

Christmas is not just for Christmas

**An exploration of the Christmas Story and its meaning,
as told by members of the congregation
at the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols
held at York Minster on Christmas Eve 2007**

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Abstract

This thesis explores the content and meaning of the Christmas Story, as expressed by members of the congregation at York Minster on Christmas Eve 2007. The work was developed through a Pilot Study in York Minster and Derby Cathedral over Christmas 2006, involving telephone and email interviews and Focus Group discussions. This enabled a questionnaire to be developed for use at York Minster's Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, held on Christmas Eve 2007; the questionnaires invited Respondents to tell the Christmas Story in their own words and to say what they thought the Christmas Story means. Completed questionnaires were analysed using grounded theory, and themes of the Respondents' understanding emerged. These themes are explored in relation to passages of Scripture read in the service and to carols sung in the service. The explicit and implicit theology of the Respondents is then compared with orthodox Christian belief, as set out in the Nicene Creed, in order to explore how Respondents' understanding did or did not correlate with what the Church of England believes. There is then reflection on issues which those constructing Christmas carol services might usefully take in to account. The thesis concludes by proposing theories for testing in further research.

This thesis makes an original contribution to research by:

- revealing what members of a particular congregation said about the Christmas Story and its meaning;
- offering a method of listening to a congregation at a Christmas service, which could be used in other contexts;

- offering new theories which might usefully be tested in further research.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: background, methodology and ethical issues

This research explores the Christmas Story and its meaning, as expressed, in response to a written questionnaire ('the Questionnaire'¹), by members of the congregation at the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols held at York Minster on Christmas Eve 2007 ('the 2007 Service'²).

The primary data for the research were qualitative and quantitative data collected from 446 questionnaires completed at the 2007 Service.

The decision to use this approach was informed by the Pilot Study,³ undertaken in York Minster and Derby Cathedral around Christmas 2006, using questionnaires, email and telephone interviews, and Focus Groups.⁴ In the Pilot Study (particularly in Focus Group discussions) many people mentioned the Christmas Story, but few elaborated on its content or meaning. This indicated that a more detailed qualitative study focusing on the Christmas Story would be fruitful.

Background

Why the Christmas Story?

The Christmas Story is embedded in 21st century British culture. It would be difficult to be living in Britain at Christmas time and not know that it

¹ Defined in Appendix 2.

² Defined in Appendix 2.

³ Defined in Appendix 2.

⁴ Defined in Appendix 2.

was Christmas. Millions of people attend Christmas carol services, in churches and elsewhere.

My aim was to explore what people regard as the content and meaning of the Christmas Story. In the Pilot Study, people had referred simply to 'the Christmas Story', as if it were one single story, which everyone would know in the same form – and yet it had been evident from other comments that this was not the case, but rather that different people had different ideas about what constitutes 'the Christmas Story' and what it means.

The idea of a single story was also apparent in the survey by Christian theology thinktank *Theos* at Christmas 2007 (much heralded in the media), when it was said that people did not know 'the Christmas Story' – but the survey was oddly selective about the elements of the Christmas Story it used, asking just four direct questions about particular elements of the story.⁵

I therefore decided to invite members of the congregation to tell the Christmas Story in their own words, so as to indicate what elements might reasonably be thought to constitute 'the Christmas Story'.

I also wanted to explore what *meaning* people attributed to the Christmas Story, as they had told it, as this was something that had not been overtly discussed in the Pilot Study, but which, like the content of the story, had appeared to be underlying much of what was said.

⁵ www.theosthinktank.co.uk.
<http://campaigndirector.moodia.com/Client/Theos/Files/Christmas.pdf>.

Why York Minster?

Between 2000 and 2006, Christmas congregations at Church of England cathedrals increased by 37%. More than 130,000 people attended services in cathedrals on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day in 2006.⁶

Until Christmas 2006, no research had been undertaken to establish why cathedral congregations in particular were increasing, or how people in the congregation perceived the services they attended. These were questions I wanted to research, and which my theological and church musical training had equipped me to research.

I had become convinced that research in this area would be worthwhile when I took informal soundings from the precentors of over 30 cathedrals in November/December 2005: many felt a tension between providing what people expect of Christmas services and providing what Christian ministers think they need; accompanying the rejoicing at burgeoning congregation numbers was the frustration of not knowing who was in the congregation and how they were interpreting the services. The precentor of York Minster was keen to explore these questions, so the Dean and Chapter of York Minster agreed to my conducting research there.⁷

Originality/contribution to knowledge and scholarship

So far as I have been able to establish, no research of this type had been done before Christmas 2006; no one I contacted⁸ mentioned being aware

⁶ Official statistics published 3 April 2007 <http://cofe.anglican.org/news/pr2807.html>.

⁷ I also conducted the Pilot Study at Derby Cathedral.

⁸ Including the precentors of all 42 Church of England cathedrals, the Archbishops' Council and the Liturgical Commission.

of any, nor could I find any published research on the topic.⁹ Much had been written about the history of carols and carol services, about Christmas liturgy, incarnational theology and Christmas as a mission opportunity, but without considering in depth the theology of the Christmas Story as presented in carol services and how that might be received by members of the congregation. Nor was there any *qualitative research* into the perceptions of people attending carol services. I believe that research in this area will benefit the mission of the Church of England, and that my research will assist further research.¹⁰

As well as making an original contribution to knowledge about the research topic itself, my research also makes an original contribution to scholarship at the interface of qualitative research with practical theology. The use of qualitative research methods in practical theology is a recent development.¹¹ There is some way to go before the two disciplines sit comfortably together; even those who have combined the two disciplines more successfully¹² indicate a bias towards theology, thereby losing some of the objectivity that qualitative research ought to have. In this research, I have developed a new method of combining the two disciplines in one particular context. I have used objective qualitative research methods, whilst using my theological training to interpret the data.

⁹ Having searched (in July 2006) the combined library catalogues of St John's College, Nottingham and five other theological colleges and the catalogues of Nottingham University and the British Library; fresh searches in August 2010 revealed nothing new.

¹⁰ A study was done in Worcester Cathedral at Christmas 2009.

¹¹ Cartledge (2003) pp12-16; Swinton and Mowat (2006) *passim*; Jolley (2006) pp17-18.

¹² e.g. Swinton and Mowat (2006) – a compilation of several qualitative studies in different areas of theology.

Methodology

I wanted to know what people think the Christmas Story is and what they think it means. This pointed clearly to a qualitative study, in which people would tell the story and give its meaning in their own words.

Qualitative research: choice of tradition/strategy¹³

Creswell outlines five traditions of qualitative inquiry: biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and case study.¹⁴

Traditions ruled out

Biography and ethnography were not appropriate for my aim, as they aim principally to study lives and behaviour. A case study would have been too narrow, because it focuses on an event 'bounded in time or place':¹⁵ I was not so interested in the *event* of one particular carol service, but in the broader effect of its contents on understanding of the Christian faith.

The two traditions most appropriate for my research were phenomenology and grounded theory.

Phenomenology¹⁶

Of phenomenology, Creswell says:

The phenomenological study...focuses...on a concept or

¹³ Creswell (1997) p47-68 calls them traditions; Denzin and Lincoln (2000, pp371-377) call them strategies.

¹⁴ Creswell (1997) pp47-68.

¹⁵ Creswell (1997) pp36-37, 40.

¹⁶ Denzin and Lincoln (2000) do not have phenomenology (or biography) as a distinct strategy/tradition, but do acknowledge the phenomenological background to analyzing interpretive practice: pp487-489.

phenomenon...and...seeks to understand the meaning of experiences of individuals about this phenomenon...how these meanings can be reduced into a specific description of the experience...Choose a phenomenology to examine a phenomenon and the meaning it holds for individuals. Be prepared to interview the individuals, ground the study in philosophical tenets of phenomenology, follow set procedures and end with the 'essence' of the meaning.¹⁷

I did initially want to understand meaning by exploring my subjects' understanding of the experience of attending a carol service. I therefore used a phenomenological approach in the Pilot Study. I began to explore the phenomenon of a carol service and the meaning it holds for individuals – the meaning of individual elements (such as carols) and the meaning of the overall experience, both at the time and over a lifetime. I also observed (in the Focus Groups – essentially group 'interviews') people developing 'meaning' by discussing the carol services they had attended. It became evident that the 'carol service experience' is a big reason why people attend; it would have been interesting to explore this further: learning more about the effects that particular aspects of the experience have on particular people would be of great value to the Church as it reflects on its mission to those who attend Christmas services.

However, as a result of the Pilot Study, I decided not to pursue this line of research further, as an even more striking theme had emerged, namely that of the Christmas Story – its content and meaning. The Christmas Story was mentioned in every Focus Group discussion and it soon became apparent that there was a pressing need to explore in more depth what

¹⁷ Creswell (1997) pp38-40.

people understood to be the Christmas Story and its meaning.¹⁸ I thought that a focussed study of the Christmas Story would be of more value to the Church than a more general exploration of particular individuals' experience of attending a carol service. And for this line of exploration, I decided that grounded theory was more appropriate.

Grounded theory

Of grounded theory, Creswell says:

*Whereas the phenomenological project focuses on the meaning of people's experience towards a phenomenon, researchers in grounded theory have a different objective – to generate a substantive theory.*¹⁹

The purpose of grounded theory is:

*to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, that relates to a particular situation. This situation is one in which individuals interact, take actions, or engage in a process in response to a phenomenon.*²⁰

Grounded theory is therefore similar to phenomenology, in that it explores how people respond to a phenomenon (in this case, a carol service), but it differs in its ultimate aim, which is to generate theory, rather than simply explanation.

¹⁸ It was not possible to do this immediately within the Focus Groups, because that would have detracted from what the Focus Groups did discuss.

¹⁹ Creswell (1997) p38.

²⁰ Creswell (1997) p56.

Phenomenology or grounded theory?

Phenomenology and grounded theory overlap, and my research could have fitted well into either tradition, so initially I deliberately collected data in a way that would work for either. Because no research had been done in this area before, it was important to approach it with an open mind; I therefore decided to collect a lot of data and see what themes and theories emerged. Because the field was potentially so broad, I would not have wanted to close any valuable avenues too early by approaching the research with preconceptions.

Key to both traditions is that data are collected from multiple individuals who have (for phenomenology) experienced a phenomenon or (for grounded theory) participated in a process about a central phenomenon; my data subjects fulfilled both these criteria.

During the Pilot Study, and in preparing the Questionnaire, I kept open the possibility that I might use either tradition.²¹ However, as I began analysing the Questionnaires, possible theories²² emerged almost immediately, and it soon became clear that grounded theory would be the most appropriate tradition to use: as this was a new area for research, and my findings would necessarily be limited to a particular context, I realised that the most useful contribution I could make would be to generate a range of new theories (grounded in the Data²³) for testing in other contexts – which is the purpose of grounded theory.

²¹ During the Pilot Study, one possible theory did emerge (see page 25) and this influenced the content of the Questionnaire; that theory subsequently developed into one of the theories offered by this thesis (Theory 2 – see Chapter 8).

²² Including that referred to in footnote 17 above.

²³ Defined in Appendix 2.

Using grounded theory in theological study

The use of grounded theory in social research emerged from the publication of Glaser and Strauss' foundational text *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967). Subsequently, Glaser and Strauss differed over how much structure there should be in the collection and analysis of data (Strauss advocating more structure and Glaser less): the split began in 1987, after which Glaser's and Strauss' paths diverged, and following Strauss' death in 1996 his work has been continued by his protégé Corbin.²⁴

The main focus of my study is theology: the theology of members of a congregation compared with the theology of the Church. I used qualitative research methods as a means to an end (theological study), rather than as the object of study.²⁵ It was therefore unnecessary to enter the debate between the two main schools of grounded theory, except to acknowledge that the methods I used were neither completely structured nor completely unstructured, and therefore might be equally acceptable or unacceptable to either school, but were in keeping with the overall tradition of grounded theory. Since the essence of grounded theory is that it develops, its methods can usefully be applied in any context (indeed that is its intention) and in conjunction with other disciplines – a point made by Corbin in an interview in 2004:

There are now many versions of the method and other than the fact they all share a desire to build theory from data, I don't know exactly what they have in common. I also find that researchers are

²⁴ The Glaser school is represented by the Grounded Theory Institute: www.groundedtheory.com.

²⁵ Creswell (2003) pp17-23 endorses such an approach.

*combining methods, which are parts of Grounded Theory with some other method, using aspects of it, such as comparative analysis and theoretical sampling, but not for the purpose of actually building theory. So I would say that Grounded Theory has taken a path of its own. But then I think that we must expect that with methods. They evolve.*²⁶

Possibly for this reason, there is now a debate about how rigorous grounded theory is.²⁷ Nevertheless, it was a suitable tradition for my purposes, in that it assisted me in the collection, analysis and evaluation of data and the generation of new theories.

One particular difference of opinion between the two schools of grounded theory highlighted an issue which was relevant for me, namely the extent to which the researcher's own preconceptions influence the data analysis.²⁸ Without needing to side with either camp, it was important to recognise how my own Christian faith would influence my perception of data on a Christian theme.²⁹ But this potential disadvantage (reduced by my recognition of it) was outweighed by the advantage that my theological training enabled me to analyse the Data in ways which would have been impossible for a researcher with no theological training, and it would certainly not have justified rejecting grounded theory as a suitable tradition within which to work.

²⁶ <http://www.qualitative-research.net/fqs-texte/3-04/04-3-32-e.htm#zi> para 17.

²⁷ Charmaz (2000) p509ff.

²⁸ Charmaz (2000) pp512-513: the Glaser school alleging that imposing any structure will involve undue influence being brought by the researcher.

²⁹ See pp20-21 below.

Choice of methods

Grounded theory lends itself to a variety of methods. Though it is sometimes said that grounded theory traditionally uses interviews,³⁰ Strauss himself allowed 'very diverse materials'.³¹ What matters is that data should be 'raw' – not shaped by preconceptions. Therefore, in the Pilot Study (see Chapter 2) I invited Participants³² to discuss carols without leading or prompting the discussions, and in the Questionnaire (see Chapter 3) the two substantive questions were open-ended, allowing the Respondents³³ to use their own words. These methods produced unstructured data, which is what grounded theory needs.

In grounded theory, data are analysed by stages of coding: first, *open coding* (assigning data to categories), then *axial coding* (linking categories) and finally *selective coding*: writing a 'story' which integrates the categories produced through open axial coding and produces *concepts* (showing how categories inter-relate); these concepts lead to propositions or hypotheses forming a theory, which might be tested in the future.³⁴

Pilot Study

For the Pilot Study, I gathered data using questionnaires, interviews (telephone and email) and Focus Groups and analysed it using grounded theory methods – see Chapter 2.

³⁰ e.g. Creswell (1997), p40.

³¹ Strauss (1987), p1; Denscombe (1998), p114.

³² Defined in Appendix 2.

³³ Defined in Appendix 2.

³⁴ Creswell (1997) pp150-152; Denscombe (1997) pp119-120; Charmaz (2000) pp514-519. In keeping with the 'open' nature of grounded theory, there are variations in terminology and approach. The application of coding to *qualitative* data is what initially made grounded theory unique in qualitative research: Strauss and Glaser (1967) pp102-103.

2007 Study³⁵

For the 2007 Study, I wanted to collect a large quantity of qualitative data which I could analyse with minimal preconceptions, to see what concepts emerged and to generate theories which could usefully be tested in further research. I wanted to collect data in ordinary language, produced with maximum freedom and minimal prompts.

The Pilot Study had shown that a questionnaire was the most effective way of gathering data from a large number of people in a short time, after which it would have been impossible to identify and contact most of those people. In the Pilot Study, a questionnaire, administered at the service itself and completed while the congregation was present in the Minster, had yielded data from a large number and range of people. For the 2007 Study, I decided that a questionnaire, though more limited than individual interviews, would give access to more people and would nonetheless enable the key elements of the Christmas Story to be identified.

The Questionnaire included some quantitative questions, designed to place the qualitative data in context and also to show if there were any patterns indicating that certain particular things were mentioned disproportionately more or less by particular groups of people.³⁶

In grounded theory research, data collection and analysis are ideally done concurrently, rather than consecutively. This was not practicable for the 2007 Study, because there was only one opportunity to collect the Data and another similar opportunity would not occur for a whole year. This

³⁵ Defined in Appendix 2.

³⁶ This having emerged as a possible concept/theory in the Pilot Study.

increased the importance of getting the Questionnaire right: for this, I was advised and assisted by Professor Paul Ballard of Cardiff University.

Advantages and disadvantages of methods used in 2007 Study

In the Pilot Study I used several different methods, whereas in the 2007 Study I used only one method: the Questionnaire.

Advantages of a questionnaire (over other methods) were: it enabled me to collect data from many more Respondents than it would have been possible to interview; answers were necessarily concise, making it easier to distil the main points; and it gave all Respondents an equal chance to participate and to speak.³⁷

The main disadvantage of a questionnaire, compared with interviews and focus groups, was that it was not possible to ask Respondents to clarify ambiguous or incomplete answers. This was sometimes frustrating and made it difficult to classify some answers, but the disadvantage was outweighed by the advantage of obtaining a large quantity of data.

The main advantage of using a single method (rather than multiple methods) was consistency in the Data: although Respondents' answers varied enormously, every Respondent had had an equal opportunity, so it was more reasonable to compare Questionnaires than it would have been to compare (say) a Questionnaire with an interview.

³⁷ Compared with focus groups: in the Pilot Study some Participants had dominated and others had been reluctant to speak.

The obvious disadvantage of using a single method was that it was not possible to collect *any* data of a type which could only have been obtained by a different method. However, the Pilot Study had indicated that this would not prevent me from obtaining good quality data of the type I needed: the discussions of 13 Focus Groups in two cities had been remarkably similar, with some points being raised by every group. It was reasonable to expect a similar outcome when asking people to tell the Christmas Story – a subject on which people were unlikely to need prompting or to be influenced by others. This was indeed borne out in the 2007 Study by the fact that the few Questionnaires which stated that they had been completed collaboratively were not significantly different from the majority.

A drawback with all the methods I considered and/or used was that the Respondents were self-selecting. Collecting enough data of the type I wanted inevitably relied on the goodwill of volunteers who happened to be present at a particular service: it would be possible to conduct similar research with a true cross-section of the population, but not in a cathedral on Christmas Eve.

Literature review

A thesis normally includes a review of literature in the particular field of research. Since there are no published works directly in my field, a literature review would have referred to works from the two fields which I am combining (qualitative research and theology) – effectively two separate literature reviews. This would have served little purpose other than to demonstrate that the two fields which I am combining have not

been combined before. Therefore, following Wolcott³⁸ and Silverman³⁹, I have dispensed with a formal literature review, in favour of simply combining the two fields and noting where appropriate which works have informed my argument.

Ethical Issues

This research involved collecting data about people's religious beliefs. The Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) defines data about personal religious beliefs as 'sensitive personal data' and stipulates measures which must be taken when controlling and using such data, to ensure that it remains confidential.

Pilot Study

For the Pilot Study, I stored data about interviewees' and Participants' religious beliefs electronically, alongside personal information (name and telephone number and/or email address) which would have enabled them to be identified. This made the data subject to controls applying to sensitive personal data under the DPA. I therefore registered myself as a Data Controller under the DPA and complied with the DPA as to storage and use of the data.

I obtained informed consent from telephone and email interviewees and from Participants for the use of the data they supplied. I have kept all their identities confidential.

³⁸ Wolcott (1990) p17.

³⁹ Silverman (2005) p299.

When inviting people to participate in Focus Groups, I explained what the research was about and its purpose; at the beginning of each session, each Participant gave written consent to the videotaping of the session and I made it clear that they were free to withdraw their consent at any time during or after the session and to ask for the tape or any part of it to be deleted (although no one did so). To minimise any perceived imbalance of power as between Participants and the cathedrals, or any pressure to contribute data, each cathedral offered Participants a voucher giving (as appropriate) free entry to part of York Minster or a discount in the Derby Cathedral coffee shop.⁴⁰

2007 Study

The Questionnaire offered Respondents the option of giving their name and contact details or remaining anonymous. I decided not to contact any of the Respondents, and as I did not store any sensitive personal data from the Questionnaires electronically, the DPA did not apply to the Data.

Both Studies

In both the Pilot Study and the 2007 Study, all data subjects consented to my subsequently quoting what they said, on the basis that I did so in such a way that they could not be personally identified.⁴¹ In this thesis I do not identify any Participant/Respondent by name.

⁴⁰ Following guidelines suggested by Litosseliti (2003) pp51-53.

⁴¹ Interviewees and Participants consented explicitly and Respondents consented implicitly by completing the Questionnaire (which stated that consent was implied).

The effect of my Christian beliefs

As a Christian priest, I have beliefs which underpin my epistemology. It was important to acknowledge what effect my beliefs might have on my perception of any data.

Concerning the Christmas Story, I believe:

- that God is Holy Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit;
- that God the Son became a human being in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who was born in Palestine, was crucified in about 33CE, rose from the dead, and subsequently ascended into heaven and is present now through the Holy Spirit;
- that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine;
- that God chose to become human, to die and rise again in order to demonstrate his love for all people;
- that through his life, death and resurrection, God made salvation and eternal life available to everyone who believes that Jesus Christ is Lord;
- that God is revealed in Jesus Christ, through the Bible, through the work of the Holy Spirit, through the history and tradition of the Church and through human experience.

These beliefs (my 'Core Beliefs') are consistent with orthodox Christian doctrine, but within my Core Beliefs is considerable scope for debate.

I believe that the Christmas Story is the story of Jesus' birth (again acknowledging the range of possible meanings for that phrase) and also is part of a greater story/meta-narrative of human salvation. I believe that

the Christmas Story is 'true' but I cannot say exactly where my belief lies between accepting every detail as historically accurate and seeing the whole story as mythical/metaphorical. Because of my Core Beliefs, I am prepared to believe unprovable aspects of the gospel accounts, including Jesus' miraculous conception and the appearance of angels; but I recognise that not all Christians would believe in these elements of the story and I do not think that believing every detail as presented in the Bible is necessary for Christian faith.

Part of me also has a childish, sentimental view of the Christmas story, because Christmas reminds me of my childhood; this includes 'traditional' elements of the story, including snow, a stable and animals, even though those elements are not mentioned in the Bible.

My inclination, when encountering versions and interpretations of the Christmas Story which are inconsistent with my Core Beliefs, would be to judge them as not Christian, even 'wrong'. Recognising this helped me to put my preconceptions aside and approach data objectively as a researcher. But I also acknowledge that one aim of this study was to understand barriers to Christian faith, so as to assist the mission of the Church.

Chapter 2

The Pilot Study

Initial aims

In my initial research proposal, my stated aim was to explore, in relation to the Christmas 2006 carol services at York Minster and Derby Cathedral:

- some reasons why people came to such services
- spiritual and theological perceptions of the services as experienced by members of the congregation
- how far the congregation's actual perceptions corresponded with what the Church of England believes is the significance of Christmas (especially the Incarnation).

These aims were deliberately broad, as I wanted to approach the research inductively, collecting a wide range of data without closing off any potentially useful avenues prematurely.¹ In keeping with these broad aims, I used a variety of methods for collecting data in the Pilot Study.

Data collection: December 2006 to February 2007

In 2006 I was on placement at Derby Cathedral. I therefore conducted the Pilot Study there and also, for contrast and for the reasons given on pages 6-7 above, at York Minster.

¹ Bryman (2004) pp8-10.

By coincidence, the Association of English Cathedrals (AEC) commissioned The Reverend Lynda Barley, Head of Research and Statistics at the Archbishops' Council, to conduct a survey of some cathedral congregations over Christmas 2006. That survey was therefore also conducted at Derby Cathedral and York Minster² and we shared the data. The data were gathered by a *quantitative* questionnaire, which was completed by 2636 people at four carol services on 22nd and 24th December 2006 – two at Derby Cathedral and two at York Minster.³ This questionnaire invited people to provide an email address or telephone number if they were willing to be contacted; 790 did so, enabling me to obtain data by telephone and email interviews and to recruit Participants for Focus Groups.

Between December 2006 and February 2007, I collected qualitative data from 276 people, by the following methods:⁴

- Email interviews (163 interviewees)
- Telephone interviews (72 interviewees)
- Focus Groups (80 Participants in 13 groups)

The principal data were those from the Focus Groups; initially I intended to use the telephone and email interviews principally to recruit Participants for Focus Groups, though in fact the interview data were themselves (illuminating the Focus Group data).

² The AEC survey also included Southwark Cathedral.

³ And also by 695 people at the two Midnight Masses, but I decided not to use those.

⁴ Some individuals provided data by more than one method.

Telephone and email interviews

For the email 'interviews', I sent an email asking:

- Could you say some of the reasons why you went to the service?
- What would you say that the service was for – what was its purpose?
- Do you think that there was a message in the service? If so, what was that message?
- Please add anything else you would like to say about carols and/or carol services generally

The telephone interviews included the same questions.

The most striking outcome from these interviews was that there were no obvious differences in answers given by different demographic groups: men, women, people of different ages, Christians and non-Christians, regular and infrequent churchgoers gave similar types of answers, many mentioning 'the real meaning of Christmas'. This observation influenced the direction of my research and was reinforced by the 2007 Study, leading eventually to a theory.⁵

⁵ Theory 2: see Chapter 8.

Focus Groups

In preparation for the Focus Groups, I conducted a trial run with volunteers who met at Derby Cathedral three times in November 2006. From this I developed a structure for the post-Christmas Focus Group discussions, so that they would be consistent.⁶

In February 2007, 80 people attended 13 Focus Group meetings – eight in York (47 Participants) and five in Derby (33 Participants), with between four and nine Participants each. This was many more people and groups than I had originally envisaged, because there was considerable interest: it was easy to fill all these groups. All the York Participants and most of the Derby Participants had attended one or more of the four carol services and had completed a questionnaire.

Each group met for 90 minutes and discussed the words of some of the carols sung at the carol services they had attended. All the York groups and some of the Derby groups discussed *O come all ye faithful*, and all the groups compared *Hark! The herald-angels sing* with *It came upon the midnight clear*; groups also discussed one or more of the carols sung by the relevant cathedral choir. The aim was to explore what Participants thought about the words and meaning of familiar and less familiar carols.

I recorded each Focus Group meeting on video and transcribed them afterwards.⁷

⁶ I also followed guidelines suggested by Kreuger (2000), Bloor (2001), Litosseliti (2003) and Stewart *et al* (2007).

⁷ Some fully and some in note form.

Data analysis and initial concepts

I analysed the transcripts using grounded theory coding methods.

I began with open coding on all 13 transcripts. This revealed a concept (for the purposes of grounded theory): that particular topics were raised by all Focus Groups and other topics by several (though not all) Focus Groups; all these topics also arose in (some) email and telephone interviews.

I then used axial coding, looking for connections between categories of data⁸ – particularly any patterns amongst different demographic groups. This revealed a second concept: that (as with the email and telephone interviews) there were *no* obvious patterns.⁹

In the Pilot Study I did not do the final stage of analysis – selective coding –because the open and axial coding had already identified these two concepts and a clear direction for the 2007 Study.

In May 2007, I gave a written report to the Dean and Chapter of each cathedral.¹⁰

⁸ Creswell (1997) p151.

⁹ The one or two exceptions (e.g. a born-again Christian in one of the York groups who briefly silenced the group with her comments) were notable because they *were* exceptions.

¹⁰ Phillips (2007).

Questions which emerged from the Pilot Study

From the Pilot Study data there also emerged two important but unasked questions, with unspoken answers:

- What is the Christmas Story?
- What does the Christmas Story mean?

The Christmas Story

In the interviews and Focus Groups discussions, many comments recognised the importance of 'the Christmas Story' for Christians and non-Christians. A word that appeared frequently was 'remind': it appeared that there is power in the fact and experience of the reminder, as well as in the story itself.

This led me to ponder: what *is* the Christmas Story? The Focus Group discussions indicated that Participants had a fairly fixed idea of what 'the Story' was – that they thought that it included particular elements which ought to be mentioned in a carol service. But although many mentioned 'the Story', most did not specify what elements they thought it contained, and there seemed to be an implicit assumption that everyone else already knew the story in the same form. I wanted to explore this.

Meaning of the Christmas Story

Although many people mentioned 'the real meaning of Christmas', it was apparent that there was a wide range of definitions for that phrase, though most people did not attempt to define it. Some of the Focus Groups did,

however, discuss the meaning of Christmas, possibly without realising it, where it was relevant to particular lines in carols. The most complex discussions revolved around the words 'Very God, begotten, not created' which was discussed by the 11 groups who discussed *O come all ye faithful*.¹¹ With just one exception (a professor of linguistics), nobody knew that this was an affirmation of the divinity and pre-existence of Christ, and several Arian views were put forward. This led me to ponder: if people do not understand, or misunderstand, familiar carols, does that matter? But that question cannot easily be answered without knowing what people *do* think the Christmas Story means – a question I therefore wanted to explore.

What I learned from the Pilot Study

From the Pilot Study emerged two key concepts and two key questions. I wanted to test the two concepts in relation to the two questions. This would generate (as grounded theory seeks to do) theories for further testing – namely theories as to how different groups of people tell and understand the Christmas Story.

The Pilot Study gave me the two substantive questions for the 2007 Questionnaire and made it easy to formulate those questions.

From the Pilot Study I also learned how to gather data from a large number of Participants in a short time. The enthusiastic response to invitations to join a Focus Group (particularly in York) encouraged me to think that this would be reasonably easy to do again elsewhere.

¹¹ This line was the original inspiration for this research.

Participants said that they had found it an interesting and worthwhile exercise – demonstrating the value of theology done by ordinary people.¹²

¹² Fraser (1980); Jolley (2006) p32.

Chapter 3

The Questionnaire and the Respondents

The Questionnaire

See Appendix 1

Aim

The substantive questions were Questions 1 and 2 – both qualitative questions.

The aim of Question 1 was to see what elements Respondents included when telling the Christmas Story in their own words. It was designed to elicit which elements were mentioned by the most Respondents – elements which, for the Respondents collectively, constituted the Christmas Story.

The aim of Question 2 was to get an indication of what Respondents thought the story they had told in reply to Question 1 meant; in particular, whether they did or did not attribute what the Church might consider a *Christian* meaning to the story.¹ Built into Question 2 was an assumption that its reference to ‘the Christmas Story’ meant ‘the Christmas Story, as told in reply to Question 1’. This was not explicitly stated on the Questionnaire, as it would have made Question 2 more difficult to understand and might have confused those Respondents who were already making the assumption that I had assumed they *would* make. Whilst

¹ As I conducted this study in a Church of England cathedral, it is limited to what the Church of England believes and teaches, whilst acknowledging that there are differences in doctrine across different Christian denominations, some of which were represented amongst the Respondents.

Respondents *could* have told one story in reply to Question 1 and attributed a meaning to a different story in reply to Question 2, nothing in the replies suggested that anyone did this.

