



CHRIST CHURCH CATHEDRAL, VICTORIA, BC

# Organ Meditation: Messiaen's *La Nativité du Seigneur*

FIRST SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS

Sunday, December 28, 2025 4.00 p.m.



CHRIST CHURCH  
CATHEDRAL  
A CATHEDRAL FOR THE CITY



## PROGRAMME NOTES

"Emotion and sincerity above all else. But conveyed to the listener by means which are clear and true." These words, written by a 27-year-old Olivier Messiaen, begin the preface to *La Nativité du Seigneur*. This nine-movement work is becoming a staple of the repertoire, especially at churches and cathedrals which support rich music programs, and is increasingly offered alongside the more traditional fare of Nine Lessons and Carols and Midnight Mass.

Messiaen composed *La Nativité* during the summer of 1935 while on vacation in Grenoble. The work marks an important shift in twentieth century organ composition, moving away not only from the idea of the symphonic organ and accompanying romanticism, favoring instead the composer's own musical language of 'modes of limited transposition,' but also in the sounds he demands of the organ: mutation stops without fundamentals create an almost 'other-worldly' effect, melodies played by the pedals sounding higher than the accompanying keyboards – Messiaen flipped the organ upside down.

*La Nativité*'s nine movements treat several theological aspects of the birth of Christ: Our predestination, fulfilled through the incarnation of the Word; God living in our midst, God suffering; The birth of the Word, the birth of Christ, and the birth of Christians; and finally descriptions of some characters from the Christmas story.

Listen for the birdsong and the shepherds' pipes in *Les bergers*, the seemingly endless final chord in *Desseins éternels*, the plodding camels in *Les Mages*, and the summation and integration of many of the preceding musical ideas in *Dieu parmi nous*.

As *La Nativité du Seigneur* is one of Messiaen's most accessible suites, we will be presenting it this afternoon alongside expanded versions of the short passages of scripture which the composer included at the top of each movement. Some are well-known and loved readings from Luke's nativity Gospel, others are more theologically heavy selections from Paul's letters and others. We invite you to let all of this wash over you or soak into you in whatever measure you wish.

## YEAR OF THE ORGAN

This concert is part of the Year of the Organ 2025, a year-long celebration of the 20th birthday of the cathedral's Hellmuth Wolff's Op. 47 pipe organ. The Year of the Organ is raising awareness of this wonderful instrument as an asset for the whole city's music community and raising funds for some essential renewal work on the instrument

The campaign has achieved two-thirds of its \$150,000 goal. If you would like to contribute to this campaign, you can make a gift by cheque, credit card or via our website. Please be sure to specify 'organ project' in the donor message. Thank you!

Officiant: Canon Ian Alexander, AAM, ODBC  
Organist: Donald Hunt, FRCO, *Director of Music*

**V:** The Lord be with you.  
**R:** And with thy spirit.  
**V:** Let us pray.

### Collect of the Day

**Officiant** Almighty God, who has given us thy only-begotten Son to take our nature upon him, and as at this time to be born of a pure virgin: Grant that we, being regenerate and made thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by thy Holy Spirit; through the same our Lord Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the same Spirit, ever one God, world without end. **Amen.**

Reading: Luke 2.1-7

I. *La Vierge et l'enfant*

The Virgin and Child

Reading: Luke 2.8.12

II. *Les Bergers*

The Shepherds

Reading: Ephesians 1.3-10

III. *Desseins éternels*

Eternal Designs

Reading: John 1.1-13

IV. *Le Verbe*

The Word

Reading: Galatians 3.23-29

V. *Les Enfants de Dieu*

The Children of God

Reading: Luke 2.13-15

VI. *Les Anges*

The Angels

Reading: Hebrews 2.5-10

VII. *Jésus accepte la souffrance*

Jesus Submits to Suffering

Reading: Matthew 2.1-11

VIII. *Les Mages*

The Magi

Reading: Luke 1.26-35

IX. *Dieu parmi nous*

God Among Us

## Collect of Christmastide

Officiant O God, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of thy only Son Jesus Christ: Grant that as we joyfully receive him as our Redeemer, we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come again to be our Judge; who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, now and ever.

All **Amen.**

## The Grace

All **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.**

## THE ORGANIST

**Donald Hunt** was born and raised in Halifax, Nova Scotia. He went on to study music at McGill University in Montreal, where he received Bachelor and Masters degrees in organ performance and composition, studying principally with John Grew. During his time in Montreal, he was assistant organist at Christ Church Cathedral, Montreal. He has also held organist posts in the UK, including at Truro Cathedral, St Paul's Cathedral, and St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh. Donald is a first prize laureate of the *Concours d'orgue de Québec* and has been a finalist in the *Concours Prix d'Europe* and the RCCO National Organ Playing Competition. Since 2017 he has served as Director of Music at Christ Church Cathedral, Victoria, where he plans the liturgical music for three Sunday services, and directs a number of choirs, including a treble choir of young choristers in partnership with the Cathedral School. He has broadcast live on BBC radios 3 and 4, including playing for the Scottish celebration of Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee. Donald is an Associate of the Royal Canadian College of Organists and a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists.

*A retiring collection will be received in aid of the work of the cathedral. Our easy to use, Tap machines are available at the Quadra Street and Burdett Ave entrances.*