

The aim of these four Holy Week meditations, which I have called 'Music of the Passion' has been to give enough background on four relatively short pieces of music that throw some light on aspects of the suffering of Jesus, so that they can help us to enter into those experiences. They are not meant to be teachings, let alone fully worked-out theology, but they are intended to give all hearers space in which to try and comprehend what Jesus took on himself for our sakes.

There is a great contrast between the last piece, which we shall be hearing this evening, and the music we have heard so far. For one, it comes from the lifetime of many of us gathered here, and it is also from a very different context. When the National Theatre in 1977 first put on their production 'The Mysteries', it was hailed as a modern re-telling of an event that was a major part of English religious observance right through the Middle Ages until the more puritanical strands of reformation tradition put a stop to it. Mystery Plays were a way of recounting the Gospels and other parts of Scripture in dramatic fashion to a largely illiterate population. They existed all over Europe, but tended to die out when literacy spread and people began to read the stories for themselves, though from time to time an enduring revival of such plays took place, as for example with the Passion Play at Oberammergau.

'The Mysteries' was based on the Wakefield mystery cycle, with liberal additions from other places, such as Coventry and York. As with the originals, the production actually involved the audience, who took part rather than spectated – and as with the originals, the dramatic and musical expression was contemporary.

The music was provided by a variety of Folk Rock artists, who eventually settled in number and makeup and called themselves The Home Service. They recorded an album of some of the main musical items in 1985, and tonight's piece is taken from that.

The third and last play is called Doomsday, and we will hear music from the very last section: music for the Coronation of the Virgin, the Lyke Wake Dirge, and the final music called 'Judgement: the Wheel', which takes human reality into the eternal reality of God.

The Virgin's Coronation involves her welcome at the throne of Jesus, who sits at God's right hand, and lifts her up with him to God's presence, as humanity hopes to be lifted up at the end of time. The Lyke Wake Dirge is a celebration of death in the New Orleans style, showing that death is to be celebrated as the gateway to eternal life. The Judgement is the place where all words fall away into eternity.

I chose to conclude these Meditations with this music as it is a real antidote to any gloomy lack of hope that may have arisen in us as we entered into Christ's suffering in the earlier pieces. Each of those in its different way tried to assert something hopeful for us in Christ's suffering. Here we see a hope that is beyond words – and indeed maybe beyond expression. It is not by accident that the Evening Standard review of The Mysteries described it as 'An extraordinary experience... no wonder the end of it all saw an explosion of communal joyousness with everybody, actors, musicians, and audience alike, cheering and clapping and singing and dancing.'

When I disappear in a moment I will simply play the music. You may wish to meditate quietly as we have in the past few days, or you may wish to express

yourself in some other way, but if you choose to cheer, clap, sing , or dance, please do so quietly so as not to disturb those who just want to 'be' and to think! I will then conclude with a prayer written for this evening.

Music played

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GC8ZwzkIWNw> (only the music was played in church)

In so many small hopes, small joys, small glimpses, Lord,
we see 'that fair land where the soul never dies'.

Give us a thankful and grateful heart

that for all the pain and suffering of this week

and of the world in which we live,

through it all in Jesus you have thrown open to us

the gate of new life and eternal joy. Amen

PC, 27th March 2024