbourne Beasts Song *arranged by Patrick Allies*

The Oxen (1991)

In Bethlehem above (2023)

Methinks I see an heavenly Host (pub. 1786)

Jonathan Rathbone (b.1957)

Yshani Perinpanayagam (b.1983)

William Billings (1746-1800)

Interval



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Paul Spicer (b.1952)	Mary Sings Lullabies
Anon	In a Field as I Lay
Peter Warlock (1894-1930)	Lullay: I Saw a Swete Semly Syght (c.1500)
	I Saw a Fair Maiden (1927)
	Angels Appearing
Judith Weir (b.1954)	My Guardian Angel (1997)
	The Feast of Stephen
Anon	Staffansvisa (c.1830-40) <i>arranged by Gunnar Idenstam</i>
	Good King Wenceslas (pub. 1582) <i>arranged by Piers Connor Kennedy</i>
	Carolling and Wassailing
Guillaume Costeley (c.1530-1606)	Allon, gay bergeres (pub. 1567)
Traditional	Wassail Song (pub. 1928) <i>arranged by Martin Shaw</i>
Trad/English	The Boar's Head Carol (pub. 1521)
Anon	Gaudete (2004) <i>arranged by Karl Jenkins</i>



UNDER 35S

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The greatest stories have a habit of engendering further stories. It is not surprising, therefore, that the account of the birth in a Bethlehem stable of Jesus of Nazareth, believed by Christians to be God in human form, has prompted so many tangential, non-biblical tales. And of course, not just stories, but also customs and rituals that while not central to the dissemination of the Gospel account of Christ's birth, are nevertheless held dear by those who transmit them. A handful of these are represented tonight, offering just a flavour of the many traditions that make up Christmas folklore.

The programme opens with a sequence devoted to the Virgin Mary, and some of the ways in which her role is commemorated. Dating from 1631, the hymn *Hanacpachap cussicuinin* is fêted as the earliest polyphony known to have been printed in the colonial Americas. It compares Mary to a tree, a column of ivory, and an iris. The *Song of the Nuns of Chester* describes the roles of Mary and Joseph as they care for their newborn baby in the stable. The source is a 15th-century manuscript used in the processions of St Mary's Nunnery in Chester. The anonymous words of the hymn *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen* are most often sung to the melody and harmonies given to it by **Michael Praetorius** in 1609. Mary is compared to a rose, springing forth from the Root of Jesse, herself giving life to Jesus Christ. In this version, a four-part canon is added, penned by Praetorius's contemporary Melchior Vulpus. *Riu, riu, chíu* is a Spanish *villancico*, a form of secular music that gradually made its way into church. Its dance origins are clear as it excitedly relates how sinless Mary, the 'lamb', was protected from 'the wolf'.

Across medieval Europe, communities collaborated on mystery plays throughout the Christian calendar. In Coventry, the Shearmen and Tailors' Pageant told the nativity story, including the austere *Coventry Carol*, which depicts King Herod's infanticide. It is presented here with a tenor line, ostensibly missing, added by Ben Byram-Wigfield. Also from this pageant is *As I Rode Out This Enderes Night*, sung here not in its medieval form but in a jolly, folksy version composed by **Peter Foggitt**.

In around 1907, the folklorist Ruth Tongue transcribed a Somerset carol known as *The Nailsbourne Beasts Song*. This was the sole domain of the cowman, who would sing it to the cattle in the barn every year on 24 December. In a similar vein, Thomas Hardy learnt as a boy of the saying that the oxen would kneel down every year as the moment of Christ's birth approached. This inspired his nostalgic poem *The Oxen*, set by **Jonathan Rathbone** with great sensitivity to mood and meaning. In *Bethlehem above*, by the musical polymath **Yshani Perinpanayagam**, sets the composer's own evocative words describing the nativity. Here, too, the oxen have their role, whispering

'Gloria in excelsis Deo'. *Methinks I See an heavenly Host* is an 18th-century carol by **William Billings**, who lived and worked in Massachusetts. It is written in a boisterous, hymn-like, style, using the full singing range. The oxen are vocal again: this time they are encouraged to exult and 'low for joy'.

