



THE ARCHBISHOPS OF
CANTERBURY & YORK



29 September 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Follow the Star: Join the Song

We are writing with an invitation for you to be part of the premiere of a special new Christmas carol in 2023.

The carol is a new setting of the well-loved text The First Nowell, written by renowned composer Bob Chilcott for choirs across the Church of England in 2023. As well as being free to download for use in Church of England schools and places of worship this year, it is also included in the much-anticipated Carols for Choirs 6 volume published by Oxford University Press in July.

The aim is to encourage as many churches, chapels and cathedrals as possible to perform the piece in a carol service, concert or at any time that suits during Advent 2023.

Since 2018, The Church of England's national Christmas themes have engaged millions of people with the Christmas message through reflections, special events, music and the good news that is ours as we put the birth of Jesus Christ at the heart of their Christmas celebrations. We are hoping to build on the significant engagement of last year's campaign Follow the Star: The Great Invitation.

This year's theme – Follow the Star: Join the Song – highlights how singing can help draw us closer to God and each other through journey from Advent to Epiphany. 'The First Nowell' is one of the centrepieces of this year's resources. We would love to see it feature in Christmas programming up and down the country, and we really hope that you will be willing to participate.

What we're inviting you to do:

- **Learn:** We're making the downloadable score, learning videos and backing tracks available free via cofe.io/Christmas
- **Sing!** Most importantly sing and enjoy the new carol! We are encouraging every church to incorporate the Carol as part of your Christmas or Advent services. It is a gift to choirs and congregations so it is for you to use however you would like.
- **Share:** Let us know that you are intending to perform The First Nowell, and if you are able, share a video of the performance using the hashtag **#FollowTheStar**.

You can find out more about what to expect from this year's Follow the Star: Join the Song campaign at churchofengland.org/Christmas.

As we prepare to celebrate the coming of the light of Christ into this dark world, may we share in God's joy together, joining the song of praise to our heavenly Lord.

Archbishop Justin Welby

Archbishop Stephen Cottrell