Questions 3 to 7 inclusive were quantitative questions. These were designed to illuminate the replies to Questions 1 and 2 by providing information about the Respondents and, through triangulation, to enhance the qualitative data and strengthen any concepts which might arise.² I wanted particularly to test the concept which had arisen in the Pilot Study and see if there were any patterns as between different groups of Respondent: were certain elements or meanings mentioned more, or less, by Respondents in particular groups, or by those who had come to the service for particular reasons?³ This would be ascertained by correlating data from Questions 1 and 2 with that from Questions 3 to 7 inclusive.⁴

Suggested word limits

Question 1 suggested 'about 100 words' and Question 2 'about 20 words'. I worded them like this, to make it clear that these were not rigid word limits, also saying that bullet points would be fine. As I wanted to encourage as many people as possible to complete questionnaires, I thought that some indication of desired length (beyond simply the size of the space on the paper) would be helpful, but did not want to deter people by a rigid limit, nor did I want to discourage brief answers, or answers not in perfect English.

² See Creswell (2003) p217 on triangulation and *passim* on 'mixed methods' combining qualitative and quantitative data; also Punch (2005).

³ The most-reported finding of the *Theos* survey (*op cit*) was that younger people were less familiar than older people with the Christmas Story.

⁴ I decided not to include questions about ethnic origin or social class, as I did not want to deter people from completing questionnaires by asking questions which might have been considered intrusive, or by making the Questionnaire longer than a single A4 sheet.

Having tested Question 1 on myself and others, I decided that 100 words were enough to enable Respondents to mention all the elements they thought were essential in the Christmas Story (bearing in mind that the aim was to elicit elements mentioned by the most Respondents), whilst encouraging them to be reasonably succinct. For Question 2, suggesting only 20 words showed that a shorter answer was expected: I did not want lengthy theological discussions, but 20 words were enough to enable Respondents to show whether or not they thought the story was about God and also to mention, if they wanted to, Christian themes such as incarnation, atonement or personal faith.

Method

The Questionnaire was administered at the 2007 Service.

A Questionnaire was placed on each chair before the congregation arrived and everyone was invited to complete Questionnaires before the service began (having arrived up to two hours early). This would ensure, as far as possible, that Respondents expressed views they already held, rather than being influenced by the contents of the 2007 Service. Completed Questionnaires were collected both before and after the service; usually, it was not possible to tell from a Questionnaire whether it had been collected beforehand or afterwards.⁵ It is possible that in the case of those collected afterwards, the contents of the service might have influenced what Respondents said. Even before the service, people had the service booklet, so they could have 'checked' the story from the carols and the titles of the readings (the text of the readings was not printed, but the titles give some hints). Most Questionnaires seemed to have been completed in one go,

⁵ In some cases, footprints on the questionnaires suggested collection at the end.

though a few had amendments (in one case, with a different pen), which might have been made later.

Some strikingly similar answers indicated discussion/collaboration, not only amongst those Respondents who openly completed questionnaires collaboratively, but also between neighbours (overhearing). For example, some Respondents added, apparently as afterthoughts, the Annunciation, or comments about Jesus' conception.

Replies will have been influenced by the fact that it was Christmas Eve and Respondents were sitting in a cathedral waiting for a carol service to start. The Christmas story may have been in the forefront of their minds, more so than at other times of year.⁶

Clearly, it would have been impractical to insist on exam conditions. Therefore, Respondents could 'cheat' by checking the booklet, listening to the service and/or collaborating with or eavesdropping on neighbours. But this was the most practical way of getting a large number of unprepared responses under reasonably similar conditions; it may also be a realistic reflection of how people really do think about the Christmas Story: for example, when telling it to a child, one might seek or accept prompts. Most people would not normally be asked simply to tell the Christmas Story with no help or preparation (a point made by some Respondents).

⁶ Though in the Pilot Study, Participants had no difficulty discussing the topic in November (2006) and February (2007).

Quantity and quality of Data

The Questionnaire elicited ample Data of the type I wanted. 446

Respondents answered both Question 1 and Question 2; this was more than enough to show which elements of the Christmas Story were the most prominent. After I had analysed just 100 Questionnaires, it was evident that the Q1 Data were reaching the point of theoretical saturation,⁷ in that (barring a few unusual replies) nothing new was being mentioned; this was reinforced by the other 336 Questionnaires. Similarly, the replies to Question 2 covered broadly similar themes across all the Questionnaires, with just a few striking exceptions. This indicates that, for these Respondents (i.e. those attending the 2007 Service, who were willing to complete a Questionnaire), 446 was a good sized sample.

Responses will have depended partly on how Respondents interpreted the questions. This was illustrated by one Respondent, whose answer to Question 2 said, tantalisingly:

- Sorry, not sure whether you want personal view or traditional one.
[330:F633]⁸

Question 2 asked for 'what you think the Christmas story means'. A question asking instead for 'what the Christmas story means to you' might have yielded some more personal responses, but some Respondents would have found this difficult or even embarrassing to answer. I worded Question 2 as I did, because I wanted to use an objective question which would encourage honest answers.

⁷ Glaser and Strauss (1967) p61; Strauss (1987) p21; Creswell (1997) p56.

⁸ Appendix 3 explains how to interpret references to Respondents quoted in this thesis.

This was the only Respondent who expressed difficulty in understanding any question. Most Respondents answered as I had expected, apparently interpreting the questions as I had hoped. There was nothing in the Questionnaire that I wished I had worded differently, nor was anything missing that I wished I had asked.⁹

The Respondents

From a congregation of approximately 3500, 489 Questionnaires were completed.¹⁰ Of these, 33 answered only Question 1 or only Question 2 and 10 gave a combined answer to both questions. Some or all of these may have written their answer to Question 1 before reading Question 2. I did originally include the 10 who gave a combined answer in my analysis, distributing material across both questions, but I began to realise that this would skew the results, as it was impossible to allocate elements of the replies into categories within each Data Set¹¹ without knowing how the Respondent would have done that, had they answered the two questions separately; this might cause me to mis-label certain data, which would then affect the overall totals of the various categories. Also, the purpose of Question 2 was to illuminate replies to Question 1, which was not possible where only a single answer had been given. I therefore removed these 10 Questionnaires altogether, along with the 33 who answered only

⁹ However, in future research I would use fewer age groups, so that the age group sizes were similar to those in other demographic categories. This was relevant when deciding what level to set the threshold for noting variations from overall demographic distribution (see below): the results would have been more meaningful if the demographic groups had been more similar in size. I used the age groups I did because these are the groups which the Church of England uses in its own research and which were used in the questionnaire in the Pilot Study.

¹⁰ As already noted, the Respondents were a self-selecting group, not only in that they attended the 2007 Service, but also in that they were only 12.8% of those attending (a small percentage if one bears in mind that people arrived up to two hours early for the service).

¹¹ Defined in Appendix 2.

one of Questions 1 and 2. This left 446 who answered both questions separately: these 446 were my primary data – the Data.

Most of the 446 Respondents answered Questions 3 to 7 inclusive. I included as Respondents those who did not answer any or all of these questions, as these were supplementary questions to illuminate the replies to Questions 1 and 2. I did not want to exclude replies to Questions 1 and 2 just because the supplementary questions had not been answered. Overall, 99% of Respondents answered each of Questions 3 to 7.

Demographic groups

Pie Charts 1A, 1B, 1C and 1D show the numbers of Respondents in each of the demographic groups constituted from Questions 3 to 6 inclusive. The Data Reference Decoder in Appendix 3 explains how to interpret references to these groups in Data quoted from individual Respondents.

Reasons for attending

Question 7 asked Respondents to rank up to five reasons for attending the 2007 Service. 442 Respondents gave at least one reason, though 53 of them used x's instead of numbering. Pie Charts 2A and 2B show which reasons Respondents mentioned at all and which reasons they ranked most important.

By far the most popular reason was 'To celebrate the birth of Christ', which was 15% of *all* the reasons given, but was ranked top by 35% of those ranking their reasons. To a lesser degree, the same was true of 'It's an

important part of Christmas', which was also 15% of all the reasons given, but ranked first by 21%. Conversely, 'I like the tradition' was 11% of all the reasons given, but ranked first by only 3%; similarly, 'For the music' was also 11% of all the reasons given, but ranked first by only 2% .

Respondents quoted in this thesis

In this thesis I quote, or cite in footnotes, 323 of the 446 Respondents, as shown in the following table:

		Q1 Data			
		Quote	Footnote	Neither	Total
Q2 Data	Quote	82	27	118	227
	Footnote	3	1	3	7
	Neither	67	22	123	212
	Total	152	50	244	446

Chapter 4

Data analysis and the Christmas Texts

Data analysis

I analysed the Questionnaires using grounded theory coding methods and an Excel spreadsheet.¹ I entered on the spreadsheet (a) all the replies to Question 2 *verbatim* (b) the Data from Questions 3 to 7 inclusive (demographic information and reasons for attending), which was purely objective and (c) data which emerged through coding (see below).

Open coding

Questions 1 and 2 allowed Respondents complete freedom as to what to mention. As I read the Questionnaires, I created a category for each new element or theme which arose in either Data Set and there soon emerged numerous categories, under which I noted each instance of a Respondent mentioning the relevant element or theme. This created an electronic summary of each Questionnaire and a large number of categories on which to use axial coding.

Beginning with open coding and no pre-conceptions ensured that I captured the Data without stipulating in advance what the outcome should be. Although I could have predicted fairly accurately what would be mentioned most, my method ensured that this did not influence how I

¹ Though grounded theory was 'discovered' decades before computers became commonplace, computer technology has assisted its development: Strauss and Corbin (2008) *passim*. Excel was ideal for the coding methods I used.

initially approached the Data. It also ensured that the terminology I ultimately used was that used by the Respondents.

Axial coding

Certain categories appeared in many Questionnaires. The first stage of axial coding was to identify those categories which were most important and which would become key categories for evaluating the Data. I did that by counting how many Questionnaires I had noted in each category and selecting those categories which were represented in the largest numbers of Questionnaires.²

From this process emerged all the categories I used to evaluate the Data: for the Q1 Data, Elements of the Paradigm Story (see Chapter 5); and for the Q2 Data, the Themes (see Chapter 6).³

The second stage of axial coding was to analyse the demographic composition of the group of Respondents mentioning the elements or themes in each of the categories I had selected. This would show whether certain things were mentioned more or less by particular types of Respondent.

Selective coding

The third stage – selective coding – was to draw the categories together into a coherent 'story'. I wanted to apply a similar process to each Data Set, but was not able to use exactly the same process for both, as the two

² See below as to how I chose thresholds for each Data Set.

³ 'Q1 Data', 'Element', 'Paradigm Story', 'Q2 Data' and 'Theme' are defined in Appendix 2.

Data Sets were fundamentally different, in that the Service⁴ provided an obvious framework for organising the Q1 Data, but did not so obviously provide a framework for organising the Q2 Data.

The Q1 Data naturally organised itself into an order, because it consisted of stories, which naturally had an order. I was easily able to align the Q1 Data with the story told through the Nine Lessons, in the order in which it appears in the Nine Lessons,⁵ especially as that was also the order in which most Respondents told the story.⁶ There was a potential difficulty, in that selective coding normally involves writing a new 'story' which has emerged from the data; it could have been difficult to 'create' a story out of data which consisted of stories which were versions of such a well-known story which had been told millions of times. Technically, the Paradigm Story (see Chapter 5) is a *new* story – the story created through selected coding of the Q1 Data; the fact that it closely resembles the story told in the Nine Lessons is itself a useful finding, indicating that the Respondents shared a common understanding of what the Christmas Story is.

The Q2 Data were far more varied, as there was a much wider range of possible answers to Question 2, with less clearly defined parameters; and, with a smaller word limit for Question 2 than Question 1, less scope for overlapping between Respondents. Also, unlike the Christmas Story, the Nine Lessons do not present meaning in a structured order: rather, many different meanings permeate the whole service, some overtly and some more subtly. Therefore, the Service did not itself offer a clear structure around which to organise the Q2 Data; indeed, trying to impose a

⁴ Defined in Appendix 2.

⁵ Though not all of it appears in the Nine Lessons.

⁶ But even if they had not, the Nine Lessons would still have provided an order.

particular meaning or series of meanings on the Service would have been to place too narrow an interpretation on it. Also, I wanted to find an objective meaning against which to compare not only the meanings offered by Respondents, but also the numerous meanings contained in the Service as a whole.

With each Data Set, I wanted to compare it with 'what the Church believes'. For the Q1 Data this was quite straightforward, as I could simply compare it with the Nine Lessons,⁷ which are, as Holy Scripture, necessarily consistent with orthodox Christian belief.⁸ But for the Q2 Data there was not a similar measure of orthodox Christian belief contained within the Service itself. I therefore needed to look elsewhere for a measure which could act for the Q2 Data as the Nine Lessons would for the Q1 Data. I chose the Nicene Creed for this purpose; I explain the reasons for this choice in Chapter 6.

The Christmas Texts

As well as evaluating the Data in the light of what the Church believes, I wanted to compare it with the content of the Service, to see whether the Data did or did not reflect that content. For this purpose I wanted to identify the core content of the Service – the texts which did not change from year to year,⁹ plus some additional texts which I thought it was reasonable to assume would be familiar to people attending a service of

⁷ In effect, those from Luke and Matthew.

⁸ Albeit open to many different interpretations.

⁹ Bearing in mind that Respondents who completed Questionnaires before the 2007 Service would not necessarily have heard those texts recently, but might have heard them on previous occasions.

this type.¹⁰ I therefore chose the following texts (for which definitions follow) – collectively ‘the Christmas Texts’:

- The Nine Lessons
- The Bidding Prayer
- The Top Six Carols

I also mention, where relevant:

- The Birth Narratives in Matthew and Luke¹¹
- Other passages of Scripture
- Carols other than the Top Six¹²

The Nine Lessons

York Minster uses (with minor amendments) the lessons generally known as ‘The Nine Lessons’ which are used at King’s College Cambridge and in many churches and cathedrals worldwide.¹³

The Nine Lessons read at the 2007 Service were:

- First Lesson: Genesis 3:8-15¹⁴
- Second Lesson: Genesis 22:15-18
- Third Lesson: Isaiah 9:2; 6-7

¹⁰ If I had used only the texts which do not change, that would have included *nine* lessons and only *three* carols, which would have been unbalanced.

¹¹ These include passages in the Nine Lessons, but the definition of ‘Birth Narratives’ is wider.

¹² From a limited pool (defined later).

¹³ They have been used at King’s College, Cambridge every Christmas Eve since 1919:

<http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/events/chapel-services/nine-lessons.html>.

¹⁴ King’s also has verses 17-19.

- Fourth Lesson: Isaiah 11:1-9¹⁵
- Fifth Lesson: Luke 1:26-38¹⁶
- Sixth Lesson: Luke 2:1; 3-7¹⁷
- Seventh Lesson: Luke 2:8-16
- Eighth Lesson: Matthew 2:1-11¹⁸
- Ninth Lesson: John 1:1-14

These were read from the King James Bible and therefore biblical quotations in this thesis are from the King James Version (KJV) unless otherwise stated.

The Nine Lessons are very well-known: the Service from King's has been broadcast on BBC radio since 1938 and many churches use the Nine Lessons, especially since the publication of *Carols for Choirs* in 1961 which printed the Nine Lessons (and the Bidding Prayer) in full, making it convenient for churches to use them.

In this thesis, 'Nine Lessons' means those read at York Minster in the 2007 Service, rather than those normally read at King's. I made this decision, because these were the lessons the Respondents actually heard (which could have influenced those who completed Questionnaires during or after the service) and which those who had previously attended this service at York Minster would have heard. But some Respondents would undoubtedly have heard the service from King's in previous years and might in fact have been more familiar with the King's lessons. That said, the differences are

¹⁵ King's omits verses 4b-5.

¹⁶ King's omits verses 36-37.

¹⁷ King's omits verse 2; Matthew 1.18-23 is offered as an alternative Sixth Lesson, but has not been used at King's in recent years.

¹⁸ King's omits verse 12.

negligible, but it is worth noting that while King's omits the reference to Cyrenius (KJV)/Quirinius (NRSV) in Luke 2:2, York does not, and two Respondents did mention Quirinius in reply to Question 1.

The Lessons were not printed in full in the order of service¹⁹ (though they are at King's), so it would not have been possible for Respondents to refresh their memories from the Lessons, unless there was a Bible to hand. The title of each Lesson (giving a clue to its content) was printed in the order of service.

The Bidding Prayer

The first words spoken in the service are the Bidding Prayer, substantially in the form composed by Eric Milner-White in 1918, but adapted to refer to York rather than Cambridge. For more detail, see Chapter 7. I included this in the definition of 'Christmas Texts', because its prominent position at the beginning of the Service, with the congregation standing, gives it considerable power and it sets out the purpose and meaning of the Service. Milner-White said that the Lessons and the prayers form 'the backbone of the service',²⁰ and this is the only prayer which is unique to this service.

The Top Six Carols

In the Pilot Study, Focus Group discussions had demonstrated that singing and listening to carols had strongly influenced Participants' perception and understanding of the Christmas Story. Therefore, in evaluating the Questionnaires I wanted to consider how Respondents might have been influenced by carols.

¹⁹ York Minster Order of Service (2007).

²⁰ <http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/files/services/nine-lessons-2009.pdf>.

Clearly it would be impossible to know which carols actually *had* influenced any Respondent, so I decided to select a few well-known carols which I thought it was reasonable to assume that most people attending a service of this type would already know, and which were *in fact* included in the service they attended and also in the same service the previous year.

In each of 2006 and 2007, York Minster had eight congregational carols and nine for choir only. Six of the congregational carols were sung in both years, so I selected these as the Top Six Carols. It was evident in the Focus Group discussions that these carols were all very well-known (often from memory) and that they would be expected to appear in many carol services.

The Top Six Carols are:

- Once in royal David's city
- It came upon the midnight clear
- O little town of Bethlehem
- While shepherds watched their flocks by night
- O come all ye faithful
- Hark! The herald-angels sing

Although technically these are hymns, rather than carols,²¹ I refer to them as 'carols' because the service is called 'A Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols' and colloquially these hymns are usually called 'carols'.²²

²¹ Historically, hymns derived from the Church (as these all do), whereas 'carols' had secular origins. This distinction was important in 1700, when *While shepherds watched* was published: it was the *only* hymn authorised to be sung in the Church of England on Christmas Day (because of its biblical basis): Bradley (1999) p395.

²² Participants called them carols.

Analysis of Christmas Texts

I noted on a spreadsheet all references in the Christmas Texts falling within the categories which became Elements (Q1 Data) and Themes (Q2 Data). These references appear in Chapters 5 and 6 and their accompanying tables.

Other texts

The Birth Narratives in Luke and Matthew²³

The Nine Lessons include much of the story of the birth of Jesus, as told by Luke and Matthew, though not all of it. Respondents included in their replies to Question 1 some elements from Luke and Matthew which do not appear in the Nine Lessons. Enough of them (over 10% in each case) mentioned elements from Matthew which do not appear in the Nine Lessons – namely the Flight to Egypt and the Slaughter of the Innocents – to qualify those as Elements; and a few (though fewer than 10%) mentioned John the Baptist and his parents, who appear in Luke’s Birth Narrative though not in the Nine Lessons. Therefore, where relevant, I refer to the Birth Narratives as a whole, meaning any or all of Luke 1.26-38, 2.1-20 and Matthew 1.18-2.23. I have selected these passages because they include all the elements that the vast majority of Respondents included in reply to Question 1 (and most of these verses do appear in the Nine Lessons).

²³ Throughout this thesis I refer to Luke and Matthew in this order, because this is the order in which they appear in the Nine Lessons and most Respondents who mentioned elements from both gospels mentioned Luke-only elements before Matthew-only elements.

Other passages of Scripture

Where relevant, I mention verses or passages from Scripture which are not included in the Nine Lessons, but only insofar as is necessary to interpret and evaluate what Respondents said where there is a clear correlation/influence (e.g. John 3.16, quoted *verbatim* by one Respondent).

Other carols

Where relevant, I mention in footnotes carols other than the Top Six Carols which could have influenced Respondents. I wanted to use a defined group of 'other carols', but within that group to have as wide a range of carols and possible, bearing in mind that Respondents came from many different backgrounds (not all part of the Minster congregation, not all Church of England nor even all Christian).

I therefore chose two books:

- *100 Carols for Choirs* – a compilation published in 1989 of the key carols from *Carols for Choirs* volumes 1, 2 and 3 and widely used since the early 1990s.
- *The Penguin Book of Carols* – a collection published in 1999 of 100 well-known carols edited by Bradley with scholarly comment

These two books together provide a collection of the best-known carols from the 20th and early 21st century. I considered including other books,²⁴

²⁴ e.g. *The Oxford Book of Carols* – the seminal collection published in 1928, which became the foundational carol collection for 20th century, but gave way to *Carols for Choirs* in the latter part of the 20th century (and also is not limited to *Christmas* carols).

but decided that none would provide a broader selection of carols than is already provided by these two books. I do not refer to any carols which do not appear in either of these books.

Other possible influences

It was clear, particularly in the Q2 Data, that Respondents were expressing ideas which are not explicitly mentioned in the Nine Lessons and were drawing on more and wider sources than they were with Question 1. Clearly it is impossible to know the full extent of all influences on each Respondent: these could include art (particularly that reproduced on Christmas cards), literature, drama (such as the York Mystery Plays), music, nativity plays, popular culture and much more. Such influences are beyond the scope of this research, but could be interesting areas for future research.

In analysing the Data, I therefore confined myself to two groups of texts, selected for the reasons given above:

- For primary analysis: texts actually included in the 2007 Service and in similar services in the past
- For secondary analysis (i.e. simply noting where relevant): other texts used by the Church

Methodology for comparing Data with Christmas Texts

In comparing the Data with the Christmas Texts, there was the dilemma whether to analyse the Data in the light of the Christmas Texts, or the Christmas Texts in the light of the Data. Since the primary focus was the

Data, not the Christmas Texts, I decided that the primary analysis must be the analysis of the Data in the light of the Christmas Texts: the Christmas Texts illuminating the Data where relevant, but without referring in detail to elements of the Christmas Texts which had no bearing on the Data. That said, the Christmas Texts did in fact provide a useful framework for organising the Data. This thesis does not purport to present a full analysis of the Texts. However, in Chapter 7 I do look at the Christmas Texts as a whole, to see how far they are reflected in the Data.

Chapter 5

Analysis and evaluation of Q1 Data: the Paradigm Story

How Respondents answered Question 1

Question 1 said:

Please tell the Christmas story in about 100 words, or list its main features (bullet points are fine)

A few Respondents treated 100 words as a strict limit, but most did not. Some responses were very brief and some filled most of the page (spilling into the area allocated for Question 2), but nobody continued on the reverse of the page. Those who limited themselves to 100 words might have omitted elements which they would have liked to have included (which will have affected the Q1 Data).

In this Chapter, I quote from 152 of the 446 replies to Question1 and cite a further 50 in footnotes only.

How were the stories told?

Most were well written, with good grammar and punctuation and accurate spelling (even frankincense and myrrh). Some Respondents told the story as if to someone who did not know it; others (especially those using bullet points) assumed that the reader already knew the story. Some told the story in a contemporary way that might to an outsider sound more

reasonable and believable than the more traditional story; some included dramatic details, e.g.

- While Joseph gathers wood, Mary gives birth to Jesus [92:F313]

and some included atmospheric elements, e.g.

- The stable was filled with angels, visitors and a holy sense of transition. [152:M631]

Most Respondents easily mixed the 'normal' and the more supernatural bits of the story; for example, the journey to Bethlehem (believable in any story), alongside angels. Some may have made a conscious decision whether to include only normal or also supernatural elements; some commented on the apparent absurdity of this.

Nobody mentioned Father Christmas, reindeer, Christmas trees or snow. Respondents seemed able to identify elements that they thought really were part of 'the Story' (including non-biblical Elements, such as the stable).

What sort of story?

415 Respondents (93.0%) told a traditional nativity story, based largely on the accounts in Luke and Matthew, but with other details evidently drawn from elsewhere. 31 Respondents (7.0%) did not tell a traditional nativity story, but only five Respondents did not mention Jesus or his birth, even by implication; 24 gave its overall meaning, five commented on the effect of the story *as a story* and one quoted verses from John 1 [348:M513].

One is worth noting for its uniqueness:

- Family, Friends, Gifts, Worship, Eating with family [195:F712]¹

This was the only answer to Question 1 which (apart from the word 'Worship') did not make any connection with God or Jesus. The fact that only one out of 446 Respondents gave such an answer shows that most Respondents did share a common understanding of the Christmas Story, within broad parameters: most though not all, told the story of Jesus' birth, though some (particularly those who told an 'overall' story) clearly thought that 'the Christmas Story' is more than that. I did wonder whether the Q1 Data would have been significantly different if Question 1 had asked for the Nativity Story, though I had deliberately avoided that phrase because I wanted to avoid suggesting connections with nativity plays, which might have influenced Respondents.

Conflating Luke and Matthew into a single story

Every Respondent who told a traditional nativity story combined elements from both Luke and Matthew into a single story, though some commented that the whole story does not appear in a single gospel.

Although Luke's and Matthew's gospels are quite independent, nevertheless, in the popular mind, the two stories have been conflated into one. It is therefore understandable that the Nine Lessons combine them into a single story (within a greater story). That said, Luke's and Matthew's Birth Narratives do not combine easily: books with parallel gospels do not attempt to harmonise them, but simply place them

¹ This Respondent's answer to Question 2 was 'Joy, Prayers, Singing, Carolling'.

consecutively.² But I wanted to construct a composite story, because this was what most Respondents had done, and this is also the approach taken (on a larger scale) by the Nine Lessons.³

In compiling the composite story, I therefore employed a method used by C.H. Dodd, who, in a similar way, combines seven passages from Acts and passages from four of Paul's letters⁴ to make a single 'gospel'.⁵ In a table, he sets out the texts in nine columns, aligning those sections which match one another and, from that, distils an 'overall gospel'. In effect, this is what Respondents did with the Christmas Story, drawing on (probably from memory) the gospels, carols and other sources.

The Paradigm Story

From the Q1 Data emerged a Paradigm Story, reflecting the story which Respondents told collectively. The Paradigm Story appears in Table 1A. It has two dimensions:

- 20 Elements of the Christmas Story
- Demographic weighting

Elements of the Paradigm Story

The Paradigm Story comprises 20 Elements, numbered 1 to 20. These form a composite story, combining all the Elements mentioned by over 10% of Respondents. No Respondent told the story exactly in this way (that would have been impossible in 100 words) but the Paradigm Story

² e.g. Throckmorton (1992) pp2-8.

³ Albeit by placing complete passages from Luke and Matthew consecutively.

⁴ Galatians and Thessalonians (combined), 1 Corinthians, and Romans.

⁵ Dodd (1936) *passim* and Appendix.

reflects what Respondents might have said if they had been asked collectively to construct a single story. Table 1A notes how many Respondents mentioned each Element, and the Elements are ranked 1 to 20, according to how many Respondents mentioned them.⁶ See Graph 1.

Each Element has a short name, listed under 'Element' in Table 1A, and under 'Content' is a short description, in ordinary language typical of that used in reply to Question 1.⁷ For some Elements, the 'content' has subsidiary detail below, where there are particular details that many of the Respondents mentioning that Element also mentioned (e.g. an angel in connection with the Annunciation).

For Elements which are people (e.g. Jesus, wise men) the 'number of Respondents mentioning' includes all references to those people by any name, unless otherwise stated.

Why 20 Elements?

Each Element is a separate element of the story, and these are all the Elements expressly mentioned by more than 10% of Respondents in reply to Question 1. 10% was a reasonable threshold, since something

⁶ All calculations are based on the number of Respondents mentioning an element *at all*, not how many times Respondents mentioned elements altogether (an element mentioned 10 times by one Respondent would count as one mention). This helps to mitigate the effect of responses varying considerably in length.

⁷ These descriptions are phrased as broadly as possible (e.g. Element 9: 'There was a birth'); most Respondents did not use such phraseology, but the phraseology is broad enough to encompass the varied phraseology that Respondents used.

mentioned by fewer than 10% of Respondents could not reasonably be considered a principal element of the story.⁸

Why in this order?

The Elements are in the order which is closest to the order in which most (though not all) Respondents mentioned them in reply to Question 1. This is also, broadly, the order in which they appear, if at all, in the Nine Lessons.

A disadvantage of analysing the Elements in the order in which they appear in the Paradigm Story is that some Elements which would fit naturally together are separated because of where they appear in the story, e.g. Mary appears separately from Joseph, and Stable separately from Manger. But this disadvantage is outweighed by the advantage of using one order throughout the thesis – and the best option is to use the order in which most Respondents mentioned them. Dealing with the Elements in a different order (e.g. biblical or rank order) would have presented the same problem in a different way.

I experimented with grouping Elements thematically, but rejected this because it would have entailed my shaping the Data, rather than letting the Respondents speak for themselves. Letting the order of the Elements emerge from the Data, rather than using a preconceived order, made it easier to look objectively at what Respondents actually *had* said. An example of where this decision worked well was in relation to Element 18

⁸ In fact, the lowest ranked element – Slaughter – was mentioned by 15.9% of Respondents (i.e. considerably more than 10%). I did originally include one element mentioned by just over 10% – Romans – but ultimately decided not to treat that as an element in its own right, as everyone who mentioned the Romans also mentioned the census/tax/registration, so I have treated Romans as simply a gloss on Element 6.

(Gifts): grouping 'Gifts' with the wise men would have been unhelpful, because several Respondents mentioned gifts being brought by the shepherds – so the Paradigm Story says that.⁹

That said, there were two pairs of Elements¹⁰ which I grouped together, but only after analysing all the Data, for the purpose of quoting and commenting on what Respondents said.¹¹

Demographic weighting

The Paradigm Story reflects what was said by particular demographic groups. It does this by showing (in Table 1A) where a particular demographic group mentioned an Element more or less than average by more than 5%. This gives a more nuanced story, which could be read to reflect the Christmas Story as told by particular groups of Respondents (for example men, non-Christians or Christmas-only churchgoers).

To construct this dimension, I calculated (using the spreadsheet) what percentage of Respondents mentioning each Element was in each of the demographic groups and compared those percentages with the overall percentages for the demographic groups (as shown in Pie Charts 1A, 1B, 1C and 1D). I noted all instances where Respondents in a particular demographic group mentioned a particular Element more or less than average by more than 5%. I chose this threshold because I wanted to identify those Elements which were mentioned (or not mentioned) very disproportionately by particular demographic groups. I began by noting all variations, then increased the threshold to 5%, and found that there were

⁹ The gospels mention gifts only in connection with the wise men.

¹⁰ Elements 7 (No Room) and 8 (Stable) and Elements 19 (Flight) and 20 (Slaughter).

¹¹ I did this because the Data required it, rather than because of a preconception that they were linked.

many instances of a variation of almost exactly 5%, particularly in the age groups;¹² I therefore increased the threshold from 5% to *more than* 5% and found that this produced a smaller and therefore more meaningful set of variations which highlighted the largest variations without swamping them with numerous small variations.

For 12 of the 20 Elements, including all those ranked 1 to 9, there were no variations greater than 5%: the demographic composition of the Respondents mentioning each Element reflected the demographic composition of all Respondents. For eight Elements, there were some variations from the overall averages and these are shown in Table 1A.