Mary's singing has been the inspiration for countless Christmas carols, and we will present a trio of these. **Paul Spicer's** *In a Field as I Lay* offers a soothing lullaby with luscious harmonies. *Lullay: I Saw a Swete Semly Syght* dates from around 1500. Written in just two parts, it alternates between a cradle-song chorus, and verses that recount the mystical experience of watching Mary sing to her child. *I Saw a Fair Maiden*, by **Peter Warlock**, sets another anonymous medieval poem to a simple, lyrical tune. The words describe the musical features of Christ's birth, with Mary and the angels contributing sweet melodies.

Another tradition has it that angels appear more frequently at Christmas time. This prompted **Judith Weir** to set words by William Blake that honour this. *My Guardian Angel* has a simple line for the audience to join in with, so please have your vocal cords ready.

St Stephen is linked to Christmas because his feast is celebrated by Western Christians on 26 December. For centuries there has been a tradition of giving alms to the poor on St Stephen's Day. The 10th-century King of Bohemia, Wenceslas I, is depicted doing this in *Good King Wenceslas*. The words are by English priest and writer John Mason Neale, grafted on to a 13th-century Spring carol from the 16th-century *Piae Cantiones*. This has been brought up to date in a brand-new arrangement by Piers Connor Kennedy, written for tonight's performance. Legend has it that St Stephen was Herod's stable boy. *Staffansvisa* is a traditional Swedish ballad that refers to this equestrian fable.

Finally we come to the tradition of carol singing. Beginning in France we have **Guillaume Costeley's** *Allon, gay bergeres*, the carol of the shepherdesses, encouraging them to visit the Christ child, tin whistle in tow. England has an old custom of wassailing, which involved singing and dancing to toast good health, and blessing the fruit trees. *Wassail Song* describes this practice, placing a humorous emphasis on the refreshments required from local houses. *The Boar's Head Carol* describes the ceremonial serving up of a boar's head at a Christmas feast. While this version of this exuberant carol dates from the 16th Century, the tradition it commemorates is likely to be far older. To close, we return to *Piae Cantiones* for the medieval carol, *Gaudete*. In the hands of **Karl Jenkins**, it dances with skipping rhythms and uses the full vocal gamut. Who can resist its command to rejoice?

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The Wolf and the Lamb

Anon

Hanacpachap cussicuinin (pub. 1631)	Heaven's joy!
Hanacpachap cussicuinin, Huaran cacta muchas caiqui. Yupairuru pucocmallqui, Runa cunap suyacuinin. Callpannacpa quemicuinin, Huaciascaita.	Heaven's joy! A thousand times shall we praise you. O tree bearing thrice- blessed fruit, O hope of humankind, helper of the weak. Hear our prayer!
Uyarihuai muchascaita Diospa rampan Diospamaman Yurac tocto hamancaiman Yupascalla, collpascaita Huahuaiquiman suyuscaita Huahuaiqui	Attend to our pleas, O column of ivory, Mother of God! Beautiful iris, yellow and white, receive this song we offer you; come to our assistance, show us the fruit of your womb!

Song of the Nuns of Chester (c.1425)

Anonymous

Qui creavit coelum, lully, lully, lu, Nascitur in stabulo, by, by, by, by, by, Rex qui regit seculum, lully, lully, lu.	He who created the heavens, lully, lully, lu, is born in a stable, by, by, by, by, by, the king who rules the world, lully, lully, lu.
Joseph emit paniculum, lully, lully, lu, Mater involvit puerum, by, by, by, by, by, Et ponit in praesepio, lully, lully, lu.	Joseph brings a garment, lully, lully, lully, lu, the mother wraps the child, by, by, by, by, and lays it in a manger, lully, lully, lu.
Inter animalia, lully, lully, lu, Jacent mundi gaudia, by, by, by, by, by, Dulcis super omnia, lully, lully, lu.	Among the animals, lully, lully, lully, lu, the joys of the world lie, by, by, by, by, sweet above all things, lully, lully, lu.
Lactat mater Domini, lully, lully, lu,	The mother suckles the Lord on her breast, lully, lully, lu,
Osculatur parvulum, by, by, by, by, by, Et adorat Dominum, lully, lully, lu.	kisses the little one, by, by, by, by, and worships the Lord, lully, lully, lu.

