**Wonder in the Waiting**

**Advent Jazz Vespers Script**

Narrator 1:

Good evening, and welcome to ‘Wonder in the Waiting’, an Advent Jazz Vespers service.

The Jazz Vespers Service originated in New York in the 1960’s. It is an example of the coming together of several traditions, each finding a unifying voice through the unique musical heritage that we call ‘jazz’.

Bringing jazz music to church is nothing new. Through the years, many great jazz artists have interpreted religious music in a jazz context. Duke Ellington, Dave Brubeck and Wynton Marsalis are just some of the composers who have used biblical themes and imagery to inform and inspire their work.

The evening ‘Office of Vespers’ stretches way back into the worship life of the Jewish people. Vespers traditionally began at what was known as the rising of the evening star. This daily time was called the *‘Lucinarium’* which meant *‘time to light the lamps’.*

Jazz Vespers can be either loud and lively, or give time for quiet reflection*.* Tonight the music is more reflective and will be interspersed with Advent-themed artwork and readings. You don’t need to do anything – just breathe in deeply. And as we gather to light the lamps and wait together ahead of Christmas Day, we pray that the light of Advent might renew our bodies, minds and hearts.

Narrator 2:

Tonight we will go on a journey into the mystery of Advent – the paradox of the ‘now and not yet’. We will allow space for the longing and pain which exist alongside the joy and celebration of this season. This is a time to lean into lament, wonder in the waiting and look forward expectantly, hopeful for the light to come.

There will be opportunity tonight to sit in silence and reflect on what is going on in and around you. That will be when you see the word ‘WAIT’ come up on the screen. Don’t be fazed by the silence. Instead, let it hug you.

Narrator 1:

There will also be opportunity later this evening to light a candle representing a prayer in your heart – a memory of someone or something you hold dear, a sense of gratitude or anxiety in the present, a fear or hope for the future. When that happens, come forward, or just sit and reflect in the candlelight. We come to acknowledge the God who is in all and who, in the Babe of Bethlehem, is the Light and Hope of the World.

Narrator 2:

The word ‘Advent’ literally means ‘*the coming, the unexpected arrival of something or someone important’*. Around 700 years before Jesus was born, the prophet Micah wrote this:

Micah 5: 2, 4-5 (NLT) (SLIDE 2-3)

*‘But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel, whose origins are in the distant past, will come from you on my behalf.… And he will stand to lead his flock with the Lord’s strength, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. Then his people will live there undisturbed, for he will be highly honoured around the world. And he will be the source of peace.’*

WAIT (SLIDE 4)

Narrator 1:

Bethlehem is still and silent, unaware of the glory that awaits it. But light is silently swooping in and putting down roots where hope and fear meet. No matter how noisy and busy life is outside these walls, tonight we can find this stillness as we wait.

Let’s sing the four verses of ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem’. There will be a short introduction before each verse.

Carol - O Little Town of Bethlehem (SLIDE 5-8)

Narrator 1:

Advent – Christ is not yet born. And the longing for his coming speaks to the many times we anxiously wait and hope for answers in our daily lives. Let this reflection called ‘Nearly’ speak into our waiting now …

Reading – Nearly, by Roddy Hamilton (SLIDE 9-12)

Is there stardust among the hay?   
Are there angels singing in the corners of the sky?   
Is there a glint of polished halos in the sunlight?

Not yet, not yet …

Are the hungry seated round the tables of the rich?   
Are the homeless settled in a stable with others?   
Are the powerful worriedly pacing their corridors of power?

Nearly, nearly …

Is the journey joined?   
Is Heaven preparing?   
Is Incarnation ready?

Just about, just about …

Welcome to the fading minutes of the waiting time,  
The last of darkening nights;   
And know the light will begin to stretch the days once more,   
for God is on the way.   
It’s time to hold your breath and start the rumour.  
Soon and very soon God is here – Immanuel!

WAIT (SLIDE 13)

Narrator 2:  
In the first chapter of his Gospel, Saint Matthew speaks out the words of the prophet Isaiah when he writes: *‘Look! The virgin will conceive a child!  She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means* ***“God is with us”.’*** *(1:23 NLT)*

Our next carol is ‘O come, O come, Immanuel’. We will sing these five verses straight through.

Carol - O Come, O Come, Immanuel (SLIDE 14-18)

Reading – How Long? (SLIDE 19-23)

Narrator 1:

How long must we go on walking in the dark,  
Every step a stretch of hope,  
Reaching for the revelation?

How long must we bear the weight   
Of our lingering longings and anxious achings,  
Lying in wait for the dry bones to rise?

How long must we be held captive,  
A lonely exhale our ransom cry   
To punctuate an unfinished sentence?

How long must we sing this song,  
Our voices cracked with broken hallelujahs,   
A holy harmony of hope in a minor key?

How long must we wait before the dawn?

Not long.

It’s not light yet, but it’s getting there.

WAIT (SLIDE 24)

Artwork – The Annunciation (SLIDE 25 - see suggested music in Leader’s notes)

As we wait in the darkness, we will take some time to look at this painting of ‘The Annunciation’, which depicts an angelic light breaking into Mary’s room, transforming her life and the course of history.

As we look upon this beautiful piece of art, take time to explore what God might be revealing to you as we wait, watch and listen.