Variations between different demographic groups

In the Q1 Data, there were no obvious patterns as between men and women or Respondents of particular age groups; perhaps more surprisingly, there were also no patterns as between Christians/non-Christians or regular/infrequent churchgoers. Usually, it was not possible to tell while reading an answer to Question 1 whether or not the Respondent was a Christian or a frequent churchgoer (these were revealed by Questions 5 and 6 on the reverse of the page).¹³ Some non-Christians told a story which was closer to the gospel accounts than some Christians did. All this was consistent with my observations in the Pilot Study and with the concept which I had wanted to test in the 2007 Study.

¹² This was because the age groups, being more numerous than the other demographic groups, were smaller and therefore it took fewer Respondents to make a 5% variation than with, say, the 'Christian' group (340 Respondents, 76%), where 17 extra Respondents would be needed to produce a 5% variation. Inevitably, with different group sizes, applying one threshold across the board has a greater impact on smaller demographic groups.

¹³ In some cases, it was more clear in the answer to Question 2.

As an aside, the smallest demographic group (Age Group 2 (18-24) – 21 Respondents, 5%) was the only demographic group with no variations of even 5% for any Element: so the smallest group was the most consistently in line with the average. This is unexpected, given the relatively large impact that a numerically small variation has on a small group, but it might indicate that it would be unwise to extrapolate too much from small variations (or their absence).

Elements and correlation with Christmas Texts

This section should be read alongside Tables 1A and 1B. Table 1A lists and ranks the 20 Elements and shows which demographic groups mentioned them disproportionately more and less; Table 1B shows where these Elements appear (if at all) in the Christmas Texts.

Under the heading for each Element, I quote one typical response, which in the case of those Elements mentioned in the gospels accords with the relevant gospel account. When quoting something said by one, two or three Respondents, I give Data References,¹⁴ but where more than three Respondents said something I do not identify those Respondents, except any I quote.

¹⁴ See Appendix 3.

Element 1 (ranked 3): Mary

- Mary had a baby called Jesus [268:F313]

What Respondents said

364 Respondents mentioned Mary by name and a further 22 referred to Jesus' mother without naming her.

Christmas Texts

Mary is mentioned by name in four of the Nine Lessons – more than any other Element. In the Fifth Lesson (Luke 1.26-38) Mary is the central character.

Although the name Mary appears in only two of the Top Six Carols, other carols refer to her as 'virgin' (see Element 2).

Other texts

Mary appears elsewhere in Luke's and Matthew's Birth Narratives and in many carols.¹⁵

¹⁵ e.g. *The Holly and the Ivy*; *Sans Day Carol*; *Cherry Tree Carol*; see also Elements 2 and 3.

Element 2 (ranked 16): Miraculous conception

- Mary had conceived the baby with the Holy Ghost [128:F633]

What Respondents said

123 Respondents referred to Jesus' miraculous conception, either explicitly (38 Respondents) or by mentioning Mary's virginity (95 Respondents, of whom 10 explicitly mentioned a miraculous conception).

In this Element I included all Respondents who used the word 'virgin', even though 85 of them said nothing more about the miraculous nature of Jesus' conception. I did this because it was impossible to know whether those Respondents had simply used 'virgin' as a title, or whether they meant to imply something miraculous. I originally counted 'Virgin' as a separate Element, but this excluded those Respondents who mentioned the miraculous conception without using the word 'virgin', and it would have been wrong to have two separate Elements for what was (apparently in many cases) essentially the same point. Including all who said 'virgin' may have included some who did not mean to imply a miracle.

Virgin

95 Respondents used the word 'virgin'. 29 referred to 'Virgin Mary' – as if 'Virgin' were her title, six referred to a 'Virgin Birth' and 55 simply stated that Mary was a virgin (some with cynical/humorous asides):

- Jesus, a virgin-birth – traditional church teaching, although the original text may have been translated at a time of particular misogyny. [467:F612]
- Pregnant Mary (virgin – Holy Ghost business) [123:F421]

- Jesus was born to Joseph and Mary (allegedly a virgin!) [215:F413]

Other descriptions included 'innocent woman'.¹⁶ Five Respondents stated that Mary was unmarried and/or that she and Joseph had not had sexual relations, e.g.

- It is a miraculous conception, as Joseph and Mary are not married...!
[233:M313]
- Mary and Joseph in unconsummated marriage [15:M612]

Miraculous conception

38 Respondents explicitly mentioned Jesus' miraculous conception; 10 of these also said virgin. Some expressed the miracle in interesting ways, e.g.

- Mary is pregnant with son of God [56:F313]
- Mary was pregnant with God's son [58:F711]
- God had made Virgin Mary pregnant [80:M431]
- Conceived by God through the Archangel Gabriel [241:M733]
- The Lord and Virgin Mary had a child [50:M711]
- The father was really 'the Father' proper – God [316:M512]

Nine referred to the Holy Spirit/Holy Ghost, e.g.

- Mary pregnant by Holy Spirit, not her fiancé [127:M513]
- Born to a virgin at the request of the Holy Spirit [282:M613]
- Mary impregnated by Holy Spirit [258:M511]

¹⁶ 12:F631].

Immaculate Conception

15 Respondents¹⁷ used the phrase 'immaculate conception', e.g.

- Mary, who had fallen pregnant by immaculate conception
[163:M621]

and one said 'Mary and Joseph conceived immaculately' [305:M421]

All these were referring to Jesus' miraculous conception: no one used 'immaculate conception' in its correct sense of *Mary* being conceived without sin. Only three of these Respondents also said 'virgin', possibly indicating that most saw (incorrectly) 'immaculate conception' as an alternative to 'virginal conception'.

Christmas Texts

In the Fifth Lesson, Gabriel explains that Mary will conceive by the power of the Holy Spirit. However, Luke (unlike Matthew – see below) does not state whether or not Mary was still a virgin when Jesus was born, though he does make it clear that she was still unmarried (Luke 2.5: Sixth Lesson).

None of the Top Six Carols mentions Jesus' conception or the Holy Spirit, but *O come all ye faithful* and *Hark! The herald-angels sing* refer once each to a virgin.

¹⁷ Plus another two in reply to Question 2.

Other texts

Matthew emphasises Mary's virginity more than Luke, but the relevant passage in Matthew (1:18-25) does not appear in the Nine Lessons.¹⁸ In this passage, Matthew tells us:

- that Mary 'was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit/Ghost' while engaged to Joseph but before they lived together (1.18)
- (by implication) that Joseph was not the father (1.19)
- that Joseph was told in a dream: 'The child conceived in her is from the Holy Ghost' (1.20)
- that Joseph had no marital relations with Mary until after Jesus had been born (1.25)
- that this took place to fulfil Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin would conceive and bear a son (1.22-23)

Some less familiar carols refer to a virgin, some using 'Virgin' more as a title than as a description (as did some Respondents).¹⁹

Comment

There is a distinction between virginal *conception* and virginal *birth*.

Matthew implies that Mary was a virgin not only when she conceived but also when she gave birth to Jesus, whereas Luke states only that she was a virgin at the time of Jesus' conception. The doctrine of the Church of England (which differs from Roman Catholic doctrine) is correctly called the doctrine of virginal *conception*.²⁰

¹⁸ Though it used to be offered as an alternative Sixth lesson.

¹⁹ e.g. *A Virgin most pure*; *Angelus ad virginem*; *The Virgin Mary had a baby boy*.

²⁰ General Synod (1986) – acknowledging (p62) considerable divergence of views within the Church of England.

The Apostles' Creed's '*conceived by the Holy Ghost/Spirit, Born of the Virgin Mary*' points to virginal *birth*, whereas the Nicene Creed is less explicit: '*was incarnate from the Holy Ghost/Spirit and the Virgin Mary*'.

Literature on this topic has been described as 'legion'²¹ and it became the source of major controversy in the 1980s, following comments made by the newly-appointed Bishop of Durham, Dr David Jenkins, which attracted considerable attention in the media. This led to the publication of the House of Bishops' Report *The Nature of Christian Belief*.²²

The Questionnaires indicated that most Respondents were not particularly exercised by this topic: only just over a quarter of Respondents mentioned it at all, and nearly 70% of those simply used the word 'virgin' with no further comment. This was not a major theme, as it might have been 20 years earlier.

Element 3 (ranked 13): Annunciation

- Mary visited by an angel, told she will give birth to the Son of God
[208:F211]

Note: although 'Annunciation' properly means the announcement of Jesus' conception to *Mary*, this Element includes the pre-birth announcements to both Mary and Joseph.

²¹ Albright and Mann (1971) p10.

²² General Synod (1986).

What Respondents said

215 Respondents mentioned the announcement of Jesus' conception, expressly or by implication, 22 using the word 'annunciation'²³, e.g.

- It started with the Annunciation [337:F613]

194 Respondents mentioned an angel in connection with the Annunciation, e.g.

- Mary was visited by an angel who came with a message from God that she was to have a Baby and was to name him Jesus.

[78:M312]

- The Virgin Mary was told by an angel of the Lord that she was to bear a child who would be God's Son, and to name him Jesus

[86:F713]

131 Respondents named Gabriel, e.g.

- The Angel Gabriel came to Mary to tell her she was to have a baby

[352:F613]

though eight of those mentioning Gabriel did not mention the Annunciation, and some were referring to another part of the story.

One Respondent said that the message was delivered *by God*:

- God told Mary that she would have his baby [214:M113]

and three by the Holy Spirit/Holy Ghost.²⁴

²³ Eight saying annunciation to Mary and one saying annunciation to Mary *and* Joseph.

²⁴ [6:F512] [153:M611] [209:M512].

Commenting on Mary's response, one Respondent said:

- Mary's response: My soul doth magnify the Lord – Magnificat [117:F513]²⁵

and others:

- Mary was shocked as she was a virgin [89:F413]
- Mary unsure since she is unmarried and a virgin [179:F413]
- Mary would probably be scared frantic, but Gabriel added that this was all in God's plan [452:0413]

34 Respondents mentioned the announcement to *Joseph* of Jesus' conception, e.g.

- Joseph, her betrothed, also visited and reassured by an angel. [91:F613]
- Joseph is told by Mary (he is a little upset) so Angel tells him it's OK and to relax! [278:M312]
- Joseph took fright and decided on divorce but in a dream he was told to go and get a life and go on holiday in Egypt as a post-birth treat. [337:F613]

33 mentioned the announcement to Joseph and also to Mary. One (a child [448:M133]) mentioned only the announcement to Joseph.

Another young person combined both announcements:

- One day an angel came to Mary and said 'wassup girl your gonna have a baby, he will be the son of God.' Joseph didn't believe Mary

²⁵ This is actually Mary's response to Elizabeth's greeting in Luke 2.46, rather than her response to Gabriel at the Annunciation

so the angel came to Joseph and said 'yo man it's true, he will be called Jesus.' [141:F122]

as did this Respondent, in a different way:

- An unmarried girl and her partner listen to God [344:F713]²⁶

Christmas Texts

The Fifth Lesson is Luke's account of the Annunciation to Mary. None of the Top Six Carols mentions the announcement of Jesus' conception or the Angel Gabriel.

Other texts

The popular carol *The Angel Gabriel* was included in the 2007 Service as a choir item, immediately after the Fifth Lesson. The words of the carol were printed in the Order of Service.

A number of carols are specifically about the Annunciation, rather than Jesus' birth.²⁷

The announcement to Joseph appears in Matthew 1.20.

²⁶ This Respondent (a non-Christian attending church more often than Christmas only) devoted over half her story to the pre-birth announcements and said in reply to Question 2 'Miracles happen when you least expect it'.

²⁷ e.g. *Angelus ad virginem*, a 15th century carol for the Feast of the Annunciation; *A maiden most gentle* (a 20th century Roman Catholic carol with the refrain 'Ave Maria'); and *Joys Seven*, a medieval carol reintroduced into the repertoire through a musical arrangement by the Director of Music at King's College Cambridge, who for 20 years read the Fifth Lesson at the King's College service on Christmas Eve.

Comment

Those Respondents who mentioned the announcement to Joseph were apparently drawing on Matthew's account, which does not appear in the Christmas Texts.²⁸ The Nine Lessons include only Luke's account of the announcement to Mary (Luke (1:26-38)); Matthew's account of the announcement to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-23) is not included. But Matthew's announcement to Joseph is followed five verses later by Jesus' birth (Matthew 1:25), whereas Luke gives us Mary's visit to Elizabeth, Mary's song, the birth of John the Baptist and Zechariah's song before we reach the account of Jesus' birth. So, arguably, Matthew's announcement, being linked with his Birth Narrative, has a better claim to be part of the Christmas Story than Luke's Annunciation, which is separate from his Birth Narrative and more closely linked with the intervening passages.

For Matthew, the announcement to Joseph is an important part of the story, because it links Jesus with Joseph and hence with the House of David. Through this episode, Matthew makes this point at least as strongly as Luke does by giving Joseph's membership of the House of David as the reason for Joseph (and Mary) going to Bethlehem. But the exclusion of this episode from the Nine Lessons in favour of Luke's account of the Annunciation (Fifth Lesson) and the events in Bethlehem (Sixth Lesson) may have pushed Matthew's side of the story out of popular consciousness.

The Church has always treated the Annunciation to Mary as quite separate from Jesus' birth and it is celebrated, on March 25th, as a festival in its own right – a festival which is older than Christmas and which was until

²⁸ But which does appear in the alternative Sixth Lesson (not used at York, nor at King's in recent years).

1752 the first day of the secular calendar year; even the date of Christmas is computed from the date of Jesus' conception, rather than the other way round.²⁹ Given the importance of the Annunciation in its own right, it is odd that it should have become part of the Christmas Story. It is impossible to know whether it would have become a prominent part of the story if it had not been one of the Nine Lessons, or what might have happened if Matthew's account had been used as the Fifth Lesson instead.³⁰ Another influence may be that some carols mention the Annunciation, although these may have become popular because they fit with the Fifth Lesson.

Element 4 (ranked 5): Joseph

- Joseph her betrothed was also visited by an angel who reassured him about the coming event. [90:F313]

What Respondents said

335 Respondents mentioned Joseph by name (compared with 386 naming Mary and 338 naming Jesus (by that name)) and a further 21 mentioned him without a name. 332 named both Mary and Joseph (more often in that order, though some said 'Joseph and Mary'). Whilst 27 Respondents mentioned Mary by name without referring to Joseph at all, no one named Joseph without also mentioning Mary (though three of them did not give her name). Just one Respondent mentioned Jesus 'earthly father'³¹ and not Mary and 59 mentioned neither.

²⁹ Talley (1986) pp134-141; (1990) p132; Kelly (2004) pp59-60.

³⁰ Matthew 1.18-23 is offered as an alternative *Sixth* Lesson.

³¹ 277:M731.

Some said that Joseph was a carpenter:³²

- Joseph (a chippy) was travelling to Bethlehem with his wife, Mary (a virgin) [157:M412]
- The earthly father, a simple carpenter, envisions God's all-embracing message to mankind [277:M731]

Several mentioned Joseph's connection with King David:

- He was from the line of David [114:F511]
- Joseph was descended from King David [167:F612]
- Joseph, of the family of David [189:M713]
- She married Joseph, from the House of David [6:F512]

though one began his story:

- Mary of the House of David, betrothed to Joseph... [152:M631]

Several stated that Joseph was not Jesus' biological father:

- Not fathered by Joseph – God's Son [11:F611]
- Mary and Joseph were the parents, though the father was really the 'father' proper – God. [316:M512]
- God was his father in heaven and Joseph his father on earth [354:F012]

And one gave a reason for this:

- A leader fulfilling Jewish biblical prophecies, with a legitimate royal line through his mother, and legal claim through his 'father', who

³² Neither Luke nor Matthew says this in their Birth Narrative.

vitality did not contribute sperm, thus avoiding the Biblical curse on his antecedents [371:M623]

Some mentioned Joseph's response to the news of Mary's pregnancy:

- ...her husband (who stood by her even though he was not the father) [118:M621]
- Pregnant woman, tolerant husband [381:M611]
- Joseph's acceptance [143:F713]
- The Holy Ghost spoke to Joseph to tell Joseph what was happening so Joseph could not throw Mary out [153:M611]
- In spite of misgivings he married her [18:M512]

Christmas Texts

The Fifth Lesson, though about the Annunciation to Mary, and though Joseph does not appear in it, names Joseph before Mary: Luke 1.27. The Sixth Lesson also names Joseph before Mary: Luke 2.4-5. The Seventh Lesson (shepherds) mentions 'Mary and Joseph' once (Luke 2.16), but the Eighth Lesson (wise men) mentions only Mary (once), with no reference at all to a father.³³

None of the Top Six Carols mentions Joseph, even by implication.

Other texts

In Matthew 1.18-25 (see Element 2), the emphasis is on Joseph, rather than Mary.

³³ Oddly, as Matthew generally presents the story from Joseph's point of view.

Some less familiar carols mention Joseph.³⁴

Comment

For Matthew, Joseph is essential to the story because he links Jesus with King David (as several Respondents did)³⁵ This is an essential feature of Matthew's gospel, which begins:

An account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David...(Matthew 1.1)

There was some confusion (sometimes openly expressed) about whether and when Mary and Joseph were married. Views ranged from their being married before the Annunciation³⁶ to their still being unmarried after Jesus' birth;³⁷ some Respondents said that Mary was both married and a virgin, but expressed confusion about that.³⁸

- She was a virgin even though she was married to Joseph!?!
[171:F311]

This was the only point on which Respondents openly expressed the difficulty of trying to reconcile two conflicting accounts – though they were not necessarily aware that this (rather than their own memory) was the root of the problem.

³⁴ e.g. *Cherry Tree Carol* (Joseph was an old man).

³⁵ Albright and Mann (1971) p9 and R Smith (1989) pp35-36 note that Matthew is concerned with legal descent, not biology; it is worth reflecting that modern society is more interested in biological descent than legal.

³⁶ [30:F611] [269:F611].

³⁷ Consistent with Luke.

³⁸ Forgetting Matthew 1:25.

The confusion is understandable, as Matthew and Luke disagree on this point.

According to *Matthew* (1.18-25 – not one of the Nine Lessons), Mary and Joseph were engaged when Mary became pregnant; an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him to marry Mary, which he did (apparently immediately: 1.24), but they had no marital relations until after Jesus was born (1.25). *Luke* (1.26-38 – Fifth Lesson) agrees that Mary and Joseph were engaged when Mary became pregnant, but he implies (2.5 – Sixth Lesson) that they were still unmarried when Jesus was born.

Element 5 (ranked 7): Bethlehem

- Born in Bethlehem [215:F413]

What Respondents said

335 Respondents named Bethlehem as Jesus' birthplace. Three referred to 'patrimonial home'³⁹ and 'place of origin'⁴⁰ and 'appropriate tribal territory'⁴¹ without naming a town. One said that Jesus was born *on the way to Bethlehem*;⁴² another said 'in the little town of Bethlehem'⁴³

A few Respondents made the point that it was Bethlehem because it was Joseph's ancestral town/he was of the house of David, e.g.

³⁹ [148:M612].

⁴⁰ [452:0413].

⁴¹ [181:M513].

⁴² Possibly influenced by *Shepherd's Pipe Carol*.

⁴³ [185:F312].

- Joseph (of David's line) went with his fiancée Mary, who was pregnant, to Bethlehem (the city of David) [471:M713]

Several Respondents made a feature of Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem, some mentioning a donkey, e.g.

- They travel with a donkey and Mary being pregnant makes the journey difficult [83:F221]
- Mary is heavily pregnant and so goes on a donkey while Joseph walks [130:F312]

Some commented on the distance travelled:

- Travelled 100 miles in four days! [268:F313]
- One week, 70 miles! Ow! [432:M313]
- 92 miles (quiz answer at home pub) [163:M621]⁴⁴

Six Respondents said that Jesus was born in *Nazareth*, but four of these also referred to a journey (possibly meaning a journey *from* Nazareth).

Christmas Texts

Bethlehem is mentioned once in the Sixth Lesson (Luke 2.4). But, beyond saying that Joseph and Mary travelled there from Nazareth, Luke gives no details of the journey. In the Seventh Lesson, the angel refers to 'the city of David' (Luke 2.11) and later the shepherds name Bethlehem (Luke 2.15). Bethlehem is mentioned four times in the Eighth Lesson, including Matthew's misquotation of Micah 5:2.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Clearly this was considered a general knowledge topic suitable for a pub quiz.

⁴⁵ Scholars e.g. Hagner (1993) p28 suggest that Matthew deliberately misquotes Micah, in pursuit of his overall aim: to show Jesus fulfilling prophecy.

O little town may be partly responsible for keeping Bethlehem firmly in the popular mind (though it mentions Bethlehem only twice). Of the other Top Six Carols, *O come all ye faithful* and *Hark! The herald-angels sing* mention Bethlehem once each. The other Top Six Carols do not mention Bethlehem by name, but *Once in royal David's city* has (obviously) 'David's city' and *While shepherds watched* has 'David's town' (both adopting Luke 2.11 – Seventh Lesson).

The Bidding Prayer's exhortation 'In heart and mind to go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass...' echoes the shepherds' words after the angels have left them (Luke 2.15 – Seventh Lesson).

Other texts

Many other carols mention Bethlehem.⁴⁶

Comment

Both Luke (2.4-7) and Matthew (2.1) state that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea in order to establish a link with the House of David. Luke makes that point by mentioning in passing (Luke 1.27) that Mary was engaged to Joseph who was of the House of David, and by giving it as the reason for their going to Bethlehem (Luke 2.4); he reaffirms the link with David in the angel's announcement to the shepherds (Luke 2.11). Matthew makes the link through Herod's advisers (Matthew 2.5-6). All these verses appear in the Nine Lessons.

⁴⁶ Include the familiar e.g. *God rest you merry*: 'In Bethlehem in Jewry this blessed babe was born'; and less familiar *A babe is born*: 'In Bethlehem that blessed place'; and 20th century carols e.g. *Star Carol*, *Shepherd's Pipe Carol*, *Bethlehem Down*.

But there are debates about the location of Jesus' birth, with many scholars claiming that Matthew and Luke are simply making a theological point, with no historical foundation.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, this is one of the best-known elements of the story. In the *Theos* survey,⁴⁸ 73% of respondents (similar to the 75% of Respondents here) named Bethlehem as Jesus' birthplace, in reply to the question 'According to the story in the Christian Bible, where was Jesus born?'⁴⁹

Element 6 (ranked 11): Census/tax/registration

- Caesar Augustus demanded a census of his imperial subjects
[68:M631]

What Respondents said

239 Respondents mentioned (singly or in various combinations) a census, tax, registration, counting and/or a decree or order:

- Census⁵⁰ – 146
- Decree⁵¹ – 6
- Tax⁵² – 60
- Registration⁵³ – 24, including 2 saying registration of Jesus' birth
- Counting – 10
- Other, e.g. 'pay their dues'⁵⁴ 'government head count'⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Marshall (1977, pp101-102), Fitzmeyer (1981) pp393-394); Raymond Brown (1977); Nolland WBC (1989, pp104-105); Evans (2001, p22); M Smith (2000) dissenting.

⁴⁸ *Op cit.*

⁴⁹ <http://campaigndirector.moodia.com/Client/Theos/Files/Christmas.pdf>.

⁵⁰ This word appears in NIV (Luke 2.1), but not KJV or NRSV.

⁵¹ KJV, NRSV, NIV.

⁵² KJV.

⁵³ NRSV.

⁵⁴ [132:F712].

⁵⁵ [110:F621].

Of the 60 Respondents who mentioned tax (KJV), most clearly envisaged the payment of monetary tax in Bethlehem, e.g.

- Mary and Joseph travel to Bethlehem to pay their Roman taxes
[51:F713]

Two Respondents said that Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem 'for tax reasons'⁵⁶ and one that they went to register for poll tax.⁵⁷

34 Respondents mentioned registration (NRSV) (of whom three specified registration for *tax*) or counting. Two Respondents said that Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem to register Jesus' birth,⁵⁸ one of them⁵⁹ also saying that the Angel Gabriel told them to go there.

19 Respondents mentioned Caesar Augustus (KJV, NIV), Emperor Augustus (NRSV), Caesar or Augustus and two Respondents⁶⁰ mentioned the governor Quirinius – both calling him Quirinius (NRSV, NIV) rather than Cyrenius (KJV).⁶¹ One of these⁶² also named Caesar Augustus (KJV). One Respondent said that the census was held in the year 0AD.⁶³

One Respondent ended his story:

- Moral of the story is stay at home to have kids and fill census in early, then you can really celebrate. [381:M611]

⁵⁶ [247:F513] [325:M231].

⁵⁷ [97:M611].

⁵⁸ [237:F522] [448:M133].

⁵⁹ [448:M133].

⁶⁰ [127:M513] [288:M212].

⁶¹ The relevant verse (Luke 2.2) is omitted at King's, but included at York.

⁶² [127:M513].

⁶³ [139:M321].

Christmas Texts

The Sixth lesson includes Luke's explanation of why Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem. The KJV does not include the word 'census', but does say 'taxed'.

Carols

None of the Top Six Carols mentions a reason for Mary and Joseph being in Bethlehem.⁶⁴

Other texts

Matthew does not give an equivalent reason for Jesus being born in Bethlehem.

Comment

Why did so many Respondents mention a census – a word Luke does not use? And why did so many mention tax? Scholars agree that ἀπογράφειν (a word implying writing) can apply to census registration, normally for taxation purposes;⁶⁵ but they also agree that there is no historical evidence for the census or taxation to which Luke refers, indicating that Luke may have been making a theological point, rather than a historical one: by setting his story firmly in the Roman world (more so than Matthew) Luke is emphasising that Jesus was born for the whole world (synonymous with the Roman Empire).⁶⁶

⁶⁴ *A Virgin most pure* has a verse about this, including the line 'and there to be tax-ed'.

⁶⁵ e.g. Nolland (1989) p103.

⁶⁶ See Raymond Brown (1977) pp414-418; M Smith (2000) pp284-285.

Element 7 (ranked 9): No room

- No room at the inn [351:F512]

Element 8 (ranked 8): Stable

- Jesus, Son of God, king of kings, was born in a smelly, cold, dirty stable! [207:F113]

I combine these Elements here, as most Respondents who mentioned both linked them. They are, however, separate Elements, as Element 7 appears in Luke's gospel, but Element 8 does not.

What Respondents said

271 Respondents (60.8%) referred to the lack of accommodation in Bethlehem, e.g.

- There was nowhere to stay – no room at the inn [248:F612]
- Bethlehem was chockka – there was no room at the inn [268:F313]

Some gave reasons, e.g.

- Because of an Imperial Roman census there was overcrowding in the city [118:M621]
- There was no room at the inn (BA must have handled the reservations) [145:M613]
- They arrived too late to secure a place at the Holiday Inn or the Marriott, but the Travelodge offered them a shed round the back... [452:0413]

115 (42.4% of those mentioning a lack of accommodation) said 'no room at the inn' – the most-repeated phrase between all the questionnaires.

Respondents using bullet points often used this phrase; some Respondents

had it as a separate 'sentence', sometimes in inverted commas or with an exclamation mark.

Only three Respondents used Luke's (KJV) phrase 'no room for them *in* the inn';⁶⁷ 21 simply said 'no room', while another 18 used a combination of 'no room/rooms' 'in/at' 'the/an/any inn/inns'.

116 Respondents referred more generally to the lack of accommodation, some embellishing the story, with Mary and Joseph trudging round Bethlehem knocking on doors/searching for accommodation, all the inns being full, and a kind innkeeper offering a stable, e.g.

- The inn they came to had no room, but the Innkeeper said they could use the stable. [65:F731]
- The inns were crowded with travellers, but one innkeeper took pity and gave them a room in a manger (*sic*), where Jesus was born. [67:F621]
- An innkeeper felt sorry for the couple and let them stay in his stable [459:M413]
- Finally an innkeeper takes pity on them and offers them his stable to sleep in [76:F331]
- One innkeeper pitied them and let them stay in a stable [149:F113]

Despite the varied phraseology, everyone who included this Element was referring to a lack of accommodation, rather than lack of a place in an inn to put a baby. Many used this to explain the reason for the stable – see above, and:

⁶⁷ [238:F713] [353:M512] [360:F713].

- Mary gave birth to Jesus in the only room they could find, a stable [18:M512]
- At Bethlehem all inns are full, so sleep in a stable [55:M422]
- Because there is no room at any of the inns, finally manage to room in a stable...[56:F3131]
- Lost but spared by 'kindness' and shelter in a stable [121:F512]
- The only accommodation left was a stable at the rear of an inn [58:F711]
- The child was born in a manger in a stable, due to a lack of accommodation at late notice or medical facilities [203:M211]

Some Respondents made a link with the present day, e.g.

- A refugee with no space. People we can see on TV every day still. [344:F713]
- ...victims of intolerance/persecution, becoming in effect asylum seekers [70:M532]

326 Respondents said that Jesus was born in a stable or similar.⁶⁸

298 Respondents said 'stable'; other descriptions included:

- barn: 5
- cave: 3⁶⁹
- cattle shed, cowshed, shed or outbuildings: 7

⁶⁸ Element 8 includes all Respondents who mentioned accommodation of stable-like quality, using any terminology. This is consistent with including all mentions of e.g. Mary, shepherds, regardless of terminology.

⁶⁹ [278:M312] [344:F713] [440:F111].

Some described the place:

- a lowly place: 3⁷⁰
- lowly surroundings: 2⁷¹
- humble conditions,⁷² menial conditions,⁷³ less than salubrious,⁷⁴ in poverty,⁷⁵ poor circumstances,⁷⁶ unsuitable place⁷⁷
- Some theories suggest an old shepherds' watch tower [363:M613]

Three Respondents referred to a manger or manger door, when they seemed to mean a stable.⁷⁸ Three Respondents (not counted in this Element) said that Jesus was born in an inn.⁷⁹

Christmas Texts

Luke says that Mary *laid her son in a manger* because there was no room for them in the inn: the Sixth lesson ends:

...because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2.7)⁸⁰

Luke does not give any reason for there being no room, nor any further description of the inn; nor does he mention a stable.

The idea that Jesus was born in a stable may have been assisted in recent memory by *Once in royal David's city*, which since 1919 has opened the

⁷⁰ [61:M611] [253:F621] [327:M713].

⁷¹ [23:F612] [246:F731].

⁷² [426:M712].

⁷³ [277:M731].

⁷⁴ [272:M512].

⁷⁵ [467:F612].

⁷⁶ [312:M512].

⁷⁷ [439:F712].

⁷⁸ [67:F621] [156:F512] [426:M511].

⁷⁹ [208:F211] [385:M712] [402:F611].

⁸⁰ followed incongruously by "Thanks be to God"!

Christmas Eve carol service from King's College, Cambridge – a practice copied at York Minster and elsewhere where the traditional Nine Lessons and Carols format is used. This is because the service evolved from one originally held on Christmas Eve 1880 in the wooden shed which was to become Truro Cathedral.⁸¹ So the Service opens with:

*Once in royal David's city
Stood a lowly cattle shed*

And builds up (in volume and intensity) to the last verse, which begins:

Not in that poor lowly stable...