Roga mater filium, lully, lully, lu, Ut det nobis gaudium, by, by, by, by, by, In perenni gloria, lully, lully, lu.	The mother asks her son, lully, lully, lu, that he may give us joy, by, by, by, by, in everlasting glory, lully, lully, lu.
In sempiterna saecula, lully, lully, lu, In eternum et ultra, by, by, by, by, by, Det nobis sua gaudia, lully, lully, lu.	World without end, lully, lully, lu, forever and ever, by, by, by, by, by, may He give us his joy, lully, lully, lu.

Es ist ein Ros entsprungen (1609)

Anonymous
harmonised by Michael Praetorius arranged by Melchior Vulpus

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming

Es ist ein Ros entsprungen aus einer Wurzel zart, Wie uns die Alten sungen, von Jesse kam die Art Und hat ein Blümlein bracht Mitten im kalten Winter, wohl zu der halben Nacht.	Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming from tender stem hath sprung! of Jesse's lineage coming, as men of old have sung. It came, a floweret bright, amid the cold of winter, when half spent was the night.
Das Röslein, das ich meine, davon Jesaia sagt, Hat uns gebracht alleine Marie, die reine Magd. Aus Gottes ew'gem Rat Hat sie ein Kind geboren wohl zu der halben Nacht.	Isaiah 'twas foretold it, the Rose I have in mind; with Mary we behold it, the virgin mother kind. To show God's love aright, she bore to men a Saviour, when half spent was the night.
Das Blümelein so kleine, das duftet uns so süss, Mit seinem hellen Scheine vertreibt's die Finsternis: Wahr' Mensch und wahrer Gott, Hilft uns aus allem Leide, rettet von Sünd und Tod.	O Flower, whose fragrance tender with sweetness fills the air, dispel with glorious splendour the darkness everywhere; true man, yet very God, from Sin and death now save us, and share our every load.

Ríu, ríu, chíu (pub. 1558)

Riu, riu, chiu, la guarda ribera, Dios guardó del lobo a nuestra cordera.	Riu, riu, chiu, the river bank protects it, as God kept the wolf from our lamb.
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El lobo rabioso la quiso morder, Mas Dios poderoso la supo defender, Quisola hazer que no pudiese pecar, Ni aún original esta Virgen no tuviera.	The rabid wolf tried to bite her but God Almighty knew how to defend her, He wished to create her impervious to sin, nor was this maid to embody original sin.
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Este qu'es nacido es el gran monarca, Christo patriarca, de carne vestido; Ha nos redimido con se hacer chiquito, A un qu'era infinito, finito se hiziera.	He who's now begotten is our mighty Monarch, Christ, our Holy Father, in human flesh embodied; He made himself small and so redeemed us: He who was infinite became finite.
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Muchas profecias lo han profetizado, Ya un nuestros dias lo hemos al consado Adios humanado vemos en el suelo, Yal hombre nelcielo porquel le quistera.	Many prophecies told of his coming, and now in our days have we seen them fulfilled. God became man, on earth we behold him, and see man in heaven because he so willed.
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The Mystery Plays

Anon

Coventry Carol (c.1580)

Robert Croo

Lully Lulla, thou little tiny child,
By by lully lullay.

O sisters too how may we do,
For to preserve this day,
This poor youngling for whom we do sing,
By by lully lullay.

Herod the king in his raging,
Charged he hath this day,
His man of might in his own sight,
All young children to slay.