Reading – Advent Calendar by Rowan Williams (SLIDE 26-29)

Narrator 2:On a harsh winter’s day, poet Rowan Williams imagines how God might break into our world. When the world seems lifeless, the God of life will come.

He will come like last leaf’s fall.  
One night when the   
November wind  
has flayed the trees to the bone, and earth  
wakes choking on the mould,  
the soft shroud’s folding.

He will come like frost.  
One morning when the shrinking earth opens on mist,   
to find itself arrested in the net  
of alien, sword-set beauty.

He will come like dark.  
One evening when the bursting red  
December sun draws up the sheet  
and penny-masks its eye to yield  
the star-snowed fields of sky.

He will come, will come,  
will come like crying in the night,  
like blood, like breaking,  
as the earth writhes to toss him free.  
He will come like child.

WAIT (SLIDE 30)

Narrator 1:   
Let’s sing a carol which continues the poet’s mood: ‘In the bleak midwinter’. There’s an introduction before each of the four verses.

Carol - In the Bleak Midwinter (SLIDE 31-34)

Romans 8: 19-22 (Voice Translation) (SLIDE 35-36)

Narrator 2:

‘For all of creation is waiting, yearning for the time when the children of God will be revealed. You see, all of creation has collapsed into emptiness, not by its own choosing, but by God’s. Still he placed within it a *deep and abiding* hope that creation would one day be liberated from its slavery to corruption and experience the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that all creation groans *in unison* with birthing pains up until now.’

Artwork – Nativity (SLIDE 37 - see suggested music in Leader’s notes)

Narrator 2:

We are going to look at another painting now showing a Nativity scene amongst the rubble. As we look, we groan with all of creation while we wait for the full revelation of the light bright enough to shine through every crack and chasm of darkness.

Reading – Creation Waiting (SLIDE 38-41)

Narrator 1:

As we wait for Jesus, there is a sense in which earth is waiting, but Heaven is also waiting. Here is a reading which helps us imagine the anticipation of Heaven and earth …

All creation holds its breath,  
A pregnant pause  
Before the long-expected light is revealed  
In the shape of a God-child.

All Heaven holds its breath,  
Waiting in the wings  
Before hope is hosted  
On hilltops and in hearts  
In the shape of a choir of angels.

New parents hold their breath,  
Listening for that first cry  
Before peace on earth is nurtured  
In the shape of sleepless nights.

All of the Godhead holds its breath,  
Hovering over the waters  
Before exclaiming life   
In the shape of everlasting light.

WAIT (SLIDE 42)

‘The world is waiting’ quote (SLIDE 43)

Narrator 2:

The Christian writer and activist Shane Claiborne writes:

*‘The world is waiting. We are in a world pregnant with hope, and we live in the expectation of the coming of God’s Kingdom on earth. As we wait, we also work, cry, pray, and ache; we are the midwives of another world.’*

Pause PPT on Slide 43 for reflection on Claiborne quote

Candles slide (SLIDE 44)

Narrator 1:

Now you areinvited to come and light a candle representing a prayer in your heart – a precious memory, thanks, or concern for today, a fear or hope for the future. Whether you choose to come forward or stay in your seat, breathe in this time deeply. Feel free now to come and light a candle, as you listen to the song ‘In this Light’.

Song - In this Light (SLIDE 45-47)

Reading – A New Dawn (SLIDE 48-52)

Narrator 1:

A light is dawning –

It’s on the move

Creeping towards the horizon,

The long shadows finally fading

As the light waits to take centre stage.

A flame is flickering –

Holding out against the darkness,

Holding firm against battering winds

And yet not snuffed out.

A spark is reigniting

Hope in the face of hatred,

Joy amongst the injustices,

Peace for the persecuted.

A glow is radiating

In the face of a child,

A royal beauty bright enough

To take down rulers from their thrones.

A light is dawning

Out of the cosmos,

Breaking through the clouds,

Erasing the shadows –

A visible image of glittering gold,

A vibrant harmony

Where light meets life.

Narrator 2:

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. This is our hope and our faith. And although, like the ancients of old, we are often waiting for hope, we also, like the ancients, live and pray and work with God to see hope, joy, peace and love come on earth as it is in Heaven.

Let’s listen to the song ‘What child is this?’

Artwork – Adoration of the Shepherds (SLIDE 53)

Musicians or backing track – What Child is this? (see Leaders notes)

WAIT (SLIDE 54)

Narrator 1:

Thank you for being here tonight to take space and wait for Jesus. In a momentwe will share a final reading as a blessing prayer, but first we will sing one last carol together – ‘Silent Night’. May you sleep in heavenly peace tonight as you rest in the assurance that the light is coming.

Carol – Silent Night (SLIDE 55-57)

Reading – When Skin is not Enough (SLIDE 58-60)

Narrator 2:

When skin is not enough to contain you   
and words cannot hold you   
and religion is too shallow to know you  
and theology too vague to meet you,  
Be born, O Jesus, be born as love among us,   
for there we meet Immanuel.

When the stable is not big enough   
and the story too familiar   
and the season too busy   
and the time not yet right,  
Be born, O Jesus,   
Be born as justice among us,   
for there we meet Immanuel.

When the longing is too great   
and the waiting too long   
and the promise too disturbing for our way of living,  
Be born, O Jesus,   
Be born living among us,   
for there we meet Immanuel.

Narrator 1:

God bless you in the waiting.