None of the other Top Six Carols mentions either of these Elements.

Other texts

Other carols mention a stable.⁸²

Comment

Most Respondents who mentioned 'no room' said that the effect was that Jesus was born in a stable, rather than Jesus being laid in a manger (and many more mentioned a stable than a manger)

I initially treated: 'lack of accommodation' and 'no room at the inn', as two separate Elements, since many Respondents mentioned them as separate

⁸¹ <http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/chapel/ninelessons/history.html>.

⁸² Notably Christina Rossetti's *In the bleak midwinter*: 'a stable place sufficed'. Though not usually sung at carol services, the hymn *Thou didst leave thy throne and thy kingly crown* includes the line 'But in Bethlehem's home was there found no room for thy holy nativity'.

Elements of the story and I thought there was a distinction to be made between the former, which does not appear in Luke's gospel, and the latter, which does. However, I concluded that Respondents who mentioned either or both (and who would not necessarily appreciate that one was biblical and the other not) were in fact making a single point, namely that it was difficult for Mary and Joseph to find a place to give birth. Several Respondents referred to Jesus having 'humble origins', which is probably the real point that Luke is making:⁸³

- They were ordinary people. No money. No status. [193:F713]

It is noteworthy that only three out of 271 Respondents used Luke's words 'no room for them in the inn', compared with 115 saying 'no room at the inn' (the title of a 1940s play/film).

As to the inn, Luke uses the word κατάλυμα – a flexible word encompassing anywhere where one might stay, including an inn or a guest room in a house.⁸⁴ Luke 2.7 can bear alternative interpretations: either that the Holy Family was excluded from the κατάλυμα, or that there was not space to put a newborn baby in the κατάλυμα where Mary and Joseph were staying.⁸⁵ Most Respondents largely took the former view,⁸⁶ assuming that there was a stable connected with the κατάλυμα. This follows an ancient tradition, whose evolution can be traced through Christian art.⁸⁷

⁸³ q.v. Philippians 2.5-11.

⁸⁴ Nolland (1989) p105.

⁸⁵ Nolland, (1989) pp105-106 and Wilson (1992) pp80-83 prefer the latter interpretation.

⁸⁶ The three who said that Jesus was born in an inn might have taken the latter view.

⁸⁷ By at least the time of Giotto (14th century), a stable is common.

Element 9 (ranked 1): Birth

- The birth of our Lord! That's it. [267:M613]

What Respondents said

423 Respondents expressly mentioned a birth and a further 20

Respondents mentioned Jesus' birth by implication – either by listing elements of the story, including Jesus, or by commenting on the overall meaning of the story of Jesus' birth (or both):

- Birth of Christ our Saviour [26:M713]⁸⁸

If it seems odd that more Respondents referred to the birth than to Jesus, this is largely because of the Respondents who did not tell a traditional nativity story, but referred more generally to the meaning of this particular birth; I counted these as referring to the birth, e.g.

- God came to earth as a baby [54:F313]

Six Respondents said that Jesus was born on Christmas Day (which technically is accurate, though not necessarily December 25th), e.g.

- With great sense of timing, he is born on Christmas Day
[381:M611]

Some said that he was born on December 25th but one commented:

- Jesus is probably not a Capricorn [68:M631]

⁸⁸ This was this Respondent's entire answer.

Christmas Texts

This is the only Element which appears outside the Fifth to Eighth Lessons: as well as appearing in the Sixth to Ninth Lessons (inclusive) and being foretold by Gabriel in the Fifth Lesson, it is also mentioned less directly in the Second, Third and Fourth Lessons, with connections made by the titles to those Lessons (printed in the Order of Service):

- *Second Lesson*: God promises to faithful Abraham that in his descendants the nations of the world will be blessed.
- *Third Lesson*: Isaiah proclaims the lasting rule of a king from the line of David.
- *Fourth Lesson*: The Prophet declares that Christ's rule will bring peace.

I counted these as references to this Element, although they are not explicit references to Jesus' birth, because some Respondents apparently did see these passages as referring to Jesus' birth – particularly those who gave an 'overall' meaning in reply to Question 1 – and some said that Jesus' birth fulfilled prophecy.⁸⁹

Jesus' birth is mentioned (expressly or by implication) in five of the Top Six Carols. *It came upon the midnight clear* does not mention the birth (but was inspired by Luke 2.8-14).

The Bidding Prayer, whilst not expressly mentioning Jesus' birth, clearly implies that this is what the Service is about: it refers to 'the Babe lying in a manger', 'this Holy Child' and 'the Word made flesh' and places the birth

⁸⁹ I took a different approach for Theme 5 (Incarnation), for reasons given later.

within the whole story of redemption, though in a subtle way which might not be easily understood without some background knowledge.

Comment

Since nearly everyone mentioned or alluded to Jesus' birth, it is reasonable to say that for most of the Respondents 'the Christmas Story' is the story of Jesus' birth, whether in the form of a traditional nativity story or an 'overall' story.

Element 10 (ranked 2): Jesus Christ

Jesus, by this or other names, was mentioned by 426 Respondents – more than any other character in the story. Because the names and descriptions used by Respondents, and those appearing in the Christmas Texts, touch on the question of who Jesus is, this is a topic which overlaps with the Q2 Data and the Themes as no other Element does.⁹⁰ I therefore deal with both Data Sets together in Chapter 6, comparing and exploring the meanings of the names and descriptions used by Respondents in reply to both questions.

Element 11 (ranked 17): Manger

- Jesus slept in a manger [94:M121]

This Element appears at this point in the Paradigm Story because that is the order used most commonly by Respondents who mentioned it (not following Luke's order).

⁹⁰ Although 'Birth' (Element 9) overlaps with Theme 5 'Incarnation', Respondents overall did make a clear distinction between the birth of a child in the Q1 Data and the Incarnation of God in the Q2 Data, so I was able to treat the two Data Sets separately for those topics.

What Respondents said

99 Respondents mentioned a manger, two others mentioned straw and one a 'straw bed' [100:F321]. Many said that Jesus was *born* in a manger.⁹¹ One said that Mary and Joseph spent the night in a manger, 'where Mary bore her child' [156:F512].

Six mentioned 'swaddling clothes' and three 'swaddling bands':

- Wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger [9:F621]
- He was wrapped in swaddling bands and laid in the manger [78:M312]

One ended her story:

- The little boy lay asleep on the hay [185:F312]⁹²

another said:

- Child in a manger [276:F713]⁹³

Christmas Texts

Luke says that Mary wrapped her son in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2.7: Sixth Lesson). No Respondents mentioned the manger before the inn.

Three of the Top Six Carols mention the manger, as does the Bidding Prayer, echoing Luke 2.16 (Seventh Lesson).

⁹¹ Luke says that he was laid in a manger after he was born.

⁹² Possibly quoting *Away in a manger*.

⁹³ Possibly quoting the carol of that name.

Other texts

The manger appears in several popular carols.⁹⁴

Comment

Over three times as many Respondents mentioned the stable (non-biblical) as the manger (biblical), though the manger (biblical) was mentioned disproportionately more by Respondents who attend church only at Christmas.

Those who said Jesus was born in a manger might have confused 'manger' with 'stable' (particularly the Respondent who referred to the 'manger door'⁹⁵).

Element 12 (ranked 19): Animals

- Legend says there were animals in the stable [415:F712]

What Respondents said

73 Respondents mentioned animals. 34 mentioned a donkey (as transport for Mary and Joseph) e.g.

- Go on donkey, Mary heavily pregnant [265:F411]
- Mary rode on a donkey [399:F612]

⁹⁴ e.g. *Away in a manger; God rest you merry* : 'and laid within a manger where oxen feed on hay'; *See amid the winter's snow*: 'Lo (or 'low') within a manger lies...'; and 20th century carols e.g. *Child in a manger, Jesus Child*.

⁹⁵ [426:M511].

49 mentioned other animals present at Jesus' birth⁹⁶:

- Jesus was born among the cattle [58:F711]
- The ox and ass watched [286:F612]
- The manger is surrounded by farm animals and shepherds [125:M611]
- The baby Jesus was born, amongst the straw and animals [65:F731]
- And the cattle and sheep were his friends [151:F712]
- Jesus was born in menial conditions but among animal life [277:M731]
- ...with a manger for a crib and the smells and warmth of the animals [279:F621]

One Respondent stated:

- There were no animals present in the cave. [440:F111]

Christmas Texts

The Nine Lessons do not mention any animals (and animals are not mentioned at all in Luke's and Matthew's Birth Narratives).

Of the Top Six Carols, *Once in royal David's city* and *While shepherds watched* mention animals.

Other texts

There is an ancient tradition of animals being present at Jesus' birth: the earliest Christians made a connection with Isaiah 1.3:⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Ten also mentioning a donkey.

The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib

Many other carols mention animals.⁹⁸

Comment

Sawyer traces how the ox and the ass were appropriated very early on as characters in the Christmas story – dumb animals who recognised who Jesus was.⁹⁹ The ox and ass are ubiquitous in nativity art through the centuries, appearing even in the absence of Mary and Joseph.

St Francis is credited with having begun the tradition of a Christmas crib with animals.¹⁰⁰

Element 13 (ranked 6): Shepherds

- Shepherds visit baby Jesus [394:F512]

⁹⁷ Sawyer (1996) pp119-120.

⁹⁸ e.g. *Unto us is born a Son*: 'Ox and ass their owner know' (quoting Isaiah); *Away in a manger*: 'The cattle are lowing'; from the 15th century, *Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*: 'Betwixt an ox and a silly poor ass'; from the 20th century, *Little Donkey*.

⁹⁹ Sawyer (1996) pp119-120.

¹⁰⁰ <http://www.franciscans.org.uk/Page52.htm>; Graham et al (2005) pp84-85.

What Respondents said

347 Respondents mentioned the people whom Luke calls ποιμένες.

340 said 'shepherds', e.g.

- At that time shepherds were on the hills watching their sheep [78:M312]
- Shepherds were the first to hear the good news and they came to worship Jesus [427:F713]
- Shepherds came to worship him [287:F321]

One said 'a shepherd'¹⁰¹ and others used descriptions such as 'humble working men'¹⁰² and 'field people (lower class)'.¹⁰³

Of the 340 who said 'shepherds', seven specified *three* shepherds, possibly confusing them with wise men (not that Matthew specifies *three* wise men).

One Respondent commented:

- The shepherds are probably the care of us, God's sheep [327:M713]

Christmas Texts

The Seventh Lesson tells the shepherds' story.

¹⁰¹ [156:F512].

¹⁰² [397:F612].

¹⁰³ [189:M713].

Two of the Top Six Carols mention the shepherds. *While shepherds watched* is a paraphrase of Luke 2:8-15. *O come all ye faithful* mentions the shepherds in one of its less well-known verses.¹⁰⁴

Other texts

Many other carols mention the shepherds.¹⁰⁵

Element 14 (ranked 14): Angel/heavenly host

- During the night an angel came and told the shepherds of the birth [407:F611]
- Heavenly hosts proclaim the birth [476:F713]

What Respondents said

199 Respondents mentioned an angel or angels appearing at the time of Jesus' birth, either proclaiming Jesus' birth or appearing in or around the birthplace.

171 of these linked the angel(s) with the shepherds, e.g.

- His birth was heralded by angels, observed by local shepherds [333:F712]
- Shepherds (watching sheep) are visited by host of angels [400:F612]

¹⁰⁴ The relevant verse is often omitted, but included in York Minster's and other more elaborate carol services.

¹⁰⁵ e.g. *The first Nowell, God rest you merry, gentlemen, See, amid the winter's snow, In the bleak midwinter*. Some late 20th century carols develop the pastoral theme, e.g. *Shepherd's Pipe Carol* and *The Lamb*, a poem by William Blake, set to music by John Tavener in 1982, as a BBC Commission for the King's College carol service.

- That night shepherds were told of the birth of God's Son and witnessed hosts of angels singing praise to the new child [55:F613]

11 linked them with the wise men, e.g.

- 3 wise men were summoned by Angel Gabriel [5:F511]
- The three Wise Men presented their gifts to the child, having been told by the Angels that the Messiah had been born [402:F611]

Nine linked them with both, e.g.

- Shepherds and wise men were also told by Gabriel he was coming [33:F412]

One Respondent began his story:

- Angel appears to shepherds at night [75:M611]

With one exception, everyone mentioned *either* one angel *or* plural angels, but not both. The exception was:

- 'Gabriel and Angels warn Shepherds, [following the wise men's visit to the 'reigning king'] who also head for Bethlehem. Heavenly host appears.' [187:M612]

Single angel

64 Respondents mentioned an angel (singular) and in every case but two¹⁰⁶ the angel was said to have announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds (60 Respondents), the wise men (8 Respondents) or both (6 Respondents). 23 of these specified that it was the Angel Gabriel, whilst 41 mentioned an

¹⁰⁶ [97:M611] and [384:F532] (whose first bullet point was 'Angel', followed by 'shepherds').

unnamed angel appearing to the shepherds (and two of these said the wise men too, but no one said wise men only). With the one exception quoted above, no one who mentioned a single angel also mentioned the subsequent appearance of the heavenly host.

One Respondent ended his story:

- 'The arch angel (*sic*) brings a message confirming Jesus' status'
[97:M611]

Plural angels

99 Respondents mentioned 'angels' appearing to the shepherds only (96 Respondents), wise men only (1 Respondent)¹⁰⁷ or both (2 Respondents)¹⁰⁸ and nine mentioned the 'heavenly host' appearing to the shepherds. Other signs to the shepherds included 'heavenly choir'¹⁰⁹ 'heavenly voices'¹¹⁰ 'bright light'¹¹¹ and 'shining light'¹¹² and one Respondent, in a poem, referred to 'Angel Delight'.¹¹³

17 Respondents simply mentioned 'angels' and another three 'heavenly/host[s]/of angels', without relating them to the shepherds (or wise men).¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁷ [402:F611] quoted above.

¹⁰⁸ [225:F512] [249:F712].

¹⁰⁹ [63:F713].

¹¹⁰ [118:M621].

¹¹¹ [235:F512].

¹¹² [351:F512].

¹¹³ [96:M413].

¹¹⁴ [443:F412] [475:M713] [476:F713].

Some Respondents specified what the angels/heavenly host sang:

- Angels with shepherds 'Glory to God in the Highest and Peace to people on earth' [37:F513]¹¹⁵
- ...a choir of angels promising 'peace on earth and goodwill to all men' [404:F713]
- Glory be to God on high! [33:F313]
- the angels proclaimed his birth as had been prophesied by Isaiah' [128:F633]
- Shepherds Angels Gloria Sanctus [177:M713]¹¹⁶
- Proclaimed by angels as the Saviour [385:M712]

Just as those who mentioned a single angel did not mention the heavenly host (or other angels), so those who mentioned the heavenly host (or 'angels') did not also mention a single angel appearing first to announce Jesus' birth.¹¹⁷

Christmas Texts

In the Seventh Lesson, Luke tells how 'the angel of the Lord' (unnamed) appeared to the shepherds¹¹⁸ announcing Jesus' birth, and then the heavenly host appeared, saying 'Glory to God in the highest...'. *While shepherds watched* (a paraphrase of Luke 2.8-14) also tells the story in this way.

This is the only Element that appears in *It came upon the midnight clear* – another carol inspired by Luke 2.13-14.

¹¹⁵ A frequent churchgoer, possibly used to hearing these words in the Gloria.

¹¹⁶ This Respondent used Latin and Greek in reply to Question 2. Luke reports the angels singing the opening words of the Gloria, but not the Sanctus.

¹¹⁷ With the one exception noted above.

¹¹⁸ And not the wise men, who appear only in Matthew.

Of the other Top Six Carols, all but *Once in royal David's city* mention angels. *O come all ye faithful* has a whole verse devoted to the angels and their message – traditionally the last verse sung (with a descant) at carol services, including the 2007 Service. This carol does not link the angels' message with the shepherds, who appear in a different verse (and not the verse immediately before this one). It does, however, refer to Jesus as the King of Angels, and this is echoed in the Bidding Prayer.

O little town has a more general reference to angels (not strictly from Luke and not connected with shepherds).

Hark! The herald-angels sing concludes the Service at King's College Cambridge, York Minster and elsewhere where that format is used. It also does not link the angels with the shepherds.

Other texts

Other carols mention the angels.¹¹⁹

Comment

Although Luke says that one (unnamed) angel appeared to the shepherds, telling them of Jesus' birth, and then the heavenly host appeared (and *While shepherds watched* tells the story in the same way) *nobody* told the story in this way.

Although five of the Top Six Carols mention angels, only one of them (*While shepherds watched*) links them with the shepherds. The others use the angels to bring their message into the present: *O little town*, *O come*

¹¹⁹ e.g. *Angels from the realms of glory*.

all ye faithful and *Hark! The herald-angels sing* are all in the present tense and *It came upon the midnight clear* moves into the present tense after the first verse, bringing the angels' message of peace and goodwill into the present day. In the Pilot study, Participants praised this carol in particular for its relevance in 2006/2007.

Element 15 (ranked 4): Wise men

- Wise men came from the east [374:M612]

What Respondents said

378 Respondents mentioned the people Matthew calls μάγοι – more than mentioned Joseph. 244 said 'wise men' (some in inverted commas), e.g.

- The wise men, the gentile leaders, came from afar to worship [263:F513]

108 said 'kings', e.g.

- Newborn child visited by exotic kings [15:M612]

46 said 'magi', e.g.

- Magi bring gifts but do not report back to Herod [307:F612]

Some used more than one term:

- Three wise men (who may or may not have been kings) [431:M332]

and one said that wise men *and* kings came to visit:

- after 12 days wise men and kings from afar journeyed with gifts to see the holy child [194:F713]

but nobody used all three terms.

12 Respondents referred to the wise men using none of these terms: three said 'astrologers'¹²⁰ and others said 'stargazers'¹²¹ 'learned men'¹²² 'renowned academics'¹²³ and '3 dudes'.¹²⁴

From the East/Orient

60 Respondents said that the wise men/kings/magi came from the East.

50 said 'wise men' from the East, e.g.

- Wise men travelled from the east to seek the new king [91:F613]

11 said 'Kings' from the East, e.g.

- The 3 kings travelling from the East visit...[125:M611]

Two said Magi from the East:

- Magi from the east travel to visit Baby Jesus [105:M612]¹²⁵

Three Respondents said that kings¹²⁶ came from the 'Orient':

- The child was visited...later by kings from the Orient [389:F622]

¹²⁰ [344:F713] and two saying *three* astrologers: [288:M212] [350:F632].

¹²¹ [149:F113].

¹²² [61:M611].

¹²³ [397:F612].

¹²⁴ [337:F613].

¹²⁵ Also [127:M513] and [168:M632] 'Magi *in* the east'.

¹²⁶ All those saying 'Orient' said 'kings,' possibly influenced by 'We three Kings of Orient are'.

seven said they came from 'afar' (or equivalent), one '3 kings in Egypt'¹²⁷ and one 'from Iran (Persia!)'.¹²⁸

Three

203 Respondents (42.5% of those mentioning them at all) said that there were three of them.¹²⁹

135 said three wise men, e.g.

- 3 wise men have heard a Saviour born, to be a king [9:F621]

74 said three kings, e.g.

- The three kings come to adore him¹³⁰ [230:M613]

11 said three magi, e.g.¹³¹

- 3 magi follow star to find/worship child [330:F633]

Three Respondents gave the traditional names Caspar, Melchior and Balthazar,¹³² whilst another said:

- we know the names of three of them [36:M713]

and some said that we do not know how many there were.

¹²⁷ [286:F612].

¹²⁸ [316:M512], possibly referring to the carol *Three Kings from Persian Lands Afar* (not sung at the 2007 Service).

¹²⁹ Disproportionately more Christmas-only churchgoers (+7%) and fewer frequent churchgoers (-9%).

¹³⁰ Echoing the chorus of *O come all ye faithful*.

¹³¹ These numbers total more than 203, because some people used two terms.

¹³² [101:000] [140:M711] [430:F432].

Three Respondents said (correctly) that only one gospel mentions the wise men.¹³³ Four mentioned recently-reported comments by Archbishop Rowan Williams about the 'mythical' status of the wise men,¹³⁴ e.g.

- There were 3 kings/wise men no matter what the Archbishop of Canterbury says [432:M313]

Several Respondents said that the wise men arrived 'later', 'a few days later', 'about two weeks later'¹³⁵ or '12 days later';¹³⁶ one said that it could have been up to two years later, noting that they visited in a house, not a stable.¹³⁷ One said that the wise men visited the Holy Family in Egypt.¹³⁸

One Respondent applied Luke's wording (about the *shepherds*) 'Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger' to the *magi*:

- They follow the star to Bethlehem, where they find Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger in the stable [168:M632]

Christmas Texts

In the Eighth Lesson, Matthew refers to 'wise men from the East', but does not say how many there were.

¹³³ [57:M712] [99:F533] [246:F621].

¹³⁴ e.g. *Daily Telegraph* 21st December 2007:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/features/3635114/We-three-kings-of-Orient-arent.html>.

¹³⁵ [183:F413].

¹³⁶ [79:M712] [370:F712] and [2:F211] adding 'Epiphany'.

¹³⁷ [181:M513].

¹³⁸ [172:F221]. Matthew 2:13 seems to rule this out.

Of the Top Six Carols, only *O come all ye faithful* mentions the wise men – in a less well-known verse.¹³⁹ None of the Top Six Carols mentions the wise men coming from the East/Orient, nor that there were *three* of them.

Other texts

There are some well-known carols specifically about the wise men/kings.¹⁴⁰

Some carols mention the East/Orient, most famously 'We three kings of Orient are'.

As to *three* wise men, The First Nowell has '*Three wise men came from country far....Then entered in those wise men three*'. *Kings of Orient* and *The Three Kings* refer to three kings, the former giving each an individual verse.

Comment

Arguably, the wise men are not part of the *Christmas* Story: liturgically, the Church treats Epiphany as a separate festival.¹⁴¹

The ancient tradition of *three* wise men and their names may have arisen because of the three gifts mentioned by Matthew.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Often omitted, but included in York Minster's and other large-scale carol services.

¹⁴⁰ e.g. *Kings of Orient*: 'We Three Kings'; *The Three Kings*: 'Three Kings from Persian lands afar'; *As with gladness men of old*. Also, like the shepherds, the wise men feature in well-known nativity carols, e.g. *The first Nowell*, *In the bleak midwinter*, *A babe is born*, *Nativity Carol*.

¹⁴¹ Talley (1990) pp133-134 suggests that Epiphany was established in the early 2nd century, possibly before Christmas became established.

¹⁴² The tradition is evident in Christian art as early as the 5th century: http://www.sacred-destinations.com/italy/ravenna-sant-apollinare-nuovo-photos/slides/xti_6806p.htm.

Shepherds and wise men

Most Respondents mentioned both shepherds *and* wise men:

- Shepherds: 356
- Wise men: 392
- Both: 347
- Wise men only: 45
- Shepherds only: 9
- Neither: 77

Most who mentioned both did so in that order,¹⁴³ many saying that they arrived more or less together, including:

- Wise men led to stable by shepherds. Their mission was confirmed when angels appeared above the crib [313:M713]

Several Respondents said that the shepherds and/or wise men worshipped Jesus:¹⁴⁴

- The three kings come to adore him [230:M613]
- Adoration of magi etc [8:F712]¹⁴⁵
- They (shepherds)are overcome with adoration for the child [240:F732]
- Worshippers of the child include shepherds and wise men with gifts [12:F631]

¹⁴³ i.e. the order in the Nine Lessons.

¹⁴⁴ Matthew 1.11 says that the wise men 'fell down and worshipped him', but Luke 2.15 says simply that the shepherds 'found' Jesus lying a manger (though in Luke 2.20 (not included in the Sixth Lesson) they return home glorifying and praising God).

¹⁴⁵ The title of numerous works of art.

And some mentioned them in a more general way:

- People of all classes travel to Bethlehem to celebrate the birth and worship [264:F331]
- Awe and hope led the wise and the lowly to a humble stable [22:F302]
- People come all night when all Mary and Baby Jesus want is a good night's sleep – plenty of time for visitors later [381:M611]

Element 16 (ranked 10): Star

- There was a bright star in the sky [304:F321]

What Respondents said

243 Respondents mentioned a star, 'stars'¹⁴⁶ 'astrological signs (stars)'¹⁴⁷ or 'strange signs in the sky'.¹⁴⁸ Two added the star as an afterthought.¹⁴⁹

207 Respondents connected the star with the wise men and/or shepherds.

145 linked it with the wise men/magi only, e.g.

- Wise men follow a star to see the new born king [66:M621]
- A star guides magi to Jesus [396:F511]

21 linked it with the shepherds only, e.g.

- Jesus is born under a star that guides the shepherds [323:F312]

¹⁴⁶ [64:F322].

¹⁴⁷ [453:F312].

¹⁴⁸ [344:F713].

¹⁴⁹ [389:F622] and [441: F511] using a different pen.

41 linked it with both, e.g.

- The shepherds and 3 x wise men all came to worship the new born King led by a star [469:F613]

One Respondent said that she could not remember whether it was the wise men or the shepherds who followed the star.¹⁵⁰

Six Respondents said that the star was in the *east*, five of these connecting it with the wise men, though the sixth did not mention the wise men – just the star:

- A star shone in the east [347:F712]

Some expressed confusion about how wise men *from* the east should have seen the star 'in the east'.¹⁵¹

Two Respondents said that it was the North Star.¹⁵² One that Mary and Joseph followed a star to Bethlehem.¹⁵³ Three Respondents said that it was the Star of David.¹⁵⁴

Some commented on its significance:

- 'wise men'...connected it with an ancient prophecy of a great king's birth [436:M712]

¹⁵⁰ [193:F713].

¹⁵¹ Does Matthew mean 'We saw the star *when we were in* the east'?

¹⁵² [186:M213] and [188:F212] said that Mary and Joseph followed it.

¹⁵³ [7:M512].

¹⁵⁴ [300:M113] [430:F432] [268:F313].

One Respondent added a detail:

- 3 kings followed the brightest star ever seen, possibly due to a tip-off from an angel called 'Gabriel' [203:M311]

And another:

- SatNav not working – followed a star [381:M711]

Christmas Texts

The star appears only in Matthew and only in relation to the wise men. The Eighth Lesson mentions the star three times, and the east twice.

Of the Top Six Carols, only *O come all ye faithful* mentions the star.¹⁵⁵ *O Little Town of Bethlehem* mentions 'morning stars'.

Other texts

The star is not mentioned elsewhere in the gospels. Other carols mention it.¹⁵⁶

Comment

There are numerous theories as to the identity and theological significance of the star. Some scholars suggest that Matthew was drawing on Balaam's prophecy in Numbers 24.17 – to show Jesus fulfilling prophecy.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ The relevant verse is often omitted, but included in York Minster's and other more elaborate carol services.

¹⁵⁶ e.g. *We three kings*: 'O star of wonder...'; *The Three Kings (from Persian lands afar)*, in which the choir sings the German chorale *Wie schon leuchtet der Morgenstern*; *The first Nowell*, which has the *shepherds* seeing the star first; *Star Carol*.

¹⁵⁷ e.g. Raymond Brown (1977) pp170-173; Kelly (2004) p12.

Respondents may have been confused as between star/angels and wise men/shepherds because these are all bright things in the sky. It is possible that Luke and Matthew are making the same point in different ways.

Element 17 (ranked 15): Herod

- Herod hears a new king has been born and feels this threatens his power [83:F221]

What Respondents said

149 Respondents mentioned Herod, 144 giving his name and others calling him 'king',¹⁵⁸ 'local ruler',¹⁵⁹ 'despot',¹⁶⁰ and 'the authorities'.¹⁶¹

Several Respondents described the wise men's visit to Herod:

- Herod trying to find all baby boys who might be threat because of inadvertent tip-off by wise men [123:F421]

and one gave a different version:

- three astrologers see a bright star in the East and follow it, although are intercepted en route by King Herod's troops who are searching for the prophesied child [288:M212]

¹⁵⁸ [187:M612] [198:M713].

¹⁵⁹ [110:F621].

¹⁶⁰ [310:F432].

¹⁶¹ [381:M611].

19 Respondents mentioned Herod early in the story (before the journey to Bethlehem); of these, 12 said that Herod ordered the census/registration/taxation.

Christmas Texts

Herod appears in the Eighth Lesson in connection with the wise men.

None of the Top Six Carols mentions Herod.

Other texts

Some carols mention Herod in connection with the slaughter of children (Element 20).

Comment

Many Respondents mentioned Herod before Jesus' birth, although Matthew does not mention him until Chapter 2, 'after Jesus was born...'. It is also noteworthy that Respondents connected him with the *census*, which appears only in Luke, whereas Herod appears only in Matthew.

Element 18 (ranked 12): Gifts

- The wise men give Jesus Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh [80:M431]

What Respondents said

219 Respondents mentioned gifts being presented to Jesus.

178 mentioned only the wise men bringing gifts, e.g.

- He was visited by three wise men bearing gifts [50:M711]

Three mentioned only the shepherds bringing gifts, e.g.

- Shepherds came bearing gifts for the child [4:F711]¹⁶²

29 mentioned both groups bringing gifts:

- The Shepherds and the Wise Men brought the child gifts and worshipped him [82:M712]

138 Respondents (63% of those mentioning gifts at all) named the wise men's gifts as gold, frankincense and myrrh (usually in that order and correctly spelled, though with some interesting misspellings and comments about the difficulty of spelling them); one named just frankincense and myrrh.¹⁶³

Some Respondents mentioned the significance of the gifts, e.g.

- Gold, frankincense and myrrh – symbols of Life, Death and Wealth [101:000]¹⁶⁴
- Gifts for a King, a god and a man [404:F613]
- The wise men then paid material homage to he (*sic*) who eschewed all material wealth [28:M412]

Others commented:

- Gifts of great value, but not really much fun for a baby to play with [452:0413]
- In the Life of Brian version Mary tells them they can keep the myrrh [138:F321]

¹⁶² Also [212:F213] [330:F633].

¹⁶³ [463:F611].

¹⁶⁴ A collaborative answer by four people.

Six Respondents said what the *shepherds* brought: a lamb¹⁶⁵, lambs¹⁶⁶ a sheep¹⁶⁷ and wool (quoted below). All these also specified what the wise men's gifts were, e.g.

- Wise men, angels and shepherds came to see Jesus. They brought presents of gold, frankincense and myrrh, wool and blessings [94:M121]

One Respondent stated that the shepherds came 'without presents'¹⁶⁸

There were some comments about why we give presents at Christmas, linking this with the presents given to Jesus. One Respondent listed gold, frankincense and myrrh, adding:

- But no Christmas gifts – only Birthday ones! [100:M321]

Christmas Texts

The Eighth Lesson ends with the wise men presenting gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Luke does not mention gifts being given, by the shepherds or by anyone else.

Of the Top Six Carols, only *O come all ye faithful* mentions the wise men's gifts.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ [183:F413] [431:M332] [432:M313].

¹⁶⁶ [208:F211].