That woe is me poor child for thee,
And ever mourn and say,
For thy parting, neither say nor sing,
By by lully lullay.

Lully Lulla, thou little tiny child,
By by lully lullay.

Peter Foggitt (b.1984)

As I Rode Out (2014)

Anonymous

As I rode out this enders night,
Of three jolly shepherds I saw a sight,
And all about their fold a star shone bright:
*They sang terly terlow;
So merrily the shepherds their pipes gan blow.*

Down from heaven, from heaven so high,
Of angels there came a great company,
With mirth and joy and great solemnity,
They sang terly terlow; ...

The Beasts on Christmas Eve

Traditional

The Nailsbourne Beasts Song

Anonymous

arranged by Patrick Allies

O the beastës all heard the Angel call
When the Cock sang ‘Christ is born’,
And they all kneeled to pray down upon the hay,
When the Cock sang ‘Christ is born’,
And the Ruddick sang, O the little Ruddick sang,
So sweetly sangéd he,
On Chrissimas morn on the Blessed Thorn,
On a twig of the Holy Tree.

Then the oxen they did low and the ponies they did bow,
When the Cock sang ‘Christ is born’,
And the Donkey roared, ‘Praise Our Sweet Lord’
When the Cock sang ‘Christ is born’.
And the Ruddick sang...

Let us kneel in the hay, for ‘tis Christmas Day,
When the Cock sings ‘Christ is born’,
And there’s blooth on the twig and the lambs do jig
When the Cock sings ‘Christ is born’,
And the Ruddick sings, O the little Ruddick sings,
So sweetly singés he,
On Chrissimas morn on the Blessed Thorn,
On a twig of the Holy Tree.

Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended.

Jonathan Rathbone (b.1957)

The Oxen (1991)
Thomas Hardy

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
'Now they are all on their knees,'
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said on Christmas Eve,
'Come; see the oxen kneel,

In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,'
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

Yshani Perinpanayagam (b.1983)

In Bethlehem above (2023)
Yshani Perinpanayagam

In Bethlehem above,
A star pierces the midnight sky to proclaim
The child is born!
Gloria in excelsis Deo!

In a stall below
A babe fed by a mother loving and brave.
The oxen whisper:
Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Shepherd, take knee with king.
Rejoice! Heaven and earth resound with his glory,
The angels singing:
Gloria in excelsis Deo!

William Billings (1746-1800)

Methinks I see an heavenly Host (pub. 1786)
William Billings

Methinks I see an heav'nly host,
Of angels on the wing!
Methinks I hear their cheerful notes,
So merrily they sing.

Let all your fears be banish'd hence,
Glad tidings I proclaim;
For there's a savior born today,
And Jesus is His name.

Lay down your crooks, and quit your flocks,
To Bethlehem repair;
And let your wand'ring steps be squar'd
By yonder shining star.

Seek not in courts or palaces,
Nor royal curtains draw;
But search the stable, see your God
Extended on the straw.

Then learn from hence ye rural swains,
The meekness of your God,
Who left the boundless realms of joy
To ransom you with blood.

The master of the inn refus'd,
A more commodious place;
Ungen'rous soul of savage mould,
And destitute of grace.

Exult ye oxen, low for joy,
Ye tenants of the stall,
Pay your obeisance, on your knees
Unanimously fall.

The Royal Guest you entertain,
Is not of common birth,
But second to the Great I Am,
The God of heav'n and earth.

Then suddenly a heav'nly host,
Around the shepherds throng,
Exulting in the threefold God
And thus address their song.

To God the Father, Christ the Son,
And Holy Ghost ador'd:
The First and Last, the Last and First,
Eternal praise afford.

Interval

Mary Sings Lullabies

Paul Spicer (b.1952)

In a Field as I Lay

Anonymous

Byby, lullaby, rock'd I my child.

In a field as I lay
Me thought I heard and angel say
And speak these wordes wild:
'My little son with thee I play and sing,'
Thus rocked she her child

Byby, lullaby...