¹⁶⁷ [245:F312].

¹⁶⁸ [305:M421].

¹⁶⁹ The relevant verse is often omitted, but included in York Minster's and other larger-scale carol services.

Other texts

Several carols mention gifts.¹⁷⁰

Element 19 (ranked 28): Flight

- Jesus was taken to Egypt by his parents to keep him safe [14:F731]

Element 20 (ranked 20): Slaughter

- Herod, fearing for his power, had the new-born slain [40:M613]

I combine these Elements here, because they are linked events in Matthew's gospel and over half of the Respondents who mentioned either mentioned both. They are, however, separate Elements because they are separate pericopes in Matthew's gospel and several Respondents mentioned only one. The order in which Respondents mentioned them varied, so they appear in the Paradigm Story in Matthew's order.

What Respondents said

113 Respondents mentioned either or both of these Elements.

42 mentioned only the Flight, e.g.

- Mary, Joseph and baby escape to Egypt just in time [200:F232]
- In a dream, Joseph is warned not to return via King Herod¹⁷¹
[56:F313]

¹⁷⁰ *We Three Kings* has a verse about each of the three gifts; some carols describe shepherds offering a lamb as a gift (as did three Respondents), notably *In the bleak midwinter*: 'If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb'.

¹⁷¹ Confusing with wise men's dream.

21 mentioned only the Slaughter (varying as to who was slaughtered), e.g.

- King Herod has all new born children killed [125:M611]
- The puppet king, Herod, worried that Jesus might present a challenge to his authority, ordered a massacre of all children aged 2 or less [118:M621]¹⁷²
- King Herod receives news that a new King has been born, and orders that his army must kill all boys aged under 2 years in the region [85:M221]
- Some time later Herod, King of the Jews, plots to kill Jesus. Fails. [295:F112]

50 mentioned both, e.g.

- Herod orders massacre of the innocents. Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt with Jesus. [9:F621]
- The baby and his parents escape the wrath of a deranged despot by going into exile [397:F612]
- Keen to avoid any further insurrection the ruler arranges a campaign of military infanticide. Fortunately, the family in question receive the prescience to flee the country...[148:M612]

Two Respondents linked the Flight with prophecy (following Matthew 2.15):

- Mary and Joseph escape to Egypt to fulfil Scripture [465:F713]
- Flight to Egypt: out of Egypt I have called my son! [177:M713]

¹⁷² Reflecting Matthew 2.16.

One Respondent said that the Holy Family returned to Nazareth by 'another route'¹⁷³ and another said 'another way'.¹⁷⁴

Some Respondents placed this episode early in the story, saying that Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem 'due to Herod's rule'¹⁷⁵ or 'to avoid Herod'¹⁷⁶ and two said that they went to Bethlehem because Herod had ordered the death of babies: either all children under 6 months¹⁷⁷ or all baby boys under 2.¹⁷⁸

Christmas Texts

Neither the Flight nor the slaughter appears in the Christmas Texts.

Other texts

The Flight to Egypt and the Slaughter of the Innocents appear (in that order) in Matthew 2.13-18. Matthew says that the slaughter was of *all children aged two years or under* (Matthew 2.16).

Some carols mention these Elements.¹⁷⁹

Comment

Non -and Christmas-only churchgoers mentioned the *slaughter* more than average (and medium churchgoers less than average) whereas frequent

¹⁷³ [24:M732].

¹⁷⁴ [377:F611] - using inverted commas, indicating that it was a quotation - confusing with the wise men, who returned home by another way: Matthew 2.12 (not included in Eighth Lesson).

¹⁷⁵ [227:M512] [257:M212].

¹⁷⁶ [461:F612].

¹⁷⁷ [225:F212].

¹⁷⁸ [441:F511] who originally wrote 'babies under 2' but changed it to 'baby boys under 2' in a different pen.

¹⁷⁹ Herod and the slaughter are the main focus of *The Coventry Carol; Unto us is born a son/Unto us a boy is born* (two different translations) also includes a verse about Herod and the slaughter.

churchgoers mentioned the *flight* more than average and Christmas-only attenders less so. Does this show Christmas-only attenders focussing on human evil and frequent churchgoers focussing more on the positive aspect of God's protection?

God in the Q1 Data

172 Respondents (38.6%) mentioned God in reply to Question 1. I considered including God as an element of the Paradigm Story, but ultimately decided not to, since most mentioned him not as a character in the story, but more in the sense of being involved overall (the approach that Luke and Matthew take). Also, since many Respondents mentioned God in reply to Question 2, it would have been wrong to read too much into his inclusion or exclusion in the Q1 Data. I therefore deal with the 'God' element of the Christmas Story in relation to the Q2 Data (Chapter 6).

Did the Christmas Texts influence the Q1 Data?

Some aspects of the Data indicate that the Christmas Texts might have influenced Respondents, and some aspects indicate that they were not the main influence. So I now look at overall correlations between the Paradigm Story and the Christmas Texts and particular correlations (or lack of them of them).

Overall correlations

In this section, 'number of Respondents mentioning' is the number of Respondents mentioning an Element, counting each Respondent once per Element mentioned. Most Respondents mentioned more than one Element: one Respondent mentioning 15 Elements would count as 15 'Respondents mentioning'. Therefore, some groups of Elements show more than 446 Respondents mentioning them. The total 'Respondents mentioning' all 20 Elements was 4990. In effect, these are weightings for the Elements.

Graph 1 (mentioned on page 51 above) shows the number of Respondents mentioning each Element.

It is important to note that, in categorising the Christmas Texts for this section, I placed an Element in a particular category (e.g. Luke, Top Six Carols) if it is mentioned *at all* in a particular type of text. The analysis does not take account of the fact that some Elements are mentioned many more times in the Christmas Texts than others; for example, Element 14 (Angel/heavenly host) and Element 15 (Wise men) both appear in the Top Six Carols (so I categorised both accordingly) but Element 14 appears in

five of them, whereas Element 15 appears in only one (and only once). Attempting to rank the Elements by how many times they appear in each type of text would have over-complicated the analysis. Table 1B contains the relevant information, but that level of detail is not reflected in what follows.

Correlation of Paradigm Story with Luke, Matthew and Nine Lessons

The Nine Lessons include three Lessons from Luke (Fifth, Sixth and Seventh), totalling 29 verses, and one Lesson from Matthew, totalling 12 verses. The Paradigm Story is closely aligned with these four Lessons and it follows the order of these Lessons quite closely (that being the order in which most Respondents told it).

The 20 Elements comprise:

- 16 Elements mentioned in Luke and/or Matthew and in the Nine Lessons
- 2 Elements (Flight and Slaughter) mentioned in Matthew but not in the Nine Lessons
- 2 Elements (Stable and Animals) not mentioned in Luke or Matthew

Venn diagram 1¹⁸⁰ shows which Elements appear in Luke, Matthew, both or neither, and which are also in the Nine Lessons.¹⁸¹ Elements are labelled 'Luke' or 'Matthew' according to whether they appear anywhere in Luke and/or Matthew's Birth Narratives – not only the passages which appear in

¹⁸⁰ In the Venn Diagrams, Elements are listed by rank, not number, as the rankings (unlike the numbers) indicate which Elements were mentioned by the most and fewest Respondents.

¹⁸¹ There are no elements which appear in the Nine Lessons which are not also in Luke and/or Matthew.

the Nine Lessons; so Joseph and Miraculous conception count as both 'Luke' and 'Matthew', even though only the Luke Lessons mention them.¹⁸²

Pie charts 3A and 3B show how many Elements appear in each group shown in Venn Diagram 1 and the number of Respondents mentioning those Elements. Comparing Pie charts 3A and 3B shows that the Elements mentioned by both Luke and Matthew and which are also in the Nine Lessons (dark blue) were, collectively, mentioned by disproportionately more Respondents, whilst those which are not in the Nine Lessons (i.e. those mentioned by Matthew only (purple) or by neither Luke nor Matthew (turquoise)) were mentioned by disproportionately fewer Respondents.

Correlation of Paradigm Story with Christmas Texts

Venn diagram 2 and Pie charts 4A and 4B apply a similar analysis to all the Christmas Texts as a group. Venn diagram 2 shows which Elements appear in the Nine Lessons, the Top Six Carols, the Bidding Prayer and any combinations. Pie charts 4A and 4B show that the Elements which appear in the Nine Lessons, the Top Six Carols and the Bidding Prayer (dark blue) and (to a lesser degree) those which appear in the Nine Lessons and the Top Six Carols (red) were, collectively, mentioned by disproportionately more Respondents, whilst those which appear in none of the Christmas Texts (turquoise) were mentioned by disproportionately fewer Respondents.

¹⁸² Because it would not be right to assume that Respondents mentioning these Elements had been influenced only by the Luke Lessons and not by Matthew.

The combined effect of Venn Diagrams 1 and 2 and Pie Charts 3A, 3B, 4A and 4B is that the number of mentions increases in proportion to the number of different types of Christmas Text in which an Element appears.

Distribution of Elements in Christmas Texts

Table 4 summarises Table 1B by showing which Elements appear in which of the Christmas Texts. (Table 4 also refers to the Q2 Data and I refer to it in Chapters 6 and 7.)

Pie Charts 5A, 5B, 6A and 6B amplify Table 4:

- Pie Charts 5A and 5B show how many Elements appear in each of the Nine Lessons¹⁸³ and the Bidding Prayer, and the numbers of Respondents mentioning those Elements;
- Pie Charts 6A and 6B show how many Elements appear in each of the Top Six Carols and the numbers of Respondents mentioning those Elements.

As well as showing which individual texts contain the most and fewest Elements, these charts also show that, for each individual text (Lesson, Bidding Prayer or Carol), the *number of Elements* appearing in it is broadly proportionate to the *number of Respondents mentioning those Elements*: in each pair of charts, the slices in A and B are broadly in proportion (unlike Pie Charts 4A and 4B). So it is not the case that particular texts contain Elements which were particularly popular or unpopular.

¹⁸³ Except the First and Second Lessons, which contain no Elements.

Summary of overall correlations

The combined effect of Venn Diagrams 1 and 2 and Pie Charts 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B, 6A and 6B is that Elements which appear in the Christmas Texts were mentioned disproportionately more than those which do not (Pie Charts 4A and 4B), but those which do appear in the Christmas Texts were mentioned broadly in proportion to those appearances (Pie Charts 5A, 5B, 6A and 6B).

This could indicate that the Christmas Texts did influence Respondents, or it could be simply that the Elements which appear more widely in the Christmas Texts are in fact the most important (e.g. Jesus Christ) and that the Christmas Texts reflect that.

Particular correlations

There were many instances of Respondents including phrases or themes which appear in the Christmas Texts.

Some quoted from the Top Six Carols:¹⁸⁴

- In a lowly cattle shed¹⁸⁵ at the back of an inn [5:F511]
- In the little town of Bethlehem they are lent a stable...The shepherds watched their flocks by night. [185:F312]
- While the shepherds watched their flocks by night [188:F212]
- (Ox and cattle standing by!)¹⁸⁶ [432:M313]
- Newborn king¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Some made it clear that they knew they were quoting.

¹⁸⁵ *Once in royal David's city.*

¹⁸⁶ The exclamation mark might indicate that he is quoting, but is he actually *misquoting* *Once in royal David's city's* 'with the oxen standing by'?

¹⁸⁷ *Hark! The herald-angels sing* – six Respondents used this phrase.

Some quoted from the Nine Lessons:

- 'A decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed'.¹⁸⁸ 'Joseph and his espoused wife went to Bethlehem for they were of the house and lineage of David'¹⁸⁹ [166:F312]
- (being of the house and lineage of David)¹⁹⁰ [422:F722]
- Joseph and Mary journey to Bethlehem to be taxed. No room at inn.¹⁹¹ [63:F713]
- Shepherds 'abiding in the fields'¹⁹² [181:M513] [360:F713]
- King of the Jews¹⁹³ [61:M611]
- Wise men from the East...coming via Herod, who requests of them to inform him once they have found the child so that he too may worship him¹⁹⁴ [88:M513]
- Not born of man, but of God¹⁹⁵ [194:F713]

One Respondent began:

- 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us'¹⁹⁶

before continuing with a traditional nativity story. [252:M713]

Two Respondents quoted from Matthew 1.19 – part of the alternative Sixth Lesson:¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁸ Luke 2.1: Sixth Lesson.

¹⁸⁹ Luke 2.4: Sixth Lesson; Respondent's own quotation marks.

¹⁹⁰ Luke 2.4: Sixth Lesson.

¹⁹¹ Luke 2.7: Sixth Lesson. As noted under Element 7 (No room), many Respondents used this phrase or similar.

¹⁹² Luke 2.8: Seventh Lesson.

¹⁹³ Matthew 2.2: Eighth Lesson.

¹⁹⁴ Matthew 2.8: Eighth Lesson.

¹⁹⁵ Paraphrasing John 1.13: Ninth Lesson.

¹⁹⁶ John 1.14: Ninth Lesson.

¹⁹⁷ Not used in the 2007 Service, but could have been heard at carol services elsewhere.

- Joseph, her affianced, has a dream in which he is told not to 'put her away quietly' [38:F413]
- Joseph decides not to put her away... [191:F613]

Other indications that the Christmas Texts might have influenced

Respondents included:

- Some mentioned the Fall (First Lesson).
- Many considered the Annunciation (Fifth Lesson) and the arrival of the Wise Men (Eighth Lesson) to be part of the Christmas Story.
- Many mentioned Bethlehem. Unlike some other Elements, this is not a subject which can easily be represented visually (for example in art or drama), but is something that needs to be read, spoken or heard (for example in the Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Lessons and in carols, particularly, *O little town*).
- Respondents generally favoured Luke's 'House of David' explanation over Matthew's: many more Respondents mentioned the necessity to travel to Bethlehem (some even saying, as Luke does (Luke 2.4), that this was because Joseph was of the House of David) than mentioned Joseph's dream, which is where Matthew (1.20) has the angel addressing Joseph as 'son of David'; Luke 2.4 appears in the Nine Lessons, whereas Matthew 1.20 does not. Respondents may also have been influenced by *One in royal David's city* and *While*

shepherds watched, which both reflect Luke 2.14 (Seventh Lesson).¹⁹⁸

- The most-repeated phrase was 'No room at the inn', which (albeit with slightly different wording) are the final words of the Sixth Lesson (possibly making them memorable).
- Most Respondents who mentioned shepherds *and* wise men did so in that order, as do the Seventh and Eighth Lessons and *O come all ye faithful*.¹⁹⁹

There were also indications that the Christmas Texts were not the only or main influence:

- Some quoted from carols other than the Top Six,²⁰⁰ e.g.
 - Shepherds in the fields abiding²⁰¹ receive message from angel...The cattle are lowing²⁰² and all is peaceful [25:M412]
 - Little donkey [325:M231]
- Two Elements²⁰³ do not appear in the Christmas Texts.

¹⁹⁸ But both Luke and Matthew also connect Jesus with David in their genealogies, neither of which appears in the Nine Lessons, so the Sixth and Seventh Lessons are not the sole sources of this information.

¹⁹⁹ Though scholars generally place them in this order too.

²⁰⁰ This is most particularly significant, as the Top Six Carols are not necessarily the most well-known: I chose them simply because York Minister included them in two consecutive years.

²⁰¹ *Angels from the realms of glory*.

²⁰² *Away in a manger*.

²⁰³ Elements 19 (Flight) and 20 (Slaughter).

- Four Elements²⁰⁴ do not appear in the Nine Lessons, and two of these²⁰⁵ do not appear in Luke or Matthew at all.
- Several Respondents were apparently confused about Mary and Joseph's marital status. The Nine Lessons include only Luke's account (Luke 2.5: Sixth Lesson), which states that Mary and Joseph were engaged (not married) when Jesus was born, so those who were confused might have been influenced by Matthew 1.24 (not in the Nine Lessons).
- Several Respondents followed Matthew's approach of telling the story of Jesus' conception from Joseph's point of view – apparently influenced by Matthew 1:18-25 (not in the Nine Lessons), rather than Luke's account in the Fifth Lesson.
- Nobody recounted the episode with the angel and the heavenly host in the way Luke does (Luke 2.9-14): all but one mentioned *either* a single angel *or* plural angels.
- More Respondents mentioned the wise men than the shepherds, although there are fewer references to the wise men in the Top Six Carols (just one line in *O come all ye faithful*, compared with a whole carol about the shepherds).²⁰⁶

It is impossible to tell from the Data whether and to what extent Respondents had been influenced by the Christmas Texts, for example

²⁰⁴ Elements 8 (Stable), 12 (Animals), 19 (Flight) and 20 (Slaughter).

²⁰⁵ Elements 8 (Stable) and 12 (Animals).

²⁰⁶ Though they do have a whole Lesson each.

through previous experience of services of Nine Lessons and Carols. It is also beyond the scope of this study to explore whether the Service when first created reflected how the Christmas Story was generally told at that time, or whether it re-shaped the story in a new way, which over the course of 90 years has become the norm. But the Q1 Data do show a clear correlation between what Respondents said and the Christmas Texts.

Chapter 6

Analysis and evaluation of Q2 Data: the Themes

How Respondents answered Question 2

Question 2 said:

Please say what you think the Christmas Story means, in about 20 words.

Answers ranged from 1 to 87 words. As with Question 1, I decided to include all replies, even those considerably longer than the suggested length, as it was clearly only a suggestion and even the longest answers were short enough to enable me to extract the main themes. This approach means that there may have been themes which those who limited themselves to 20 words refrained from mentioning, but I have assumed that everyone included whatever they thought was most important.

Coding Q2 Data

Initially I did not look at the demographic information: I tried to assess what was being said without knowing the Respondents' background. Sometimes this was frustrating, because I guessed that if I could see whether the Respondent was or was not a Christian or a churchgoer it would be easier to know what they meant by what they had said – and that is why I did not look. In a very few cases where I had been unable to categorise an answer, I did look at the demographic information for

clarification.¹ An example of where I did look at demographic information so as to decide how to code particular responses was in deciding whether or not two answers were talking about kenosis; first:

- True happiness can only be found in your own mind and in supporting others. It will never be found in material success.
[239:M521]

Having looked at the demographic information, I coded this as 'No' under 'Kenosis', because it was from a non-Christian; had it been from a Christian, I might have inferred that they were relating this comment to Jesus' birth, but I could not assume that a non-Christian was making that connection.

Conversely, I coded the following as 'Yes' under 'Kenosis':

- The importance of 'humanity'. Love, harmony and kindness - honouring the family, simplicity and Christian values these are the important 'gifts' of our lives. [394:F512]

As this was from a Christian, I guessed that she was referring to the simplicity of humanity which Jesus came to share.

In these and other instances, I might have made some wrong judgments: strictly speaking, neither of these replies was about kenosis, but I included under that general heading comments that reflected the fact that God embraced the weaknesses of being human, and I was more ready to infer

¹ This follows the rules for legal interpretation: first look at what the words actually say and only if they are ambiguous look at extrinsic evidence for clarification.

that this was the intended meaning when it was said by a Christian. My overall approach was to be as consistent as possible.

Many Respondents used theological terminology, which would not be easily understood by someone with no background knowledge. For example:

- The birth of Christ to save the world. [373:F612]
- Redemption of mankind by Christ. [42:M613]

To someone who knows the theological meanings of 'Christ', 'save' and 'redemption', these are clear answers. It was easy enough to code these replies into the relevant categories, but it was impossible to know whether the Respondents who wrote these replies knew the theological meaning of what they had written, or whether they were simply repeating familiar phrases. This is an inevitable drawback of questionnaires, compared with interviews. But it does underline one of the problems that exists at a carol service: we use theological terms in such a way that they become hard-wired into people's brains, but if people do not understand or think about the meaning, then phrases like 'Christ was born to save us' can become meaningless clichés. This probably applies particularly to phrases that people have been singing in carols all their lives.

Evaluating Q2 Data

As with Question 1, particular themes emerged in many answers. I needed to organise the Q2 Data around these themes into a logical order and choose an objective measure against which to evaluate it (similar to the Paradigm Story). But, unlike the Q1 Data, the Q2 Data did not lend itself to a paradigm meaning, for the following reasons:

- The smaller word limit meant that there was a greater variety in the responses
- The smaller word limit was intended to elicit from each Respondent only what they thought were the most important aspects of the meaning: it was impossible to know what else (if anything) Respondents might have mentioned if the question had invited longer replies (and what they would still have omitted, even in longer replies). As Question 2 did not ask Respondents to give the whole meaning, it would not have been right to construct an overarching meaning and attribute it to a large number of Respondents
- With short replies, unlike the Q1 Data, it was easy to code each reply into just one or a few categories.

Another problem was that the Christmas Texts do not present meaning as they present the Paradigm Story: instead, many meanings permeate the whole Service. Even if I had constructed a paradigm meaning, I would still have had to compare it with something objective (as I did with the Paradigm Story) to evaluate it, and the Service does not present an objective meaning as clearly as it presents a story. I therefore needed to choose a specific statement of Church of England doctrine, so as to compare the meanings which Respondents attributed to the Christmas Story with the various meanings which the Church attributes to it.

Which statement of Church of England doctrine?

I considered three possible texts against which to review the Q2 Data.

The Apostles' Creed

Though the oldest creed, the Apostles' Creed was not the most suitable, as it pre-dates the Arian controversy and therefore does not address the person of Christ in as much detail as I needed in order to use it as a dialogue partner to reflect on what Respondents said about the person of Christ.

The Nicene Creed

The Nicene Creed² emerged from the councils of Nicaea (325CE) and Constantinople (381CE) as a defence against heresy, and specifically to refute the Arian heresy which denied the full divinity of God the Son. Its main purpose was to assert that Jesus is both fully God and fully man, of one substance with God the Father.³ It includes two key concepts affecting the Christmas Story: *who* Jesus Christ is, and *how* he became incarnate. The Nicene Creed would have been familiar to Eric Milner-White and the authors of all the Top Six Carols.

The Chalcedonian Definition

The Chalcedonian Definition, which emerged from the Council of Chalcedon in 451CE, is the foundation of Western Christian belief.

² Correctly called the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, as it was adopted at the Council of Constantinople in 381CE: Young (1991) pp3-5; but, in common with contemporary liturgy, I call it the Nicene Creed.

³ McGrath (2001) p360.

It affirms the two natures of Christ – fully divine and fully human – but leaves open the question how they inter-relate. It defines the boundaries of orthodox Christian belief in more detail than does the Nicene Creed

I concluded that the Nicene Creed was the most appropriate text for my purposes, because it addresses the Person of Christ in some detail (unlike the Apostles' Creed), would have been familiar to authors of the non-biblical Christmas Texts and, because it is used in Church of England liturgy, was likely to be familiar to a reasonable number of Respondents (unlike the Chalcedonian Definition). Where relevant, I use the Chalcedonian Definition to illuminate the Nicene Creed.

For convenience, I have used the contemporary language version from *Common Worship*, which is widely used (including at York Minster).

How I used the Nicene Creed

Throughout this study, the primary focus was the Data, not the Texts.

I therefore analysed the Q2 Data in the light of the Nicene Creed, using it as a tool to:

- organise the Q2 Data into a logical order, enabling reflection to be progressive, not haphazard
- illuminate, interpret and engage in critical reflection with the Q2 Data
- compare the Q2 Data with what the Church of England believes

I do not refer in this thesis to aspects of the Nicene Creed which have no bearing on the Q2 Data; what follows is not a commentary on the Nicene Creed.

Analysis of Q2 Data

From the Q2 Data emerged 19 themes ('Themes'). 15 of these are ranked, according to how many Respondents mentioned them: see Graph 2. Table 2A lists the 15 ranked Themes, showing how many Respondents mentioned them.

Themes 1 to 12 appear in the Nicene Creed ('Nicene Themes'); Themes 3 to 5 are grouped together, as they relate to the Person of Christ. Themes 13 to 15 do not appear in the Nicene Creed (Non-Nicene Themes). Themes 16 to 19 are not ranked, for reasons given later; these do not appear in Table 2A.

Each Theme has a short name, listed under 'Theme' in Table 2A, and under 'Content' are the relevant words from the Nicene Creed. Table 2A also shows which demographic groups mentioned each theme more and less than average by more than 5%.⁴

Table 2B shows where the Themes appear in the Christmas Texts. This is summarised in Venn diagram 3, which shows which Themes appear in which type of Christmas Text and in Table 4, which shows which Themes appear in each of the Christmas Texts. (I revisit these in Chapter 7)

⁴ I used the same threshold as for the Q1 Data, even though the numbers of Respondents mentioning Themes were smaller.

Underlying this chapter is my wish to let the Respondents speak for themselves and to quote many of them. I decided to quote only *complete* responses, since selecting individual phrases would remove some excerpts from their proper context and would give an incomplete picture of how Respondents answered overall. This would also have been frustrating to read, because excerpts from a single response might have been scattered across different categories: when reading the Q2 Data myself, I observed that it was important to look at *everything* each Respondent said, so I wanted readers to be able to do the same.

The Q2 Data totalled 16,670 words, so I could not quote them all. In this chapter, I quote 227 of the 446 replies to Question 2, totalling 4,420 words.⁵ To avoid repetition, I allocated each response to just one Theme, even though many fitted into more than one category:⁶ I allocated each response to the category I most wanted it to illustrate, whilst also ensuring that each category had a good range of responses from different demographic groups. Obviously, there is considerable overlap between categories, but using this method of organisation enabled me to quote many Respondents in a logical order and I believe that this gives the best overall picture of the Q2 Data. The fact that a response appears in one category clearly does not indicate that that is the only category in which it fits – but simply that that was the category I used it to illustrate.

Numbers of Respondents mentioning Themes were considerably smaller than numbers mentioning most of the Elements, and five Themes were mentioned by fewer than 10% of Respondents (compared with no

⁵ I also cite a further seven in footnotes only.

⁶ With one exception: [324:M513] is quoted under Themes 17 and 19, because it uniquely illustrates both.

Elements). Because there were fewer Q2 Data, it was not necessary to have a lower limit and I would not have wanted to exclude important themes just because only a few Respondents mentioned them – indeed the fact that themes such as the Holy Spirit were mentioned by only a few needed to be mentioned. Unlike with the Q1 Data, it would not have been reasonable to assume that something mentioned by only a few people was not important, though I comment in more detail on what the greatest numbers of Respondents said. It is therefore important to bear in mind that when comparing between the Data Sets (for example in relation to demographic variations), I am not comparing like with like.

Themes and correlation with Christmas Texts

This section should be read alongside Tables 2A and 2B.

Theme 1 (ranked 1): God

We believe in one God

What Respondents said

218 Respondents used the word 'God' in reply to Question 2. Many of these referred to God in relation to Jesus (God's Son), or to God becoming incarnate. But some wrote more generally about 'God', e.g.

- Message of hope and renewal for all Christians. God's faith; his people. [41:F613]
- In times of great despair there is hope and God will provide for everyone equally. [101:0500]

- God for all people for all time. [344:F713]

Those referring to God using other terminology (such as Word or Emmanuel) are counted elsewhere. Even so, 'God' was mentioned by more Respondents than any other Theme (though fewer than half of all).

In many cases it was evident that by 'God' Respondents meant God the Father. For example:

- Jesus was sent by God into our world to set an example for us to follow. [169:M711]

But only one Respondent actually said 'God the Father':

- Jesus was born to be a saviour and bring a message to the world, of God the Father. [65:F731]⁷

Some implied that Jesus was different from 'God' and not himself God; I consider these later.

Christmas Texts

Seven of the Nine Lessons mention God;⁸ but the two which do not (the Sixth and Eighth) between them include 12 Elements. Five of the Top Six Carols mention God, the exception being *It came upon the midnight clear*.

Three of the 'God' references in these texts are clearly referring to God the Son:

- *and the Word was God* (Ninth Lesson)

⁷ And two in reply to Question 1 [316:M512] [354:F012].

⁸ Including references to 'the LORD' in the Second and Fourth Lessons.

- *who is God and Lord of all (Once in royal David's city)*
- *God of God (O come all ye faithful, quoting the Nicene Creed)*

All the other references *could* be interpreted as references to God the Father (only), and might imply that Jesus is not 'God', particularly:

We shall see him, but in heaven

Set at God's right hand on high⁹

The Bidding Prayer is not a prayer addressed to God, but is more in the nature of an invitation to the congregation to enter into the Service.¹⁰ It does, however, incorporate the Lord's Prayer (addressed to God the Father) and concludes with a blessing:

The Almighty God bless us...

At the end of each of the Nine Lessons, the reader says 'Thanks be to God' and the Service concludes (before *Hark! The herald-angels sing*) with a Trinitarian blessing.

Comment

None of the Christmas Texts says 'God the Father'¹¹ and this, coupled with lack of clarity in the lines quoted above, may have contributed to a default understanding that 'God' means God the Father, even in lines which do refer to Jesus as God, e.g.

⁹ *Once in royal David's city.*

¹⁰ The order of service for the 2007 Service called it 'The Bidding'.

¹¹ But the Third Lesson includes 'everlasting Father' which the Church interprets as a reference to Jesus.

And praises sing to God the King¹²

This in turn may have contributed to a misunderstanding of Jesus' divine nature, which I consider later.

Theme 2 (ranked 2): Jesus Christ

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ

This section looks at the names Respondents used for Jesus Christ, looking at both the Q1 Data and the Q2 Data. I combine these because many Respondents referred to Jesus (by various names) in reply to both questions, so it is more enlightening to analyse the Data Sets together than separately.

References in this section to the use of the name 'God' include only those Respondents who applied the name 'God' to Jesus (as 86 did in Question 2, but only one in Question 1¹³); it does not include those referring more generally to 'God' (these are included in Theme 1 above).

What Respondents said

Table 3 shows the different names used for Jesus Christ in reply to Question 1 and Question 2, and the appearance of those names in the Christmas Texts.¹⁴

¹² *O little town.*

¹³ [209:M512].

¹⁴ Except for 'Son of God', which is a Theme (Theme 3), so appears in Table 2B (but Table 3 notes how many Respondents used that phrase).

Table 3 does not include a detailed analysis of which demographic groups used which names. I did conduct an analysis, but the very small numbers of Respondents using some names (in some cases, only one Respondent) would have made it difficult to make meaningful comparisons. However, it is worth noting that amongst Respondents saying 'Jesus' in reply to either question (the most-used name in both) there were no significant variations from the overall percentages, but the more 'difficult' Christological titles (such as Messiah and Emmanuel) were, as a group, used disproportionately more by frequent churchgoers, and less by Christmas-only churchgoers; also, names other than Jesus were used less by younger Respondents and more by older Respondents.¹⁵

The final category in Table 3 is 'Human Description'. This includes those Respondents who referred to Jesus *only* by a human description. In Question 1, 43 Respondents did this (referring only to a baby, child or newborn/boy/son). In Question 2, nobody did this: all those who referred to him *only* as human still used a name 'Jesus' or 'Christ' (and are counted in those categories).

Christmas Texts

Table 3 shows that:

- Jesus Christ is mentioned (by any name) much more in the Top Six Carols than in the Nine Lessons.

¹⁵ In Question 1, nobody under 35 said Christ and nobody under 25 used another Christological title. Conversely, a disproportionate number of those who said Christ were over 65.

- Though the name 'Jesus' was by far the most-used by Respondents (in reply to both questions), it appears only six times in the Christmas Texts.
- The name which appears most in the Christmas Texts is 'Christ' (13 instances); this title was used by Respondents much more in Question 2 than Question 1 (but, in each question, over half of them also used 'Jesus').
- 'Saviour', which appears only once in the Nine Lessons and once in the Top Six Carols¹⁶ was used by 34 Respondents in Question 2, compared with only four in Question 1.¹⁷
- The title 'Lord', which appears in five of the Top Six Carols and twice in the Bidding Prayer (though in none of the Nine Lessons) and, also in the Nicene Creed, was mentioned by just three Respondents.¹⁸
- *It came upon the midnight clear* does not mention Jesus Christ by any name.
- Two titles – Messiah and Redeemer (used by only six Respondents) – do not appear in the Christmas Texts.

Comment

Significantly fewer Respondents referred to Jesus (by any name) in reply to Question 2 than Question 1, but those who did mention him in Question 2 used more and varied names and descriptions: the Q1 Data includes 446 mentions¹⁹ by 426 Respondents (most using just one name, usually Jesus), whereas the Q2 Data includes 397 mentions by just 180 Respondents (most using at least two different names). It is not surprising that

¹⁶ *While shepherds watched* being a paraphrase of Luke 2.7-14.

¹⁷ At King's, the title to the Third Lesson is 'The prophet foretells the coming of the Saviour', but at York it is 'Isaiah proclaims the lasting rule of a king from the line of David'.

¹⁸ [267:M613] [6:F512] [348:M513].

¹⁹ 'Mention' meaning a name used once or more by a single Respondent.

Respondents attributing a theological meaning to the Christmas Story in Question 2 might use more than one name, since the names describe aspects of Jesus' identity and help to explain the meaning of the Incarnation. One Respondent (aged under 18) mentioned (in Question 1) the meaning of Jesus' name:

- ...and called him Jesus, which means 'God saves' [149:F113]

Understanding the names used for Jesus Christ²⁰ is key to understanding the meaning of the Christmas Story – a topic which I now explore.

Themes 3 to 5: Person of Christ

The identity of Jesus Christ is the central question at stake at Christmas, because it goes to the heart of salvation: only if Jesus is God has *God* brought salvation by dying and rising again.²¹ There was evidence of some misunderstanding amongst the replies which I coded in the categories 'Divine nature' and 'Son of God', highlighting particular difficulties for a modern congregation in understanding the meaning of the Christmas Story.

Table 2A shows that Themes 4 and 5 (though not Theme 3) were mentioned much more than average by frequent churchgoers and much less than average by Christmas-only churchgoers.

²⁰ Karkkainen (2003) pp23-29.

²¹ McGrath (2001) pp364 -365.

Theme 3 (ranked 8): Son of God

*the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father*

What Respondents said

93 Respondents mentioned the Son of God/God's son, some also naming him Jesus or Christ:

- It is the story of the birth of the son of God [18:M512]
- The Son of God has arrived - rejoice and celebrate his coming. [268:F313]
- It teaches you to celebrate the birth of Christ, Son of God.[244:F311]
- It means that Jesus is the son of God, and this is why we continue to celebrate his birthday. [85:M221]

Eight Respondents referred to God's 'only son', as the Nicene Creed does, e.g.

- That God sent down His only son to save us from our sins and to be our advocate in heaven. Salvation. Emmanuel - God with us.[238:F713]

No one said 'God the Son',²² but one Respondent said:

- It means that God presented himself in human form, as a son, to redeem the sins of the world. [168:M632]²³

²² Though one did in reply to Question 1 [209:M512].

²³ Echoing Hebrews 1.2, though it is unclear whether 'as a son' means Mary and Joseph's son or God's Son.

None of those saying 'son' also mentioned God the Father,²⁴ but 30 said 'God sent' his son, suggesting that by 'God' they meant God the Father, e.g.

- God sent his son to save the world. [246:F621]
- God sent his son to earth to tell people about God and to tell them how to live their lives. [321:F512]
- God sent his son to be our Saviour and to show forgiveness of sins. [8:F712]
- God sent his son to earth as the man Jesus Christ to enable mankind's salvation. [292:F232]
- God gave his son to the world in order to save it. [114:F511]

18 Respondents said that God 'gave' his son, or a gift,²⁵ e.g.

- That God gave his son, Jesus, to the world, to give us everlasting life. [43:F713]
- God gave his son to the world to bring hope to all, from the richest to the poorest. [55:M422]
- God gave his son in human form so people had love and hope for the future. [299:F611]
- God's gift of his Son to reconcile us to God. [427:F713]

²⁴ Only one Respondent (quoted above) did refer to God the Father (without also saying 'Son').

²⁵ Consistent with Jesus' own words in John 3.16 – quoted by one Respondent in reply to Question 2 [256:0000].

Christmas Texts

None of the Top Six Carols says 'Son of God' or 'God's Son'.^{26 27}

The only mention of 'Son of God' is in the Fifth Lesson, though the reference to 'a son' in the Third Lesson is interpreted by Christians as a reference to Jesus (though, confusingly, one of the names Isaiah uses for the child who will be born is 'everlasting *Father*': Isaiah 9.6).

So, though the theme of Jesus' Sonship appears in the Christmas Texts, it is not a major theme, and certainly is not explained in depth. The most relevant of the Christmas Texts here is the Ninth Lesson, where John begins to explain the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. But the Ninth Lesson (KJV) does *not* refer to Jesus as a 'son'; the nearest it gets is:

...and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father...John 1.14

And John 1.11 says that Jesus enabled *his believers* to be sons of God:

...to them gave he power to become the sons of God...John 1.11

²⁶ *O come all ye faithful* does have 'Word of the Father' in the final verse usually reserved for Christmas Day (and not sung at the Service, but possibly known by Respondents); other popular carols include Father/Son references e.g. *Past Three o'clock, O Little one sweet, Tomorrow shall be my dancing day*.

²⁷ Some Participants said that they had thought 'Son of Righteousness' in *Hark the herald-angels sing* was 'Son of Righteousness', showing not only that they were (understandably) missing Wesley's reference to Malachi 4.2, but also that they were reading into this line something that is not there – namely the idea of Jesus being a son.

Comment

The Church believes that Jesus is God the Son, but more usually describes him (including in the Nicene Creed) as the Son of God, or God's Son (the New Testament also does not include the phrase 'God the Son', but Jesus is revealed as God's Son at his baptism and at the Transfiguration). This was also true of the Respondents: only one Respondent said 'God the Son' (in reply to Question 1), whereas 93 said 'Son of God' or 'God's Son'. Whilst 'Son of God' and 'God's Son' are orthodox descriptions of Jesus, there was evidence in the Q2 Data that Respondents had interpreted those phrases in ways which are inconsistent with what the Church believes.

Jesus' Sonship is central to his identity as God: Jesus is God the Son. But key to this is that his Sonship stems from his relationship with God the Father: he is God the Son in relationship with God the Father, and neither is God without the other. This relationship between God the Father and God the Son is fundamental to the doctrine of the Trinity, which is the foundation of Christian faith. Therefore, if the relationship is misunderstood, the consequences are serious.

Father/Son terminology is embedded in Church of England liturgy – not only in the creeds, but also in the Gloria at the end of Psalms and canticles, in blessings and other invocations of the Trinity, in collects and in Baptism. And the Father/Son relationship is a particular theme in John's Gospel, whose stated purpose is:

... so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God...John 20:31a, NRSV

But John uses the words 'Father' and 'Son' in a particular way, which is neither overtly Trinitarian, nor similar to how most Respondents would understand 'father/son' now in everyday speech. His key point is that Jesus is *God's* only son,²⁸ and therefore *is God*. But this point is easily missed in today's context: there is a risk that a 21st century congregation will hear John's Prologue in the light of subsequent theological development. But is it right to do so?

On this question there are two opposing views. The first says that John's Prologue should be read in its original context.²⁹ John wrote for first-century Jews and Greeks and therefore his writing is comprehensible only to those who fully understand the Jewish and Hellenistic background. According to this view, the doctrine of the Trinity, which did not develop until some 400 years after the gospels were written, should not be applied retrospectively to John.³⁰ Since the Nicene Creed was primarily a defence against heresy, whereas the Gospels were not (the evangelists being themselves heretical against Judaism), it is wrong to read Nicene theology back into the gospels, because the evangelists were not addressing heresies which did not yet exist.³¹

The opposing view says that Scripture is timeless and dynamic and that all subsequent development is relevant for interpretation: this is how God speaks to all people through all ages. In his Prologue, John is simply using an image – a metaphor – to describe a close relationship. That metaphor later contributed to the doctrine of the Trinity and has continued to develop

²⁸ Beasley-Murray (1999) p1.

²⁹ See e.g. Raymond Brown (1966) pp4-31; Hooker (1993) pp86-88; Wright (1996) pp4-5.

³⁰ Raymond Brown (1966) p5.

³¹ Hooker (1993) p86.

over many centuries, and the subsequent development has become part of the text.³²

Both views are defensible, neither is wholly satisfactory, but together they are helpful. It is indeed important to avoid reading more into the Prologue than John could ever have intended. But it is unrealistic to suggest that modern people could simply ignore the intervening 19 centuries: Scripture does need to be reinterpreted for each generation; indeed the Church believes itself called to do just that.³³ Therefore, since the terminology cannot be avoided, it needs to be explained, if it is not be misunderstood in the way indicated by some Respondents.

The fact that many Respondents mentioned the Son and not the Father might suggest that the *name* 'Son of God' was more in Respondents' minds than was the *relationship* between the Father and the Son; and it might also suggest that when some Respondents referred to 'God', they meant God the Father, as distinct from his Son (particularly those who said that God sent or gave his son). This could have meant that they saw Jesus more as a human son (only), or it could be that they were simply using the same imagery as John in a way which did not detract from Jesus' divinity. But in many cases it was not possible to tell whether or not Respondents thought that Jesus was God, or whether they had even considered that question. This leads to Theme 4.

³² See especially David Brown (1999) pp60-105.

³³ Canon B15.

Theme 4 (ranked 9): Divine nature

*God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.*

What Respondents said

God from God...true God from true God

85 Respondents mentioned Jesus' divine nature, beyond simply saying 'Son of God' (some did both). All of these also mentioned the Incarnation (Theme 5) in some way.

68 described Jesus as God, e.g.

- Jesus was born a personification of God on earth. He brought hope. [419:F412]
- Jesus (God as man) comes to earth to demonstrate and preach the role of selfless love in attaining peace and redemption. [464:M613]

Light from Light

13 Respondents mentioned light, some making a connection with Jesus the Light of the World, e.g.

- God's Word made flesh, Jesus' birth is God become man. He is the light of the world and through Christ we may know God and be saved. [53:M413]
- The Christmas story to me means that in the birth of Jesus he brought light into the darkness of the world in order to save sinners

from their ill begotten [*sic*] deeds. He came to show the way of compassion, understanding and kindness so that man's inhumanity to man could be lessened. Sadly 'he came into his own, but his own received him not'.³⁴ However, if one sees and understands the message of salvation and peace, a better world would [be] seen and experienced. [360:F713]³⁵

And some mentioned light in other contexts, e.g.

- It means that darkness can become light and the sins of man are forgiven. [102:M712]
- A message of hope and light in a dark world. The amazing mysterious ways of God. [432:M313]
- Birth of new life, salvation, light, peace, glory. It's about the cycle of life and the wonders and burdens of life. [64:F322]
- Fulfilment of a promise of the return [of] God - now and in the future. Festival of light at a dark time as for Diwali and Hannukah. [467:F612]

Of one Being with the Father

One Respondent used the Greek word Homoousios, used at Nicaea to describe 'of one being/substance':

- Christus incarnatus est - God in man made manifest! Homoousios. God gave us this sign of his overwhelming Grace and prepared to die to show us the depth of his love and to share in our suffering! [177:M713]

³⁴ Quoting John 1.11: Ninth Lesson.

³⁵ This was the longest answer to Question 2.

Through him all things were made

Only one Respondent referred to Jesus as creator:

- The Christmas story is how we have got here today. The birth of our saviour and the maker of heaven and earth. [186:M213]

Christmas Texts

In the Ninth Lesson John addresses directly Jesus' divine nature. This passage is echoed in this section of the Nicene Creed, which does not appear in the Apostles' Creed, but which was added at Nicaea to refute Arianism and to affirm the divine nature of Jesus Christ:

John 1.1: And the Word was with God, and the Word was God

Nicene Creed: God from God

John 1.5: And the light shineth in darkness

Nicene Creed: Light from light

John 1.9: That was the true Light...

Nicene Creed: True God from true God

Verse 2 of *O come all ye faithful* quotes directly from this section of the Nicene Creed:

God of God

Light of light...

...Very God; begotten, not created...

In *Hark! The herald-angels sing*, 'Christ, the everlasting Lord' refers to the co-eternity of God the Son with God the Father.³⁶

The Ninth Lesson addresses the idea of Jesus as creator:

*All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made...*John 1.3

Comment

The Nicene Creed describes Jesus as God. Raymond Brown considers the question whether and to what extent the New Testament ever refers to Jesus as 'God'.³⁷ There is evidence (in the New Testament and independently³⁸) that Jesus was worshipped as God in early liturgy, but for early Jewish and Gentile Christians, applying the title 'God' to anyone other than the God of the Jews took time – for Jews because they did not want to imply that the Word was the same as the Father, and for Gentiles because they did not want to imply that the Word was a second God in a Hellenistic sense (which would constitute polytheism).³⁹ This is why 'Word' was the preferred terminology in the community for which John wrote his gospel: it was a clever compromise, because the concept of the Word was familiar, both to Jews as the means by which God accomplishes his acts of creation (the Word of God being God himself in his creative action), and also to Greeks, as the personification of God's wisdom.⁴⁰

³⁶ Though no Respondents explicitly mentioned this theme.

³⁷ Raymond Brown (1966) pp5, 24-25 and his other works to which he refers.

³⁸ e.g. Pliny's letter to Emperor Trajan: Stevenson (1987) p14.

³⁹ Raymond Brown (1966) p25.

⁴⁰ Raymond Brown (1966) p25; Milne (1993) p31.

As we are not first-century Jews or Greeks, this is difficult for us to understand. But it is important not to lose the meaning just because the terminology is difficult. Barth offers an interpretation which is more understandable to a modern congregation – that God took on flesh that was not there before: God did not take over an existing person (adoptionism); and he did not cease to be the Word, but ceased to be *only* the Word:

*He did not cease to be what He was before, but he became what he was not before, a man, this man.*⁴¹

Hark the herald-angels sing expresses a similar idea in:

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see*⁴²

Linked with Jesus Christ's divine nature is the idea of Jesus Christ as creator: the Church has long understood that a consequence of the 'hypostatic union' – the interplay between the human and divine natures – is that Jesus Christ, being God, is the creator of the world.⁴³ Only one Respondent mentioned this and the only reference to this concept is that in the Ninth Lesson. Carols which describe Jesus as the creator of the world could usefully reinforce the idea that Jesus is God.⁴⁴

In the Pilot study, Focus Group discussions of *O come all ye faithful* demonstrated that this section of the Nicene Creed was difficult to

⁴¹ Barth (1956) p149.

⁴² But Participants demonstrated that this line was difficult to understand without background knowledge.

⁴³ McGrath (2001) pp364-365.

⁴⁴ Particularly *Of the Father's heart begotten*; also *See amid the winter's snow, The first Nowell*.

understand – a difficulty exacerbated by the fact that between ‘Light of light’ and ‘Very God’ is interposed ‘Lo, he abhors not the Virgin’s womb’. This led Participants to connect ‘begotten not created’ with the virgin birth and to conclude that the meaning was ‘not created by a man and a woman, but created by God (the Father)’ (whereas it really means not created *at all*). For some, this Arian interpretation of the relationship between God the Father and God the Son led to a serious misunderstanding of the Trinity – a misunderstanding which was also evident in some of the Q2 Data (see below). The Focus Groups also indicated that familiar carols are a powerful means of embedding doctrine in the popular consciousness – whether orthodox or heretical.

Theme 5 (ranked 3): Incarnation

*He came down from heaven,
was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
and was made man.*

I included in this category all Respondents who mentioned the idea of God becoming human (this overlaps with Theme 4: Divine nature).

What Respondents said

171 Respondents mentioned God or God’s Son becoming human.

12 said ‘incarnate’ or ‘incarnation’, e.g.

- God became incarnate - great act of love and beginning of story - leading to our salvation. [117:F513]

- God incarnate on earth, with message of peace on earth, goodwill to all people and redemption of sins. [228:F621]⁴⁵

One Respondent in reply to Question 1 wrote out John's Prologue, and replied to Question 2:

- The redemption of mankind through the incarnation of Our Lord. [348:M513]

God becoming human

68 Respondents said that the Christmas Story is about *God* becoming human, some very briefly, e.g.

- God in human form. [428:M613]
- God made man. [429:F613]
- God came into the world. [359:M613]
- It means that God came to earth as man. [261:M713]

Several gave a reason for God's becoming human, e.g.

- God came to earth in the shape of man, to save mankind. [374:M612]
- God made man to show his commitment to men. [462:F713]
- Coming of our Saviour, God in human form, to save us from sin and death. [178:M613]

and one echoed this section of the Nicene Creed:

- God becomes man through the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and starts his work of redemption. [95:M513]

⁴⁵ This was the only non-Christian who said 'incarnate'.

God becoming human in the person of Jesus

18 (of the 68) referred more clearly to *Jesus* as God,⁴⁶ e.g.

- God descended from Heaven to become man in the form of Jesus.
His humble origins belie his real importance. [415:F712]
- Jesus is God's human image⁴⁷ on Earth - we come to God through
being like a child - seeing the good and opportunity in all.
[386:M313]
- God, incarnate in Jesus Christ, came on earth and dwells with his
people. [143:F713]

God and his Son

Four Respondents referred to God *and* God's Son, whilst also saying that the person who became human was God, e.g.

- God became human by giving us his son, Jesus, in human form.
[230:M613]
- Birth of son of God - God becoming human and come to save
mankind from their sins. [414:F412]

How the incarnation occurred

As well as those saying that God sent or gave his Son, 10 Respondents said that 'God' provided Jesus/a saviour, e.g.

- God sent Jesus to Planet earth to help the human race! [304:F321]

⁴⁶ These are all also included in 'Divine nature'.

⁴⁷ Echoing Colossians 1.

Other ways of expressing the Incarnation

Five Respondents referred to 'the Word', e.g.

- The Word made flesh and the birth of 2000 years of Christianity.
[362:F413]

Four said 'Emmanuel', e.g.

- Emmanuel - God with us. The start of God's redemptive plan for mankind. [103:F513]

Some Respondents gave a more abstract meaning to the Incarnation, focussing on the convergence of divine and human:

- Humanity and divinity united; God taking human form to share human experience and redeem humanity. [234:F413]
- The birth of Christ is a metaphor for the divinity of life. [145:M613]
- Hope Emmanuel God Blessing. God with us in our daily life. Hope of life eternal. [333:F712]

Three Respondents (but only three) referred to the Incarnation without necessarily implying that Jesus was divine:

- Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary, made incarnate, and brought salvation to the world by giving His life for us on the cross. The Christmas story is of a wonderful miracle. [46:F512]
- Christ became man and dwelt among us. He experienced first hand our joys and our sorrows: at Christmas we celebrate that fact.
[229:F512]
- I think the Christmas story means that Christ has been born and is with us. [111:F110]

Reasons for the Incarnation

Some Respondents gave reasons for the Incarnation, e.g.

- God came down to earth in the form of a helpless baby to demonstrate that kingship and authority were as nothing compared to divine love. [183:F413]
- God's gift to mankind of his own son, to forgive sins and inspire peace, unselfishness, love amongst humankind - and later to expiate our sin by being crucified on our behalf. [311:F512]

Some made a connection with 'us' or 'me' (several mentioned *sharing*):

- God sharing our human experience in human form. The birth of baby fulfilling prophecy. [176:F513]
- God's willingness to become man and to share in the most humble circumstances. [174:M513]
- That God loves us enough to be a part of our lives, having shared our difficulties and for those who accept his love - a chance to be loved by him and live with him forever. [191:F613]
- It means we can all link a human being with God. [122:F112]

Christmas Texts

None of the Christmas Texts includes the word 'Incarnation', but the title for the Ninth Lesson – printed in the Order of Service and read out, with the congregation standing, is:

St John unfolds the great mystery of the Incarnation

The only one of the Top Six Carols that includes the word 'incarnate' is *Hark! The herald-angels sing*: 'Hail th'incarnate Deity!'. This obscure (though memorable) phrase invariably comes during the final few minutes of the service. By contrast:

*He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all*

coming almost at the beginning of the service, might have more impact: as the opening lines of verse 2 of *Once in royal David's city*, these are traditionally the first words sung by the choir (after a soloist has sung verse 1). They echo this section of the Nicene Creed. Later in this carol, verse 5 continues with the idea of Jesus as God:

*For that child so dear and gentle
Is our Lord in heaven above*

though verse 6 might imply that Jesus is not 'God':

*We shall see him; but in heaven
Set at God's right hand on high⁴⁸*

Hark the herald-angels sing combines the divine and human natures of Christ – God dwelling with us as a man:

*Veiled in flesh the Godhead see
Hail th'incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell
Jesus, our Emmanuel*

⁴⁸ Quoted under Theme 1 above.

Unlike with Element 1 (Birth) in the Q1 Data (which elsewhere I have equated with this Theme), I did not include the Second, Third and Fourth Lessons as referring to the Incarnation, as they do not refer to God becoming flesh in the way Respondents did in the Q2 Data (whereas they do speak about Jesus' birth in the way some Respondents did in the Q1 Data).

Comment

Though 68 Respondents did describe Jesus as God, there was evidence of confusion, especially amongst those who said 'God sent Jesus', apparently implying that God and Jesus are separate (an Arian interpretation). The Nicene Creed says simply that Jesus 'came down from heaven' (rather than being sent) and that this occurred by the power of the Holy Spirit (as one Respondent said – [95:M513] quoted above).

Some Respondents attempted to explain Jesus' nature in more detail, but in doing so fell foul of the Nicene Creed and/or the Chalcedonian Definition. For example, this goes against the Nicene Creed's 'begotten not created':

- God *creating* an ambassador for a new religion, to be his physical representation on earth. Something to do with lowliness of birth, not defining greatness. Lots of messages about humanity and the meek. [123:F421]

And this next one goes against Chalcedon's affirmation that Jesus is fully divine and fully human 'without division...without separation':

- Jesus Christ was born to save the sins of the world He was born in poor in humble surroundings, rather than a King, to show he was

one of us, yet the circumstances showed he was very special – *half God, half man*. [90:F313]

Less clear are:

- God sending his son, *part of himself*, to be in the world, as an example to us and to show us the way to his heaven. [327:M713]
- With the baby Jesus came a new consciousness into this world. The consciousness of Christ *who is a part of God* (of the Divine, the Highest, or Love, Light, Wisdom). [30:F611]

'Part' could be interpreted to mean either that Jesus Christ is *part* of the Trinity (i.e. he is not the whole of it), which is consistent with Christian teaching, or that Jesus Christ is only part God and therefore not fully God, which would be contrary to Christian teaching.

The following is clearly consistent with both the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian definition:

- S. John – Jesus is the Word incarnate – God made man and dwelled amongst us. *Perfect man and perfect God*. [263:M613]

It would be unfair to criticise Respondents for giving less than theologically perfect answers; indeed all the above show Respondents grappling with a concept which the Church has grappled with for centuries and which cannot be fully explained, and it is encouraging that they did so. What Themes 3 to 5 show is that the Person of Christ is an extremely complex subject, which many Respondents did not address at all and which the Christmas Texts do address, but in a haphazard way which does not necessarily assist understanding.

Theme 6 (ranked 7): Kenosis

...he came down from heaven...

I included in this category 115 Respondents who said something about Jesus emptying himself or humbling himself by becoming human.

What Respondents said

40 Respondents said 'humble' or 'humility', e.g.

- It means that God put himself on earth in the form of Jesus Christ, saviour of men. Mary and Joseph were humble - this shows that greatness is not associated with material wealth. [323:F312]
- I think the story means that God finds it OK to humble himself so much as to make himself a mere mortal. [214:M113]
- True power and authority may be found in the humblest of circumstances: a baby in a stable can make a tyrant in a palace fearful, and very dangerous. [118:M621]

Five Respondents said 'lowly', e.g.

- Jesus is born of lowly parentage and circumstance to signify that God loves us all regardless of wealth or position. [264:F331]

14 Respondents referred more generally to the simplicity of Jesus' birth, e.g.

- The birth of Jesus in a stable shows that he is man, No fancy birth for him though he is son of God. [135:M123]⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Non-Christian 'but I've been confirmed'.

- The story shows that Jesus was a man of the people. Whilst he was a baby, he was also an ordinary person, and hence why he was born in a cattle shed.⁵⁰ [325:M235]

Five Respondents said that Jesus came to share in human *suffering*, e.g.

- God takes human form to share mankind's suffering, and therefore to bring man to God. [81:F612]

and another 11 that he came to share human *experience*, e.g.

- God's intervention in the world - as a fellow human being and joins with us in our human experience. [209:M512]
- God didn't leave us to struggle through life alone, He stepped into this crazy, messed up world to show us how to live and to show us how to love! God moved into our street! (The whole of history is hinged on a Bethlehem stable door). [96:M413]

18 Respondents said that the circumstances of Jesus' birth show that he came for all people, rich and poor (and I included these in this Theme because they all implied that the circumstances of his birth were 'humble' or ordinary), e.g.

- God sent his son to live amongst the poor, needy and homeless and was a gift for all mankind. [210:F613]
- Place and position (in society) of birth means nothing in the eyes of God - everyone equal. [284:F232]
- However humble your circumstances, Christ can be your salvation. Rejoice! [312:M512]

⁵⁰ Possibly quoting *Once in royal David's city*.

Three Respondents said that we should be humble, e.g.

- We should all remember we are equal at birth and ought to live our lives humbly and with patience and love. [151:F722]

Christmas Texts

In the Fourth Lesson, Isaiah describes the peace and equality that Christ will bring; this was echoed by those Respondents who said that Jesus' 'humble' birth was for all people. The humble circumstances of Jesus' birth (including his mother, the stable and the manger – all being Elements) are a key theme in the Christmas Texts.

The first words sung by the choir in the Service (from *Once in royal David's city*) are:

*He came down to earth from heaven
Who is God and Lord of all*

It is no accident that this line echoes the Nicene Creed, as the author Mrs Alexander wrote this carol in order to illustrate this section of the Nicene Creed for children.⁵¹

But the most explicit reference to kenosis appears in *Hark! The herald-angels sing*:

Mild he lays his glory by

This reflects Philippians 2.7 in describing God actively humbling himself.

⁵¹ Bradley (1999) p251.

Theme 7 (ranked 4): Salvation/sin/forgiveness

For us and for our salvation...

For our sake...

...for the forgiveness of sins...

What Respondents said

155 Respondents mentioned at least one of salvation, redemption, sin, forgiveness and/or atonement. I combined these into a single Theme, because many Respondents combined one or more of these themes and, though using different terminology, were expressing similar ideas; in the absence of interviews, it was impossible to explore different shades of meaning.

Salvation/redemption

126 Respondents mentioned Jesus being born to restore the relationship between God and humanity. 39 of these said 'save/saved', 15 said 'salvation' and 34 said 'saviour',⁵² e.g.

- Jesus was born to save the world. [308:F612]
- For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten [son] so that all that believe in him should be saved and have eternal life.⁵³
[256:0000]
- God's love for us. Our salvation. [398:M513]
- Birth of our saviour who came to redeem us of our sins.[332:F613]

⁵² These 34 are noted in Table 3.

⁵³ Quoting John 3.16.

Some linked the salvation explicitly with Jesus' *death* rather than his birth:

- God keeps his word, Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled. Jesus had to come and die to save us from our sins. [465:F713]
- It is the saviour's story of how he lived to save mankind and died for all our sins. [410:M512]

whereas some linked salvation more with Jesus' *life*:

- Jesus Christ was born to save us from our sins and show us how to live. [418:F713]
- God sent his only son to earth to save the souls of mankind and show the Christian way. [461:F612]

22 Respondents said 'redeem' or 'redemption', e.g.

- It means just what it says - the Incarnation of God in the form of a human being to redeem sinful man. [470:0713]
- For Christians it means that God came into the world to redeem mankind. [447:M521]

One said that we could redeem *ourselves*:

- Rebirth for mankind and renewed hope. The chance to redeem ourselves through God's blessing, love and goodwill. [426:M511]

Six mentioned some idea of helping or showing, e.g.

- Wonderful news of the Christ who came to help mankind. [352:M613]
- For my understanding it signifies the sorrow and compassion of God when compared to the demands and punishment from God throughout the Old Testament. [267:M613]

Other terms used were 'reconcile',⁵⁴ 'renew',⁵⁵ and 'restore'⁵⁶ and four said 'rebirth', e.g.

- Renewal and rebirth [337:F613]

One Respondent simply quoted *Hark the herald-angels sing*:⁵⁷

- 'Born that man No more may die, Born to raise the sons of Earth,
Born to give them second birth': Charles Wesley. [45:M613]

'For us'/'For our sake'

Ten Respondents said something about Jesus coming 'for us' or 'for our sake', e.g.

- Jesus dies for our sins. To die he has to be born - hence the Christmas story. [80:M431]
- Whether taken wholly literally - or at least partly figuratively - it is about God becoming man for man's sake. [181:M513]

Sin

55 Respondents mentioned sin or sinners and one said that humanity had 'fallen from grace'. Sin was mentioned disproportionately more by Respondents aged over 55, by Christians and by those attending church monthly or more, e.g.

- God sent Jesus into the world to save us from our sins. [420:M613]

⁵⁴ [427:F713].

⁵⁵ [41:F613] [337:F613].

⁵⁶ [179:F413] [476:F713].

⁵⁷ Though not the lines mentioning 'reconciled' or 'healing'.

- God sent his son to save the world from sin and spread the word of God on earth. [473:M612]

Sin was also mentioned by non-Christians and Don't Knows and by those attending church only at Christmas e.g.

- Christ was born to take away 'the sins of the world' - a time to reflect and a time for giving. [254:F621]
- Jesus, son of God, sent to earth to 'save' the world by dying for our sins. [24:M732]
- Story of redemption and sacrifice. Jesus born to save us from our sins. [378:F121]
- God chose to manifest self to man in human form symbolising human life can be led in holy/principled way and sins (even killing Christ) can be forgiven by God. [12:F631]

Some Respondents mentioned the Fall,⁵⁸ e.g.

- God so loved his creation (which had fallen from grace) that he gave his only begotten son Jesus Christ to be born humbly and die for our salvation. [40:M613]

This was an alternative way of referring to sin:

- The humble place of Jesus' birth symbolises his humility, leaving his Godly state to be born and suffer among men. As we eventually learn, he dies to atone for the sins of all mankind (in eastern terms, to erase the negative karma of mankind). [453:F512]

⁵⁸ The subject of the First Lesson.