Then marvell'd I right sore of this,
A maid to have a child ewis,
To have a child, my sweetest son
And yet my king of bliss;
Thus rocked she her child.

Byby, lullaby...

Anon

Lullay: I Saw a Swete Semly Syght (c.1500)

Anonymous

*Lullay, lullow, lully, lullay,
Bewy, bewy, lully, bewy,
Lully, lullow, lully, lullay,
Baw, baw my barne, sleep softly now.*

I saw a swete semly syght
A blisful birde, a blossom bright
That murnyng made and mirth of mange:

Lullay, lullow, lully, lullay, ...

A maydin moder, mek and myld
In credil kep a knave child
That softly slepe, softly slepe.
Sho sat and sange:

Lullay, lullow, lully, lullay, ...

Peter Warlock (1894-1930)

I Saw a Fair Maiden (1927)

Anonymous

I saw a fair maiden sitten and sing,
She lulled a little child, a sweetê lording.
*Lullay, mine liking, my dear son, my sweeting,
Lullay, my dear heart, mine own dear darling.*

That same lord is He that made allê thing,
Of allê lordis He is lord, of allê kingës kings.

There was mickle melody at that childës birth,
All that were in Heaven's bliss they made mickle mirth.

Pray we now to that Child, and to His mother dear,
Grant them His blessing that now maken cheer,

Angels Appearing

Judith Weir (b.1954)

My Guardian Angel (1997)

William Blake

Alleluia.
The Angel that presided o'er my birth
Said, 'Little Creature, form'd of Joy & Mirth,
Go Love without the help of anything on earth'.

Please do not turn the page until the song and its accompaniment have ended.

The Feast of Stephen

Anon

Staffansvisa (c.1830-40) Staffan's Song

Traditional
arranged by Gunnar
Idenstam

Staffan var en stalledräng – Håll dig väl, fålen min! Han vattnade sina fålar fem. – Håll dig väl, fålen min! Stjärnorna de tindra så klara, Gossar låt oss lustiga vara. En gång blott om året så, En fröjdefull jul vifå.	Staffan was a stable-lad – Steady now, steed of mine! He watered his fine horses five. – Steady now, steed of mine! Stars are twinkling clear as glass. Lads, let us now sing and be merry. One time only every year, A frolicsome Christmas we have.
Hastigt lägges sadeln på – Håll dig väl, fålen min! Innan solen mänd' uppgå. – Håll dig väl, fålen min! Stjärnorna de tindra ...	Quickly is the saddling done – Steady now, steed of mine! Ere the sun has time to rise – Steady now, steed of mine! Stars are twinkling ...
Innan någon vaknat har – Håll dig väl, fålen min! Framme han vid skogen var. – Håll dig väl, fålen min! Stjärnorna de tindra ...	Ere a person was awake – Steady now, steed of mine! He had reached the forest edge. – Steady now, steed of mine! Stars are twinkling ...

Good King Wenceslas (pub. 1582)

John Mason Neale
arranged by Piers Connor Kennedy

Good King Wenceslas look'd out on the Feast of Stephen,
When the snow lay round about, deep, and crisp, and
even:
Brightly shone the moon that night, though the frost was
cruel,
When a poor man came in sight, gath'ring winter fuel.

'Hither, page and stand by me, if thou know'st it, telling,
Yonder, peasant, who is he? Where and what is dwelling?'
'Sire, he lives a good league hence, underneath the
mountain,
Right against the forest fence, by Saint Agne's fountain.

'Bring me flesh, and bring me wine, bring me pinelogs
hither:
Thou and I will see him dine, when we bear them thither.'
Page and monarch, forth they went, forth they went
together:
Through the rude wind's wild lament and the bitter
weather.

'Sire, the night is darker now, and the wind blows
stronger;
Fails my heart, I know not how; I can go no longer.'
'Mark my footsteps, good my page; tread thou in them
boldly:
Thou shalt find the winter's rage freeze thy blood less
coldly.'