Forgiveness

32 Respondents mentioned forgiveness or something to do with reparation.

15 of these mentioned *God's* forgiveness, e.g.

- Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ the Son of God who came to forgive our sins. [257:M212]
- It is a time of celebration, as we celebrate that God sent his son to us, to forgive us our sins. [211:F412]

One said we should forgive others.⁵⁹

Some used other words to convey the idea of God taking away sin:

'cleanse'⁶⁰ 'heal'⁶¹ 'relieve'⁶² 'take away'⁶³ 'take on'⁶⁴ 'compassion'⁶⁵ and 'repentance'.⁶⁶

Atonement

Seven Respondents said 'atone' or 'atonement',⁶⁷ e.g.

- This marks the birth of Jesus at the start of his mission as the son of God to atone for the sins of man. [57:M712]

Sacrifice

13 Respondents used the word 'sacrifice' or 'sacrificed'. Only five of them also mentioned Jesus' death, expressly, e.g.

⁵⁹ [194:F713] quoted under Theme 18.

⁶⁰ [407:F611].

⁶¹ [127:M513].

⁶² [276:F713].

⁶³ [254:F621].

⁶⁴ [463:F611].

⁶⁵ [182:M711].

⁶⁶ [403:M513].

⁶⁷ All were Christian and aged over 44, but only one was a frequent churchgoer.

- God offered himself in vulnerable human form to be sacrificed in atonement for the sins of humankind. The baby Jesus embodies the innocence of the divine, maintained in his life and death. [82:M712]

or by implication e.g.

- It is about the birth, teaching and eventual sacrifice of Jesus and a gift from God to man. [115:F412]

Some linked sacrifice with salvation/atonement, e.g.

- Jesus was the son of God made flesh, therefore born to a living family but with the Holy Spirit. Born to be a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the world. [113:F612]

Some seemed to link the sacrifice more with Jesus' *birth* e.g.

- All about the coming of God to earth as a sacrifice for us. [305:M421]

One referred to *self*-sacrifice by God:

- It is a story of self-sacrifice (God's by his son/self) and altruism. A reminder of our capitalist focus in day-to-day life. [431:M332]

Two said that God sacrificed his son:

- God came down to earth. Sacrificed his son for us. [275:M113]
- It's about God saving mankind by placing his son on earth to show his good works and then to sacrifice him for the sake of others. [59:M711]

Correlation of sin forgiveness and salvation/ forgiveness

All 55 Respondents who mentioned sin or sinners also mentioned forgiveness, atonement or equivalent, or the idea that Jesus saves us from sin.

By contrast, forgiveness and salvation/saving were mutually exclusive: most Respondents mentioned one or the other. Only one Respondent used both terms:

- Birth of our saviour, acknowledge your sins, ask for forgiveness and you shall be saved. [258:M511]

Some Respondents said that salvation/redemption was available for all people, e.g.

- A saviour for all people. [243:M712]
- It's the start of the life that led to redemption for all. [235:F512]

But some made it clear that they did not believe the meaning they attributed to the story, e.g.

- God is supposed to have intervened in the world by sending his Son to be human; and ultimately to sacrifice himself for mankind, that all who believe in him might be saved from their sins. Does God really require human sacrifice to appease his wrath - that's Stone Age belief carried into the present day. [422:F721]

Christmas Texts

The Christmas Texts do not include the word 'salvation' (15 Respondents), but the Bidding Prayer has 'Redemption' (22 Respondents) and 'save' (39

Respondents) and there are three references to 'Saviour' (34 Respondents) in the Nine Lessons and Top Six Carols.

The theme of sin and redemption runs through the whole Service: in the Bidding Prayer, the congregation is invited to 'hear again':

*The tale of the loving purposes of God from the first days of our sin
until the glorious Redemption brought us by this Holy Child*

The First Lesson focuses on human sin, and the Second, Third and Fourth Lessons enable links to be made (as some Respondents did) between the Fall and the coming of a saviour in the person of Jesus.

This Theme appears in all the Top Six Carols.

Theme 8 (ranked 11): Death/resurrection

*...he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again*

What Respondents said

43 Respondents mentioned Jesus' death and/or resurrection in reply to Question 2.⁶⁸

31 of these mentioned Jesus' death. Some simply mentioned the fact of death, e.g.

⁶⁸ Some did in reply to Question 1, but fewer than 10%.

- It means that Jesus was born, knowing that he would die for us.
[316:M512]
- The Christmas story is fundamentally a story of love and hope.
Jesus, God's son, came to save the world and on dying 33 years
later offered eternal life to all mankind. [450:F412]

Five Respondents (all Christian and medium or frequent churchgoers) mentioned the cross/crucifixion, e.g.

- It means that Christ was born and had become man so that he
could die on the cross for our sins. [36:M713]

Only five of the 31 who mentioned Jesus' death also mentioned his resurrection. Two strikingly similar replies⁶⁹ indicate some collaboration:

- God brought his only son into the world to live with us and die and
rise again that we might know eternal life. It teaches us goodness
and caring and thinking about one another. [441:F511]
- The meaning of the Christmas story is God brought his only son into
the world to live with us and die and rise again, that we might know
eternal life. [440:F111]

Two other Respondents explicitly mentioned Jesus' death and resurrection:

- God appears to his people in the form of his son Jesus, who
proclaims God's love and peace on earth, goodwill towards men and
who through his death and resurrection offers forgiveness of sin and
life eternal, man's redemption. [368:M713]

⁶⁹ Consecutive numbers possibly indicating that these Respondents were sitting together.

- Christmas and Easter are linked together. Christmas is when God gave his son Jesus to us. Easter is when Jesus dies to forgive our sins and was risen into heaven. [153:M611]

and one did so more obliquely:

- Love, sacrifice, resurrection and salvation and the triumph of good over evil. Lightness in a dark season. [315:F612]

Two other Respondents mentioned resurrection but not Jesus' death: these referred to our hope of resurrection for *us*:

- The birth of the saviour of mankind to enable the redemption of our sins and our resurrection. [63:F713]
- It is our hope for our future in heaven, the forgiveness of our sins and the hope of the Resurrection. [147:M713]

Four Respondents mentioned Easter, e.g.

- After Easter, most significant date in Christian year. [124:F722]
- Means the start of a story that means nothing without Holy Week and Easter. [38:F413]

Christmas Texts/comment

The Christmas Texts do not mention Jesus' death or resurrection. The closest is Wesley's quotation from Malachi in *Hark! The herald-angels sing*:

Risen with healing in his wings

Though 155 Respondents referred to salvation, redemption, atonement and forgiveness of sins, only 43 referred to Jesus' death and resurrection.

Whilst it is unsurprising that many did not mention his death and resurrection in an answer with a suggested length of 20 words, it is interesting that so many did mention salvation without consciously addressing the question whether salvation was *completed* by Jesus birth (as some seemed to imply). This is a question which the Church grapples with: what is salvation and how is it achieved?⁷⁰

Theme 9 (ranked 14): Fulfilment of prophecy

...in accordance with the Scriptures

We believe in the Holy Spirit...

...who has spoken through the prophets

What Respondents said

14 Respondents said that Jesus' birth fulfilled prophecy,⁷¹ e.g.

- Incarnation of the Word of God as his son. Fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah. [377:F611]
- The birth of the Messiah as foretold in the Old Testament. [339:F631]
- The last in a long line of efforts by God to heal a world [visited] by sin. Fulfilment of promise and prophecy. Hope when all seems bleak. Arrival of my King and Saviour. [127:M513]

One said that John the Baptist prophesied Jesus' birth:⁷²

⁷⁰ See e.g. 1995 Report *The Mystery of Salvation*.

⁷¹ Some did in reply to Question 1, but fewer than 10%.

⁷² Six Respondents said this in reply to Question 1.

- The prophecy of Isaiah and John the Baptist was fulfilled. The Saviour of the world was born. [128:F633]

Christmas Texts and Comment

A major theme of the Service is that of prophecy being fulfilled in Jesus: the Bidding Prayer sets the scene and the first four Lessons include prophecies of Jesus' birth. In particular, the Third and Fourth Lessons, from Isaiah, have come to be associated with Jesus – assisted in the case of the Third Lesson by its inclusion in Handel's *Messiah*,⁷³ and in the case of the Fourth Lesson by the tradition of the Jesse Tree⁷⁴ and by the designation of December 19th as '*O radix Jesse*' after the antiphon set for that day.⁷⁵

Luke says that John the Baptist was only six months old at Jesus' birth, but those Respondents who mentioned him prophesying Jesus' birth might have had in mind Luke 1.41, where the unborn John leaps in Elizabeth's womb at the arrival of pregnant Mary. And the Ninth Lesson links the *adult* John the Baptist with Jesus.

Many of the names used for Jesus in the Christmas Texts (See Table 3) link with prophecy, particularly Christ/Messiah and Emmanuel;⁷⁶ and in *Hark the herald-angels sing*, 'Prince of Peace' and 'Sun of Righteousness' quote prophecies from Isaiah 9.6 and Malachi 4.2.⁷⁷

⁷³ In the aria *The people that walked in darkness* and the chorus *For unto us a child is born*.

⁷⁴ Sawyer (1996) pp75-79; the Jesse Tree appears in a 14th century window in the south aisle of York Minster.

⁷⁵ Quoted in *O come o come Emmanuel* and other hymns/carols.

⁷⁶ Which Matthew (1.23 – not in the Christmas Texts) links with Isaiah 7.14.

⁷⁷ The early Roman Church used this prophecy to link Jesus with the sun, even before Christmas became linked with the winter solstice: Talley (1990) p132.

Theme 10 (ranked 13): Eschatology

*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*...We look for the resurrection of the dead
And the life of the world to come.*

What Respondents said

33 Respondents included an eschatological element. 15 mentioned eternal life, life eternal or everlasting life, e.g.

- I think that the Christmas story means God gave his only son to save us all from death and to bring us eternal life if we believe in him. [317:F113]
- God sent Jesus into the world to save the world and give everyone a chance to have everlasting life after death in heaven. [52:F713]

Four alluded to a second coming, e.g.

- In Advent we not only look forward to something happening 2000 years ago but that our spiritual journey is in God's hands. Jesus present in the world - he will come again. [193:F713]
- Jesus represents fulfilment of prophecy in Genesis 3⁷⁸ and brought salvation from sin for all mankind. Fulfilment still to come. [363:M613]

⁷⁸ The First Lesson is from Genesis 3.

12 mentioned heaven or eternity, e.g.

- It seems to be about the unexpected and humble places God and goodness appear in a troubled world – eternity captured in a drop of present time and space.[336:F613]

Christmas Texts/Comment

Eschatology is a major theme in the Christmas Texts. The hope of heaven is a prominent theme in the Bidding Prayer – understandably, as it was written by a former army chaplain immediately after the First World War. This is also the theme of the last verse of *Once in royal David's city* – written at a time when infant mortality was common.⁷⁹

Theme 11 (ranked 15): Holy Spirit

*We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified*

What Respondents said

Only five Respondents mentioned the Holy Spirit in reply to Question 2,⁸⁰ e.g.

- The Holy Spirit manifests itself in human form to secure everlasting life for humanity. [104:M621]

⁷⁹ Participants demonstrated that life, death and the hope of a better future are still prominent themes at Christmas time: Participants found *It came upon the midnight clear* particularly relevant in 2006/7.

⁸⁰ Some did in reply to Question 1, but fewer than 10%.

- It is a sign of God's union with mankind - of the spirit becoming flesh. [155:F713]
- God wanted to demonstrate how he wanted us to live and so sent his spirit in human form to be a living example: one we could better relate to. [405:F513]

Though the demographic composition of this tiny group is too small to include in Table A, it is worth noting that all five Respondents were over 44, four were Christian and three were frequent churchgoers.⁸¹

Comment

The Holy Spirit is not mentioned in any of the Top Six Carols or the Bidding Prayer. The only reference to the Holy Spirit in the Lessons from the gospels is in the Fifth Lesson, at the Annunciation. The Fourth Lesson includes a description of 'the Spirit of the Lord' which will rest upon the promised saviour; Christians interpret this as referring to the Holy Spirit in Jesus.

The low profile of the Holy Spirit in the Christmas Texts does not assist a balanced presentation of the Trinity.

Theme 12 (ranked 10): Church/Christians

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church

What Respondents said

53 Respondents mentioned Christians or Christianity, e.g.

⁸¹ The non-Christian Christmas-only attender is the first one quoted above.

- A chance for Christians to celebrate Jesus' birth. [446:F531]
- The son of God's birth and the birth of Christianity. [139:M321]
- The beginning of a new religion called Christianity. [58:F711]

Three Respondents (only) mentioned the Church, including:

- It is the foundation of not only Church of England's faith and also that of many other religions. [13:M211]

and one 'the family of God':

- To me, it means the importance of my family, what I have and being within the family of God. [417:F60⁸²0⁸³]

Christmas Texts and comment

For obvious reasons, the Nine Lessons do not explicitly mention the Church or the Christian faith, though the Ninth Lesson hints at it with:

to them gave he power to become sons of God, even to them that believe on his name – John 1.12

The Bidding Prayer links 'us' with the wider Church, both living and departed.

Respondents mentioning this Theme were disproportionately more than average Christmas-only churchgoers, which could indicate that they particularly associate going to church with Christmas.

⁸² 'Not just a Christian – I embrace ['all' deleted] most world faiths'.

⁸³ 'I feel I am with God in all I do'.

Themes not mentioned in the Nicene Creed

Themes 13 to 15 were mentioned by Respondents but do not appear in the Nicene Creed.

Theme 13 (ranked 6): Love/peace/goodwill/hope

What Respondents said

This Theme overlaps with most of the Nicene Themes, but I categorised it 'Non-Nicene' because none of these words actually appears in the Nicene Creed.

116 Respondents mentioned love, peace, goodwill and/or hope (or similar), including the shortest answer (given by two Respondents):

- Hope [152:M631] [364:F612]

and the most poetic:

- Yesterday Yesterday Yesterday, sorrow sorrow sorrow, today today today, love love love, tomorrow tomorrow tomorrow, hope hope hope. [25:M412]

Non-Christians mentioned this Theme, e.g.

- Peace and goodwill to all. Hope in innocence. [430:F432]

Two teenagers wrote about God's love:

- It shows God's love for us and his grace in sending himself as a living sacrifice. Also his understanding of humanity. [207:F113]

- It shows how God cares and loves his people so much that he actually came onto earth. He wants to make earth better for us by coming right down into earth into our lives. What more can you ask for? [213:F113]

Some linked God's love with human love, e.g.

- Love. Firstly the love, blind adoration between a mother and a child, then almost a similar adoration between strangers and the Child. Sharing in love - all come and worship - Kings, shepherds, animals - class, wealth no longer matter. [92:F313]

Christmas Texts/comment

None of the Nine Lessons includes the word 'love', but it is a prominent theme in the Bidding Prayer and the Top Six Carols (this Theme appears in all the Top Six Carols). The angels' song of 'peace and goodwill', which appears in the Seventh Lesson is echoed and developed in *While shepherds watched* and *Hark! The herald-angels sing* and provides the basis for *It came upon the midnight clear*. Hope is also implied in the Lessons and Carols which look to the future (overlapping with Theme 10: Eschatology).

Theme 14 (ranked 5): Story

What Respondents said

141 Respondents mentioned the effect of the Christmas Story as a story.

69 used the word 'story', e.g.

- It's a story! [27:F632] [483:F622]

- It's a good story! [34:F321]
- Glorified beginning of the story of Jesus' life. [320:M221]
- A lovely story which I never tire of listening to or reading.
[205:F612]

72 referred to the effect of the story, e.g.

- A message of peace and love. God came to earth to live as one of us [376:F612].
- A redemption myth which means a great deal to many people and might be true. [110:F621]
- A myth of the cult of early Christianity - a cult that has done rather well in the intervening years with positive and negative influence on our society. [138:F321]

Several referred to other faiths:

- A Christian fable which was 'invented' to take over the pagan Lupercalian festival. [134:M521]
- Myth by which Christianity subsumed various pagan myths and attached them to the winter solstice festival. [280:M621]
- I believe the Jews copied this story from the birth story of the god Mithras to add to their own folklore as with other stories in the bible. [162:F621]
- A paradigm shift in human thinking about the nature of divinity as remarkable as the preaching of the Fire Sermon at Gaya. Good for humans - Not so good for animals or indeed the planet Earth. Perhaps things were better when God was female and in the Earth than when God was male and in the sky. [68:M631]

Some acknowledged that the story could be taken other than literally:

- A parable symbolising God's love for humanity by the gift of a son.
[288:M212]
- Whether it is entirely true or not, it tries to explain the mystery of the incarnate God. [466:M713]

Some commented on whether or not they believed it:

- Personally, I think the story is a mythological story - although parentage and location are probably factual; I believe that very few people realise that only Matthew and Luke carry the story and that most of the story has been padded out over the years to include many details that are mythological. [99:F533]
- I think it is a legend. However I also think that there was a Jesus who was an extremely holy and influential force for good, whose morals and teachings were such as to motivate his followers to continue his work and develop the religion of Christianity.
[10:M721]

Several commented that the story means different things to different people:

- Very unsure, take your own meaning from the story. [2:F211]
- It means a lot to Christians and as the people who worship God. And to little people it means presents to them. [354:F012]
- Not being a Christian it has little religious significance, but I believe it to be an enduring message to all - believers and non-believers alike. [416:M621]

Christmas Texts/comment

As Questions 1 and 2 asked about 'the Christmas Story', it is unsurprising that so many Respondents used the word 'story'. The Christmas Texts do not include the word 'story' and there is just the one reference in the Bidding Prayer to 'the tale of the loving purposes of God'. Nevertheless, it was evident from the Data that the idea of hearing this familiar story was an important theme.⁸⁴

Theme 14 (ranked 12): Celebration

What Respondents said

36 Respondents mentioned celebration, both Christians:

- It is the celebration of God's gift of his son to earth. [212:F213]
- Rebirth, celebration, communion. [297:M512]
- Christmas is all about celebrating and getting together with friends and families. A time for getting in touch, for giving and sharing. [372:F612]

and non-Christians:

- Celebrate life and miracles[19:F221]
- The beginning of life. Celebration of birth and hope. People have a chance for forgiveness. [172:F221]
- A celebration of childbirth and a new beginning to the year. [350:F632]

⁸⁴ As it was for Participants, whose discussions led to the formulation of Questions 1 and 2.

Respondents mentioning celebration were disproportionately under 35.

Christmas Texts/comment

The Christmas Texts do not include the word 'celebration', but Respondents could have been prompted by Question 7, where 'A celebration of the birth of Christ' was offered as a reason for attending the 2007 Service (and was ranked highest).⁸⁵

Non-ranked Themes 16 to 19

Themes 16 to 19 are Themes which underlie much of the Q2 Data. I did not rank them, because there was so much overlap (with other Themes and also with the Q1 Data) that any comparison would have been meaningless.

These Themes are important, because they show how Respondents approached the task of answering the questionnaires. Most Respondents who included these Themes did not offer them *as meanings* for the Christmas Story, but rather as extra layers to the meanings they gave.

Table 2B combines these Themes and mentions (only) the most relevant parts of the Christmas Texts (recognising that all these Themes permeate the Christmas Texts).

⁸⁵ I included this in Question 7 because in telephone and email interviews in the Pilot Study it was the most common answer to the question 'What would you say the service was for?'

Theme 16: Theological/spiritual/secular

Most Respondents (348) gave a theological (though not necessarily Nicene) or spiritual meaning to the Christmas Story; levels of theology ranged from:

- Birth of Jesus a saviour. [133:F711]

to one quoting Latin and Greek.⁸⁶

98 Respondents (in reply to Question 2) did not mention God or Jesus/Christ or intimate that the story was to do with God or God's son coming into the world or being at work in the world. Of these, 29 did mention God in reply to Question 1; most of these included in Question 2 spiritual (though not exclusively 'Christian') themes, e.g. from Christians:

- It's a story about the wonder at the birth of a human being - the beginning of a life, without riches or favours at birth, and the hope of a peaceful happy future, full of love. [319:F712]

and from non-Christians, e.g.

- Hope for humanity. Time for reflection, pause that new born always brings. [109:F421]
- Peace and goodwill to all, with new beginnings. Even though you may have little, there is still hope and love. [237:F522]

Striking replies⁸⁷ were:

- The role of a woman is to bear children and obey men. [287:F321]

⁸⁶ [177:M713] quoted above.

⁸⁷ From Respondents who mentioned God in reply to Question 1 but not Question 2.

- That you shouldn't turn people away in their hour of need as you never know when you will need their help in return. [245:F312]
- It should bring peace to all men, but some people do not even know the meaning of Christmas. [217:F711]

The other 69 of these 98 Respondents (who did not mention God or Jesus/Christ or intimate that the story was to do with God or God's son coming into the world or being at work in the world) also did not mention God in reply to Question 1. Of these, some gave purely secular meanings, e.g.

- To be together and have fun. [144:M131]
- Traditional family get together and the lovely music and services we have. [4:F711]

but some included spiritual themes, e.g. from Christians:

- Faith, hope and joy. [224:F513]
- Stop and find time to reflect on the true values of our living and example. [391:F713]
- That goodness must surely triumph over evil. [236:F712]

and from non-Christians, e.g.

- A new start for mankind from the lowliest of beginnings. [66:M621]

Theme 17: Faith

Most Respondents simply did what the question asked them to do: give a meaning to the Christmas Story. Most did not mention faith, though some evidently recognised that it was a question of faith whether or not you

believed their interpretation (some making it clear that they did, and others that they did not believe the meaning they offered).

62 Respondents did refer to faith or belief, e.g.

- Renewal of faith. [137:F512]
- A belief in helping others. A spiritual belief in searching for the right path A Christian belief in God. A celebration of the birth and life of Christ and a festival of light in the winter months. [301:F512]

Two Respondents (only) said that Jesus is the only way:

- Jesus, the son of God - come as a saviour - to save us from our sinful ways. The love of Christ is the only way to bring peace to the world. [51:F713]
- God coming down as a human being to live amongst us, to show us the way, through him alone. The Promise fulfilled through Jesus. Saviour! [44:F513]

18 Respondents said something to the effect that salvation is available but needs to be accepted individually; they used conditional words like 'chance' (9 Respondents), e.g.

- That God gave his son to us to redeem us of our sins and give us the chance of everlasting life. [158:F612]

'opportunity', e.g.

- God's ultimate gift to man, giving his son to redeem us, so that we have the opportunity for everlasting life. [88:M513]

'possible/possibility', e.g.

- God takes the frailty of human nature - the incarnation. The God in this human being is worshipped by 'high' and low and this incarnation - God within us becomes the possibility for us all.
[105:M612]

Some made a clear link between salvation and faith in *Jesus Christ*, ranging from orthodox statements of doctrine:

- The birth of Jesus was to cleanse us of our sins and bring peace and happiness to those who believed in Him. [407:F611]
- God sent his only son so that mankind would know what he (God) is like. He also sent him to die for us on the cross so that those who believed and asked for forgiveness could have Eternal Life.
[86:F713]⁸⁸

to general expressions of faith in a higher power:

- Hope of peace in the world - recognition that there is higher being who can give hope. [3:M612]

No non-Christians gave an answer like those quoted above, but one 'Don't Know' said:

- The most amazing things can happen in simple surroundings if you have faith. [458:F532]

This does not explain what one would need to have faith *in*, but it is an interesting interpretation because it comes from someone who does not know whether she believes in Christ.

⁸⁸ Essentially a paraphrase of John 3.16.

This one from a Christian is similar, but makes a stronger link between faith and the source of salvation/redemption:

- Glory and redemption exist in the humblest circumstances to anyone who cares to seek it out. [240:F712]

One Respondent expressed the view that *Jesus* died for his faith⁸⁹ and one mentioned Mary and Joseph's faith:

- God made man - Jesus to show perfection. Humble beginnings yet saviour of the world. Joseph and Mary's acceptance and faith to follow the word of God. [87:F713]

Some Respondents implied that we are saved by Jesus' life and/or death, rather than by faith:

- God sent his son to live a perfect life, and to die, to atone for our sins. By this, we are saved! [154:F613]

One Respondent (only) linked salvation more with works than with faith:

- Me, with heart,⁹⁰ taking all I have to give to Jesus. May not be enough to buy salvation. Who has enough? [324:M513]⁹¹

Theme 18: Response

This is linked with faith and is a theme of the Bidding Prayer and carols which invite the singer/listener to respond to what God has done.

⁸⁹ [1:F731].

⁹⁰ Illustrated with pictures.

⁹¹ Also quoted under Theme 19 below.

97 Respondents mentioned a possible response to the Christmas Story.

Many were along the lines of 'we should be nice', e.g.

- Being kind and helpful to others. [129:F611]
- Christmas is a time of happiness, people being together and nice to each other. [408:F131]
- Peace on earth. Good will to everyone [220:F612]
- The Son of God was born for us. God's gift to us. Example for us to follow, to lead a Christian life. [89:F413]

Or the more gritty:

- omgz we shouldn't judge other people innit [173:F112]
- Hear no evil, see no evil, do no evil. [277:M731]

Several mentioned reflection or pausing for thought, e.g.

- A time for reflection. [231:F712]
- Makes us think of past time and those that have worse lives than we have. [26:M713]
- The Christmas story encourages us to think of others, to pray for peace in the world, and to give thanks for our many blessings. [14:M731]

Non-Christians also saw an opportunity for reflection:

- Innocence of a child gives all a chance to think on life. [298:F521]

12 Respondents mentioned both the need for faith and the need to respond; for most of these, the response they mentioned was a response in *faith* (rather than simply being nice), e.g.

- Put your faith in the Lord, to help and understand others; God will always be with you. [107:F613]
- We celebrate the birth of Christ – God's representative on earth. Christ the light of the world – a time to look forward. Christ showed us how to love and how to love each other regardless of our faults, race, status, and to forgive others. We are reminded to go out and help others less fortunate – all who believe can be saved. [194:F713]

Theme 19: Personal connection

Most Respondents who made any connection between the story and humankind said 'we' or 'us'. Only 24 Respondents said 'I' or 'me' at all and 16 of these only in the sense of 'I think' or 'I believe' (the story is about), or 'to me' (the story means), rather than relating the story to their own life⁹² e.g.

- I think the Christmas story is a mythological tale of the Christian God sending his son to help humanity. It is a story of both humble and holy beginnings. It is a good story. [171:F31⁹³1]

Several were non-Christian:

- I'm told that it can be reduced to two: good news. [221:M622]
- I am an agnostic but think it has a lot to tell us with respect to inclusion of all people in society and hope for the future. [226:F532]

⁹² Question 2 did say 'please say what *you think* the Christmas Story means'.

⁹³ Unitarian.

Only five Respondents (all Christians and frequent churchgoers) specifically connected the story with their own life:

- To me it means that I can get a glimpse of the immensity of the Godhead. [35:F713]
- Eternal God became helpless baby in time and space - baby like me... [37:F513]
- Me, with heart,⁹⁴ taking all I have to give to Jesus. May not be enough to buy salvation. Who has enough? [324:M513]⁹⁵
- I'm still trying to understand the significance for me today, but it's something about - God being with me; his light coming into the darkness that is my sin and showing me a different way to live; hope for the future. [328:F413]
- God became 'man' to bring us into a relationship with him - fulfil a promise. Unbelievable - but the reality can be experienced and witnessed in the lives of people I know. [189:M713]

These (and the last one in particular) were the only Respondents who gave anything in the way of personal testimony about the Christmas Story.

⁹⁴ Illustrated with pictures.

⁹⁵ Also quoted under Theme 17 above.

Did the Christmas Texts influence the Q2 Data?

It is more difficult (than with Question 1) to pinpoint linguistically specific instances of the replies to Question 2 having been influenced by the Christmas Texts, since the Q2 Data reflects themes running through the whole service, rather than specific identifiable elements of a story. In reply to Question 2, two Respondents quoted deliberately from the Christmas Texts:

- 'Born to raise the sons of earth; Born to give them second birth'⁹⁶
[45:M613]⁹⁷
- ...'he came into his own, but his own received him not'...⁹⁸
[360:F713]⁹⁹

It could also be significant that more Respondents used words like 'Saviour' (34 Respondents), 'save' (39 Respondents) and 'redemption' (22 Respondents), which appear in the Christmas Texts, than 'salvation' (15 Respondents), which does not.

But one indication that the Christmas Texts might *not* have been influential was 93 Respondents saying 'Son of God' – a phrase which appears only once in the Christmas Texts. The Third Lesson includes a passage which appears in the well-known chorus in Handel's *Messiah*, '*For unto us a Child is born*'; it is possible that these familiar verses attract more attention when heard in a carol service; so this verse could have helped to highlight

⁹⁶ *Hark! The herald-angels sing.*

⁹⁷ Quoted under Theme 7.

⁹⁸ John 1.11: Ninth Lesson.

⁹⁹ Quoted in full under Theme 4.

the idea of Jesus as a son, but because of *Messiah* rather than the Christmas Texts.¹⁰⁰

There was, however, considerable correlation between the Themes and themes running throughout the Christmas Texts and in Chapter 7 I look at the correlations and consider how the Christmas Texts *as a whole* might have influenced Respondents.

¹⁰⁰ Handel's *Messiah* has been a consistently popular work since its first performance in 1742, so even if this passage from Isaiah was not so firmly linked in the popular mind with Jesus before then, there has been a link for over 260 years.

Chapter 7

How do the Christmas Texts and the Church tell the Christmas Story?

In Chapters 4 and 5 I looked at the Data in the light of the Christmas Texts: how are the Data reflected in the Christmas Texts? I now turn around and look at the Christmas Texts in the light of the Data: how are the Christmas Texts reflected in the Data? I began to consider this question in relation to each Data Set in Chapters 5 and 6, but I now look at the Christmas Texts and the Data overall: are the Data a natural outcome of the use of the Christmas Texts over many years?

First, I draw together the two Data Sets, showing how the Christmas Texts help to link the Christmas Story with Nicene faith. Then I look at the overall meaning of the Christmas Texts, and how this is reflected in the Data. I then go on to ask what meaning the Church of England attributes to the Christmas Story, how it uses the Christmas Texts to convey that meaning, and how it might convey that meaning more effectively to a 21st century congregation.

This chapter raises many questions which I do not attempt to answer. The purpose of this study was to elicit Data and generate theories, and that is what I have done. This necessarily raises new questions; answering those questions will need further research.

Correlation between Christmas Texts, Paradigm Story and Themes

In reply to Question 1, Respondents collectively told the Paradigm Story; in reply to Question 2, Respondents collectively expressed the Themes, 12 of which reflect Nicene faith. And yet the Paradigm Story is not obviously a statement of Nicene faith: only four Elements appear in the Nicene Creed¹ and only two of these are also Themes.²

So why did Respondents attribute these meanings to this story? The Christmas Texts might be the key to this. Venn diagram 4 combines Venn Diagrams 2 and 3. It shows how the Christmas Texts function as a hinge between the Paradigm Story and the Nicene Creed: although there are only two items which are both Elements and Themes, the Christmas Texts include 18 out of 20 Elements and all the Themes ranked 1-15.