In his master's steps he trod, where the snow lay dinted;
Heat was in the very sod which the saint had printed.
Therefore, Christian men, be sure, wealth or rank
possessing,
Ye who now will bless the poor, shall yourselves find
blessing.

Carolling and Wassailing

Guillaume Costeley (c.1530-1606)

Allon, gay bergeres (pub. 1567) Let's go gaily, Shepherdesses

Anonymous

Allon, gay, gay, gay, Bergeres, Allon, gay, soyez legeres, Suyvez moy.	Let's go gaily, Shepherdesses, let's go gaily, be light, follow me.
Allon, allon voir le Roy, Qui du ciel en terre est nay, Allon, gay ...	Let's go see the King, who from heaven is born on Earth. Let's go gaily ...
Un beau present luy feray, De quoy? De ce flageolet que j'ay tant gay. Allon, gay ...	I'll make him an attractive present, of what? This tin whistle that I have, so gay. Let's go gaily ...
Un gâteau luy donneray, Et moy, Plain hanap luy offriray, Gay, gay! Allon, gay ...	I will give him a cake, and me, I'll offer him a full drinking cup. Let's go gaily ...
Ho, ho! Paix-la! Je le voy; Il tette bien sans le doigt, le petit Roy!	Oh, oh, hush! I see him; He's nursing well, not with his thumb, the little King!
Allon, gay, gay, gay Bergeres, Allon, gay, soyez legeres, Le Roy boit!	Let's go gaily, Shepherdesses let us go gaily, be light, the King is drinking!

Traditional

Wassail Song (pub. 1928)
Traditional
arranged by Martin Shaw

Here we come a-wassailing
among the leaves so green;
here we come a-wand’ring
so fair to be seen.

Refrain:
Love and joy come to you,
and to you your wassail too;
and God bless you and send you a happy New Year,
and God send you a happy New Year.

Our wassail cup is made
of the rosemary tree,
and so is your beer
of the best barley.
Refrain

Call up the butler of this house,
put on his golden ring.
Let him bring us up a glass of beer,
and better we shall sing.
Refrain

We have got a little purse
of stretching leather skin;
we want a little of your money
to line it well within.
Refrain

Bring us out a table
and spread it with a cloth;
bring us out a mouldy cheese,
and some of your Christmas loaf.
Refrain

God bless the master of this house
likewise the mistress too,
and all the little children
that round the table go.
Refrain

Trad/English

The Boar’s Head Carol (pub. 1521)
Anonymous

The boar’s head in hand bear I
Bedecked with bays and rosemary.
And I pray you, my masters, be merry,
Quot estis in convivio. [howsoever many are at the feast]

Caput apri defero, [I bring the boar’s head]
Reddens laudes Domino. [rendering praises to the Lord]

The boar’s head, as I understand,
Is the rarest dish in all this the land,
Which thus bedecked with a gay garland,
Let us *servire cantico.* [Let us serve with a song]

Our steward hath provided this
In honour of the King of bliss
Which on this day to be servèd is
In Reginensi atrio: [in the Queen’s hall]

Anon

Gaudete (2004)
Anonymous
arranged by Karl Jenkins

Rejoice

Gaudete, gaudete! Christus est natus Ex Maria virgine, gaudete!	Rejoice, rejoice! Christ is born of the Virgin Mary – rejoice!
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Tempus adest gratiae Hoc quod optabamus, Carmina laetitiae Devote reddamus.	The time of grace has come – what we have wished for, songs of joy let us give back faithfully.
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Deus homo factus est Natura mirante, Mundus renovates est A Christo regnante.	God has become man, with nature marvelling, the world has been renewed by the reigning Christ.
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Ezechielis porta Clausula pertransitur, Unde lux est orta Salus invenitur.	The closed gate of Ezekiel is passed through, whence the light is raised, salvation is found.
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Deus homo factus est Natura mirante, Mundus renovates est A Christo regnante.	God has become man, with nature marvelling, the world has been renewed by the reigning Christ.
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