The fact that most of the Elements and Themes (products of the Data) do appear in the Christmas Texts suggests that the Christmas Texts might have been influential. It is impossible to know whether the use of the Christmas Texts in this particular form of service for nearly 90 years (effectively the whole of living memory) shaped Respondents' views, or whether the Christmas Texts simply reflect what Respondents would have said anyway. But it would not be surprising if the repeated presentation of the Christmas Texts in services in this way had been a significant influence.

¹ Mary, Miraculous conception, Jesus Christ and Birth.

² Jesus Christ and Birth/Incarnation: for this purpose I have equated 'Birth' with 'Incarnation' because they are essentially the same point, though expressed very differently in the two Data Sets.

The Venn Diagrams show only if there is a correlation at all (even if only in a single line of a carol); Table 4 gives a more complete picture of the extent of the correlations, by showing, for each of the Nine Lessons and Top Six Carols, which Elements and Themes appear in it (Tables 1B and 2B quote the relevant texts).

Table 4 shows that:

- The First to Fourth Lessons include ten Themes, but only one Element (Birth³)
- The Fifth to Eighth Lessons include 18 Elements and 11 Themes
- The Ninth Lesson includes nine Themes, but only one Element (Birth⁴)
- The Fifth and Seventh Lessons include similar numbers of Elements and Themes, but the other Lessons are all biased towards *either* the Paradigm Story *or* Themes
- Four Elements⁵ and four Themes⁶ do not appear in the Nine Lessons
- No Element or Theme appears in all the Nine Lessons
- No Element appears in all the Top Six Carols
- Two Themes⁷ appear in all the Top Six Carols

Thus the 'shape' of the Nine Lessons is that the first four are predominantly 'meaning', the second four are predominantly 'story' (but also with some Themes) and the last is predominantly 'meaning'. This structure requires the congregation to begin with a more conceptual approach, through story

³ Prophetised, rather than as an explicit mention of *Jesus'* birth.

⁴ Again, not an explicit mention of *Jesus'* birth.

⁵ Stable, Flight, Animals, Slaughter (these include the three lowest-ranking).

⁶ Story, Church/Christians, Death/resurrection, Celebration.

⁷ Salvation/sin/forgiveness, Love/peace/goodwill/hope.

and back to conceptual; some Lessons may appeal particularly to people with particular personality types or learning styles.

The Top Six Carols are different, in that all but one contain an even mix of Elements and Themes;⁸ unlike the Nine Lessons, the Top Six Carols say broadly similar things, but in different ways. This is not surprising, given that it is the Lessons that form the structure of the service⁹: the carols were not assembled, as the Lessons were, in order to create a single narrative running through the Service.¹⁰

The Bidding Prayer contains five Elements¹¹ and eleven Themes. All but one of these (Story) also appear in the Nine Lessons and/or the Top Six Carols.

Overall meaning of the Christmas Texts

The Data show that the Christmas Story is open to numerous interpretations. Equally, there is not just one single meaning in the Christmas Texts: they bring together a range of different meanings and agendas, covering many centuries of Pre-Christian and Christian thought. The result is a form of service compiled in 1880 and finalised in 1918, using texts from the eighth century and earlier BCE and the first century CE and edited in the 17th century, and carols largely from the 18th and 19th centuries, all presented in 2007. Each text was composed for a particular purpose, as part of a larger purpose; so, to understand the overall

⁸ The exception being *It came upon the midnight clear*.

⁹ <http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/chapel/festival-nine-lessons-2009.pdf>.

¹⁰ Although three of them have fixed positions in the Service.

¹¹ All also in the Nine Lessons and Top Six Carols.

message, it is useful first to examine the authors' purposes, including those of:

- Authors of the first four Lessons
- Luke and Matthew (authors of the gospels of those names)
- John (author of the fourth gospel)
- Authors of the Top Six Carols
- Eric Milner-White, who compiled the structure of the Service in 1918

Authors of the first four Lessons¹²

The first two Lessons are from Genesis and the second two are from Isaiah. Christians interpret the First Lesson (Genesis 3.8-19) as setting the scene for the whole story of salvation – a point made in the Bidding Prayer ('from the first days of our sin...') and by Respondents who mentioned the Fall. Similarly, Christians interpret the Second Lesson (Genesis 22.15-18), the Third Lesson (Isaiah 9.2-7) and the Fourth Lesson (Isaiah 11.1-9) as prophecies relating to Jesus. Whilst it might be argued that the authors of these texts, written many centuries before Jesus' birth, did not have that particular event in mind, Christians believe that all Scripture, as the Word of God, speaks of God in Jesus Christ.¹³ This is particularly evident in the way the Church has used Isaiah.

¹² Scholars agree that none of these texts is likely to have had a single author, but that they emerged from various sources, including oral tradition: e.g. Raymond Brown (1966) (1977); Wenham (1987) (1994); Watts (1989); Nolland (1989); Hagner (1993); Burridge (1992); Watts (2002); Bauckham (2006).

¹³ Jesus Christ himself being the Word of God: Barth (1956) *passim*; McGrath (2001) pp159-167.

In *The Fifth Gospel - Isaiah in the History of Christianity*,¹⁴ Sawyer shows how Christians (particularly in the Middle Ages) have treated Isaiah as a 'fifth gospel'. He argues that in seeking to understand Scripture, we must consider not only the original meaning, but also the history of its subsequent interpretation and use, which, he says, is at least as relevant as the original meaning. He shows how Christians and the Church have read backwards into Isaiah, in the light of the Gospels (as we see Matthew doing in his Birth Narrative: Matthew 1.23). Sawyer says it is important to note how text is *used*, because, he says, what text *does* is as important as what it *says*.¹⁵ This must be particularly so in a liturgical context, such as a carol service: the fact that these particular passages from Isaiah have become inextricably linked with Christmas gives these passages a power which contributes subconsciously to the overall meaning of the service.¹⁶ And the fact that for 90 years these passages of Isaiah have been read alongside passages from three of the gospels would surely have justified the title 'fifth gospel', even ignoring the previous 19 centuries. This certainly does indicate that the meaning of Scripture is not fixed to a specific time or meaning, but is capable of *sensus plenior*.¹⁷

Luke and Matthew

All the biblical Elements appear in the accounts of Jesus' birth in Luke's and Matthew's gospels; and Respondents conflated Luke and Matthew into a single story.

¹⁴ Sawyer (1996).

¹⁵ Sawyer p12. Others have written about the 'performance' of biblical and liturgical language: Thiselton (1975,1986); Fletcher (1992); Headley (1997); Fletcher & Cocksworth (1998).

¹⁶ This view was expressed by Participants.

¹⁷ Raymond Brown (1953).

The two accounts do, however, appear to be quite independent, not sharing a common source;¹⁸ indeed, irreconcilable differences between the two accounts¹⁹ indicate separate sources. One effect of conflating the two accounts into one is that differences between the evangelists' particular agendas are forgotten, and it becomes difficult to convey either evangelist's particular message; instead a new overall message is created, but this is not necessarily detrimental to either evangelist's purpose, since both state that their purpose is to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is therefore relevant to ask whether there are differences which ought to be preserved.

Luke writes for Gentile believers, while Matthew writes for Jewish believers.²⁰ Luke's purpose is to set down:

an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us...so that you may know the truth...Luke 1.1-4, NRSV

Matthew's purpose is to demonstrate that Jesus is:

The Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham Matthew 1.1, NRSV

That is, the Jewish Messiah who fulfils Old Testament prophecy.²¹

¹⁸ Hagner (1993) p14; Nolland (1989) p18.

¹⁹ For example as to the timing of Jesus' birth and also the very different treatment of Mary's virginity and Mary and Joseph's marital status.

²⁰ Burridge (1994) pp65-97; 99-129; Proctor (2006).

²¹ This theme is particularly prominent in Matthew's first two chapters: Raymond Brown (1977).

Luke and Matthew share a similar approach in their use of story. Both use story as a way of conveying 'truth'. They are concerned not so much with 'what happened' as with its significance. For Luke, Jesus' birth is 'not simply an event, but an event plus a revelation'²² – a turning point in history. Hence Luke's first two chapters are full of angelic announcements – announcing the gospel to the world (Luke's mission to Gentiles).²³ In fact, Luke devotes more attention to the angelic *announcement* of Jesus' birth than to the fact of the birth itself.²⁴ Similarly, Matthew makes points about kingship (Herod the King and the wise men's gift of gold), linking with the overall 'kingdom' theme in his gospel.²⁵

Much has been written about the historical 'accuracy' of the details that Matthew and Luke give about the circumstances of Jesus' birth.²⁶ Some scholars attempt to reconstruct their collection of data; others sidestep the issue, paying more attention to the evangelists' overall purposes.²⁷ For example, why does Luke refer to a census for which there is no historical evidence, and which scholars believe is highly unlikely to have occurred in the way Luke describes?²⁸ Because, whether or not there was a census, that is not Luke's point: Luke uses this census of 'all the world' to show that Jesus' birth was for 'all the world'.²⁹ Similarly, Matthew's association of Jesus' birth with the final days of Herod's reign is not necessarily a

²² Willcock (1979) p44.

²³ Tiede (1988) p71.

²⁴ Willcock (1979) p43; Tiede (1988) p65.

²⁵ Hagner (1993) page lx.

²⁶ Including recent works written for a popular audience, e.g. Wright (1992); MacArthur (2001); Spong (2001); Vermes (2006); Dennis (2007); Barker (2008); Borg and Crossan (2008).

²⁷ Evans (1996) p14 prefers Luke over Matthew because of Luke's historical accuracy elsewhere; Bock (1988) pp54-55 says it is unlikely that Luke got the date wrong; M Smith (2000) *passim* makes an ingenious and reasonably convincing case for reconciling Matthew and Luke; see also Raymond Brown (1977) p26ff; Marshall (1977) pp101-102; Willcock (1979) p42; Fitzmeyer (1981) pp393-394; Tiede (1988) p67; Talley (1990) pp132-134; Evans (1996) pp13-14.

²⁸ e.g. Sanders (1995) pp86-87 calls it 'fantastic'; Bock (1994) pp903-909.

²⁹ Tiede (1988) pp47,66; Craddock (1990) p34.

historical record, but serves Matthew's 'Moses-Jesus typology' by drawing a parallel between Herod and Pharaoh killing baby boys, leading to Jesus' escape to safety and ultimately coming 'out of Egypt' (Matthew 1.15).³⁰ And, for both Luke and Matthew, the birth in Bethlehem³¹ fits with their overall purposes: Matthew shows the birth fulfilling Jewish prophecy that a ruler would come from Bethlehem;³² Luke uses Bethlehem to make the connection with King David.³³

Where historical 'accuracy' gets in the way of their overall purposes, Luke and (especially) Matthew happily accept inconsistency.³⁴ This approach, coupled with the irreconcilable differences between the two accounts, suggests that Luke and Matthew may well have constructed their Birth Narratives around what they wanted to say, rather than the other way round.³⁵ And if they were not overly concerned with historical 'accuracy', then why should we be? For a 21st century congregation, an 'overall meaning' approach may well be more helpful than historical analysis which cannot be proved and misses the real point.

Luke and Matthew also share an approach in their use of Scripture: both assume a working knowledge of Old Testament and Jewish theology, and this assumption is most prominent in the Birth Narratives.³⁶ Luke's account of Jesus' birth is rich with scriptural allusions, linking it with the

³⁰ Evans (2001) p13.

³¹ Some scholars doubt that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, following Raymond Brown (1977) pp5-13-516 (Nolland (1989) p105 dissenting).

³² Matthew 2.5-6.

³³ Luke 2.4, 2.11.

³⁴ e.g. re Matthew: Albright and Mann (1971) p9 note the incompatibility of two key elements of Matthew's tradition – that Jesus (a) is Messiah and hence the son of David, and (b) Jesus was conceived and born in miraculous manner.

³⁵ Raymond Brown (1977) pp5-13-516; Tiede (1988) p47.

³⁶ Of Matthew's 11 quotations of Old Testament prophecy, four appear in Chapter 2, and one in Chapter 1; see Marshall (1977) p46 re Luke.

Hebrew Scriptures, for example shepherds linking with the town of David the shepherd³⁷ and swaddling clothes linking with Solomon - David's son.³⁸ Matthew draws on Scripture, because he is 'preoccupied with the theme of 'fulfilment'³⁹ – evident from his liberal quotation, and choice of, Old Testament prophecies and the parallels he draws between Moses and Jesus. In pursuing his overall purpose, Matthew misquotes Scripture⁴⁰ and uses 'proof texts'⁴¹ – for example he misquotes Micah in Matthew 2.4-6 (Eighth Lesson) to justify Bethlehem as Jesus' birthplace.

In his seminal work *The Birth of the Messiah*,⁴² Roman Catholic scholar Raymond Brown argues convincingly that the Birth Narratives are integral to Matthew's and Luke's gospels – something which no serious scholar has yet contested. Both Matthew and Luke wrote their gospels after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension and with the benefit of hindsight and in order to make an overall point. Each Birth Narrative needs to be seen as part of a complete gospel.⁴³ It then becomes clear that, despite their differences, they are in fact both conveying the same message, but in different ways, specific to their contexts. And the fact that similarities are shared between two independent accounts makes them all the more significant and two accounts (even different ones) are stronger than one.⁴⁴

It is unlikely that Luke and Matthew intended or imagined that the Birth Narratives should become the *best-known* parts of their gospels, nor could

³⁷ Fitzmeyer (1982) p395; Tiede (1988) p68 also makes a connection with David the shepherd, though oddly by linking David with the manger rather than with the shepherds.

³⁸ Fitzmeyer (1982) pp394-395.

³⁹ France (1989) p168 and other works; Hagner (1993) page lx.

⁴⁰ France (1989) p173. Re Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 7.14, see also Hare (1993) pp10-11; Green (2000) p64; Moberly (2001) p186.

⁴¹ France (1989) pp172-181; France (1980) cited (1989) p169,180-181.

⁴² Raymond Brown (1977).

⁴³ Tiede (1988) p47, 65; Proctor (2006) *passim*; Marshall p45; Raymond Brown (1977).

⁴⁴ A point made by numerous scholars e.g. Burridge (1994) *passim*; Nolland (1989) p22.

they have foreseen the extent to which these particular passages would become embedded in world culture over the course of 2000 years. In particular, would Luke and Matthew have expected that their Birth Narratives would be used with no mention of Jesus' death and resurrection, or would they have expected their gospels to be read only as complete documents? And what practice should the Church encourage?

Luke and Matthew also cannot have foreseen how their two Birth Narratives would be combined into a single story and used as they have been. But the Data suggest that, for many Respondents, this combining of the accounts may have assisted both Luke and Matthew in their overall purposes.

John

Towards the end of his gospel, John states his overall purpose:

...these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name. John 20.31, NRSV

As with Luke and Matthew's Birth Narratives, scholars generally agree that that the Prologue is integral to the Gospel.⁴⁵ In pursuit of his overall purpose, John begins by stating in the Prologue who this Jesus is: the Word of God, made flesh; this sets the context for all that follows. Though his approach is radically different from the storytelling approach of Matthew and Luke, John's purpose overlaps with both, in that he wants to demonstrate to the individual believer that Jesus is the Messiah.

⁴⁵ e.g. Sloyan (1988) p13; Brown (1966)p18, whilst noting the contrary view, calls it 'the pearl within the Gospel'.

Authors of Top Six Carols

All the Top Six Carols were written long before 1918, so their authors cannot have envisaged that their carols might become fixed (or at least frequent) items in this particular form of service. Biographical notes appear in Appendix 4; these indicate that all the authors would have been very familiar with the Bible, the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Nicene Creed.

Eric Milner-White: the story told in the Service

The history of the Service is set out each year in the order of service used at King's College, Cambridge.⁴⁶ The format was originally devised by Bishop E.W. Benson of Truro (later Archbishop of Canterbury) for use in the wooden shed which then served as his cathedral in Truro at 10 p.m. on Christmas Eve 1880. It was first held in King's College Chapel in Cambridge on Christmas Eve 1918, at the instigation of Eric Milner-White, who, at the age of 34, had just been appointed Dean of King's after experience as an army chaplain, which had convinced him that the Church of England needed more imaginative worship. The order of service was revised in 1919 and has remained the same since then. The service was first broadcast in 1928 and has been broadcast annually since 1931; it is estimated that there are millions of listeners worldwide.⁴⁷

In 1941, Milner-White became Dean of York; he introduced the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols to York Minster and it has been held there every Christmas Eve subsequently.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Though not in that used at York.

⁴⁷ <http://www.kings.cam.ac.uk/sites/default/files/chapel/festival-nine-lessons-2009.pdf>.

⁴⁸ And also, more recently, on the evening of 22nd or 23rd December.

The Service is structured around the lessons and the prayers,⁴⁹ rather than the carols; the order of service at King's describes the lessons and the prayers as 'the backbone of the service'.⁵⁰ The overriding theme is 'the loving purposes of God'. The first words spoken are the Bidding Prayer, which serves as a 'manifesto' for the Service:

Beloved in Christ, be it this Christmas Eve our care and delight to prepare ourselves to hear again the message of the angels; in heart and mind to go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass, and the Babe lying in a manger.

*Let us read and mark in Holy Scripture the tale of **the loving purposes of God** from the first days of our disobedience unto the glorious Redemption brought us by this Holy Child.*

The invitation 'in heart and mind to go even unto Bethlehem' (quoting the shepherds in Luke 2.15) expresses the imaginative power of the Service – something borne out in interviews and Focus Group discussions in the Pilot Study.

⁴⁹ The prayers are: the Bidding Prayer, the Lord's Prayer, the Collect for Christmas Eve (or Christmas Day (not used at York)) and the Blessing for Christmas Day.

⁵⁰ This is what Stephen Cleobury, Director of Music at King's since 1983, told me that he was told by his predecessor, and he views the service in this way, with the readings acting as pillars and the music being decoration for the pillars: Interview with S Cleobury 11th November 2006. Presumably this approach has been handed down since the time of Milner-White.

How is the overall meaning of the Christmas Texts reflected in the Data?

Underlying all the Christmas Texts is the idea that Jesus is God the Son, who through love, and in fulfilment of prophecy, became incarnate, as Messiah, so as to bring salvation from sin and eternal life for all who believe.

Despite the apparent differences between the Christmas Texts and the Nicene Creed, many Respondents did attribute a Nicene meaning to the Christmas Story they told. There are numerous possible reasons for this, many of which are outside the scope of this study, but this study does identify two possible influences:

- That the authors of the Christmas Texts on the one hand and the framers of the Nicene Creed on the other hand were addressing the same question in different ways (namely the Person of Jesus Christ);
- That the structure and content of the Service and the theology of the Top Six Carols help to link Luke's and Matthew's Birth Narratives with the faith set out in the Nicene Creed.

The fact that the Christmas Texts contain both the Paradigm Story and the Themes, and that Respondents said both, even though they are not obviously connected, may be an indication that the Christmas Texts are influential. Even without the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, the Nine Lessons and the Top Six Carols would still have existed and could have influenced people (and my main focus is the texts, rather than the

Service), but it is possible that these particular texts have become more influential because the Service has brought them together. The Service may also have been influential as a recurring and familiar event.

All the Respondents who gave a Nicene meaning to the Christmas Story attributed a meaning that went beyond simply the birth of a child 2000 years ago. In alluding to Jesus' divinity and/or his later life, death and resurrection and/or the foundations of Christianity/the Church, they were apparently attributing some long-term/lasting significance to Jesus' birth. Even those who presented the meaning whilst saying that they personally did not believe it described it as something of great significance for those who do believe.

The Christmas Texts combine to make an overall story with a number of possible meanings. The Respondents adopted a similar approach by combining material from different sources into single stories with various meanings. Maybe in doing so, they helped to fulfil the overall purposes of the authors of the Christmas Texts, in ways those authors might not have envisaged.

What does the Church of England believe is the meaning of the Christmas Story?

The Church of England:

*professes the faith uniquely revealed in the Holy Scriptures and set forth in the catholic creeds, which faith the Church is called upon to proclaim afresh in each generation.*⁵¹

It is important for the Church⁵² to consider what *particular* aspect(s) of Christian faith it is 'called upon to proclaim afresh' at Christmas time. Looking at the faith 'set forth' in the Nicene Creed, the aspect which is most particularly relevant at Christmas time is this: for us and for our salvation Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, became incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man.

If Scripture is the Word of God, it *will* speak afresh to every generation. Therefore we should not be surprised to conclude that Luke, Matthew, the Nicene Creed and the Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols are indeed proclaiming that very message in different ways and speaking to different generations. But it is also important for the Church to ensure that the message remains fresh.

⁵¹ Preface to Declaration of Assent under Canon C15.

⁵² Meaning the Church of England.

How the Church uses the Christmas Story

The Church uses a variety of means to proclaim afresh the faith 'set forth' in the Nicene and other creeds; one of these is the annual re-telling of the Christmas Story.

Story is a powerful means of conveying meaning:⁵³ Jesus told stories, because he knew this. The House of Bishops in their 1986 report *The Nature of Christian Belief* recognised that story can be both a help and hindrance to the Church's mission:

Western popular culture today has adopted a greatly over-simplified view of language. On this view, only so-called 'factual' statements convey objectives truths, while 'metaphor', 'poetry', 'symbolism' and suchlike refer solely to ideas existing in the mind. Thus, to call a story 'symbolic', for example, is thought to imply both that it is fictional and that what it seeks to express is wholly within the human psyche. Neither assumption is correct. A fictional story may symbolically express an objective reality, existing independently of the human mind. Equally an actual historical event may be important chiefly because it too symbolically conveys such a reality. The need for such symbolic communication arises simply because there are certain objective truths which are best conveyed in such a way; and it is the inability of much contemporary culture to understand this which is for many one of the greatest obstacles in the way of belief.⁵⁴

⁵³ Proctor (1998) *passim*; Graham *et al* (2005) pp78-108.

⁵⁴ General Synod (1986) Para 24: Faith and History, pp14-15.

The Data show this to be true: a carol service, in which 'the Christmas Story' is presented, *is* an effective way of presenting the many meanings the Church wishes to convey at Christmas. In fact, the whole range of meanings the Church wishes to convey may be conveyed more effectively *because* 'the story' told by the Christmas Texts is not a single story, but a combination of stories with different layers and meanings all brought together. For the Respondents, there was no single definitive version of the Christmas Story, nor one single meaning, and the same is true of the Christmas Texts. And even if it were possible to construct a coherent narrative from Luke and Matthew, the story would still involve more than simply the events narrated, because any story will always operate at many levels, with different people taking different meanings from it.

But does the Church help people to hear and understand the story? Just as Luke and Matthew assume a working knowledge of the Old Testament and Jewish background (which most people now will not have), in a similar way, carols and the whole structure of a carol service assume a working knowledge of *Christianity* and the Bible which people do not necessarily have, plus an ability to synthesise a vast array of disparate material and extract an important message from it. For example, the Service assumes that people will understand how the Fall and the story of Abraham fit into the story of salvation, and how Isaiah's prophecies relate to Jesus. And does everyone understand the significance of all the different names and descriptions used for Jesus – key to understanding who he is? Of course, it may be that the annual repetition of these particular passages does help people to make these connections, but if that is happening in a vacuum, are the right connections in fact being made? Does the annual repetition of selected passages from the Birth Narratives mean that their message is

kept alive, or does the reading of these passages, removed from their original contexts, actually dilute the message?

According to the Bidding Prayer, the Nine Lessons tell the tale of the loving purposes of God 'from the first days of our disobedience unto the glorious Redemption brought us by this Holy Child'. Arguably, this particular selection of passages does not do that, as we end at the Incarnation (John 1), which did not *complete* redemption; redemption includes death and resurrection as well. People who already know the whole Christian story will know that (and some Respondents included death and (fewer Respondents) resurrection in their replies to Question 2) but it might be dangerous to imply to those who are less familiar with Christianity that redemption was completed by Jesus' birth: this could give the impression that his death and resurrection were unnecessary.

Another question is whether the Christmas Story is a helpful or appropriate way of conveying the message the Church wants to give. David Brown identifies:

*the paradox of Christianity being apparently at its most appealing (in Christmas celebrations) at a point where many a theological and preacher finds the imaginative details at their most embarrassing.*⁵⁵

In other words, why use *this* story to convey *this* meaning? – a question underpinning my study. By tracing the telling of the nativity story through (especially) art and literature and a few carols, with particular reference to the depiction of the Christ child, the magi, the shepherds and animals,

⁵⁵ David Brown (1999) p2.

Brown shows how the interpretation of the whole has been enriched, both forwards and backwards.⁵⁶ For example, whilst early Christians may have seen the baby as relatively unimportant, and merely the anticipation of the adult Jesus, as a fuller doctrine of the incarnation developed, the baby and his birth became more significant;⁵⁷ this in turn led to the development of Mary's role – a topic which Brown explores in his second volume.⁵⁸

This argument is certainly borne out by the Data. In the Questionnaires, Respondents *did* include 'traditional' (non-biblical) Elements of the story, and such Elements also appear in the Top Six Carols; it was clear that 'the story' *does* engage the imagination.⁵⁹

Carols must have been a factor influencing the 'imaginative' telling of the Christmas story – not only because of the theology they contain, but also because of the effect of singing them. For David Brown, *participation* in the story is important:

*Stories, including the biblical story, will only engage the reader if they are allowed to function as very much more than the sum of a series of historical facts. We need in some sense to be allowed to be present if their full impact upon us is to be felt, and this is precisely what the imagination makes possible...*⁶⁰

⁵⁶ David Brown (1999) pp60-150.

⁵⁷ See his own comment on this in David Brown (2000) p228.

⁵⁸ David Brown (2000) pp226-287.

⁵⁹ In questionnaires this was inevitably less apparent than in Focus Group discussions, but nevertheless was sometimes apparent, e.g. some Respondents drew pictures. Several Participants referred to the medieval mystery plays, which were performed in York Minster in 2000.

⁶⁰ David Brown (1999) p74, though he concentrates more on visual aspects (especially art), which are less prominent at a carol service.

That is undoubtedly true: there is ample evidence in the Data that the imaginative details of the Christmas Story (such as animals) do engage people's hearts and minds; but does it matter if people draw details from outside Scripture? Embellishments about the inn, innkeeper, stable and animals are evidence that for many Respondents the Christmas Story is not confined to what appears in Scripture.⁶¹

There is also the 'carol service experience' – which enables a congregation to engage physically with the story, by being present, in a special building, as the story is told, and by joining in the singing of familiar carols (members of the congregation themselves being part of the corporate storytelling).⁶²

David Brown says that the Church's interpretation and reinterpretation of Scripture over time is 'in effect a substantial rewriting of the biblical narrative'.⁶³ In other words, Scripture is 'rewritten' in the light of subsequent developments. This is similar to what Sawyer⁶⁴ has observed in relation to Isaiah, which was effectively 'rewritten' (or at least reinterpreted) in the light of the gospels. Brown proposes that this rewriting 'succeeds' better than Scripture does itself, both in terms of being an effective narrative and in 'its claims to truth'.⁶⁵ But this must be a question of degree: how much rewriting can there be before the original meaning is completely obliterated and replaced with a new (unintended) meaning? There is evidence in the Data that this is what Respondents

⁶¹ See also Graham (2000) pp89-98 on Nativity plays and Brueggemann (1993) and (2003) on 'imaginative' reading of the Old Testament.

⁶² Said by Participants to be important and borne out by replies to Question 7 (reasons for attending); see also Castle (1994); Rosalind Brown (2001) Graham *et al* (2005) p78ff.

⁶³ David Brown (1999) p74.

⁶⁴ Sawyer (1996).

⁶⁵ David Brown (1999) pp74-75.

were doing, but should the Church be happy with that? At what point can we say that the Christmas Story is still the Christmas Story? How much does it have to overlap with the gospels? Is it permissible to include in the Paradigm Story *any* Elements that do not appear in the gospels? And, if so, how far do we go? If the story is 'rewritten', who then decides whether it is still the same story? Is it wrong to decide what story we want to tell and then write the story? Or is that what the evangelists in fact did?

The double-edged effect of using a familiar story to convey an important message is perhaps best illustrated by the Respondent whose answer to Question 2 was:

- A lovely story which I never tire of listening to or reading.

[205:F612]⁶⁶

The fact that Respondents took many different meanings, not all of them Christian, from the Christmas Story, does indicate that they were engaging with the story and were using imagination freely; but, for some, this could dilute, or even erase, the message which the Church wants to convey, particularly for those whose only contact with the Church is at a carol service.

It is the Church's job to ensure that the message is not swallowed up by the story, but without spoiling the story. Downing,⁶⁷ writing about meaning and language, uses the analogy of a beetle in a box: if you try to force the beetle (meaning) into the box (language) you end up making a nasty mess of both. Trying to force the meaning of the Christmas Story on a congregation could kill both the story and the meaning. Maybe a more

⁶⁶ Quoted in Chapter 6 under Theme 14 (Story); note that this was a medium churchgoer.

⁶⁷ Downing (1975), p128.

helpful analogy is that of the Christmas Story as an anchor, which allows considerable movement, but only within limits (which can be generous). In devising carol services, the Church needs to decide where to moor the anchor and how much freedom of movement to give.

How might the Church convey its message more effectively?

In proclaiming its message 'afresh in every generation', the Church today faces the same challenge that the evangelists faced and Eric Milner-White faced 1900 years later: how to tell the world that Jesus is God, and what that means for the world and for individuals.

In 1918, when the service was compiled, the world was very different. People knew the Bible and the Christian story, but were being forced to reassess it in the light of the First World War. My grandfather went up to King's in 1919 aged 22, having served in France during the war. It is impossible to imagine ourselves into the world of young men like him, for whom the service was devised; yet the form of service is still the same. It may be that the form of service is so timeless that its message speaks to every generation and culture in all circumstances – there is certainly some evidence for that view, and the Bible operates in a similar way. Part of the appeal of the service is that it has *not* changed, and so is one of the few constant features of life: there can be few people alive with clear memories of a Christmas earlier than 1918 and therefore Milner-White's service will have influenced many millions of people over whole lifetimes. But there is a danger that a form of service devised for such a different world could be inappropriate for some contemporary settings.

In the Service, the Paradigm Story blends with the Nicene Creed. So it is not surprising that many Respondents attributed Nicene meanings to the Paradigm Story. The challenge for contemporary Church of England ministers is to enable more people to make better links between the two: strengthen the correlations and make them more accessible.

Given that the identity of Jesus Christ is still of the utmost importance to the Church and its mission, the Christmas Texts might be regarded as an effective way of addressing that question, even for a modern congregation. But maybe that could be done more effectively by bringing to the forefront those aspects of Nicene faith which are less prominent in the Christmas Texts and which could helpfully be emphasised in order to convey the whole message that the Church wants to put across. This prompts two questions, which I will now consider: where does the Christmas Story begin and end, and what might be added to the Service, to convey the Church's message more clearly?

Where does the Christmas Story begin and end?

The Christmas Story (however defined) is *part* of the Christian meta-narrative; the question is: which part and how big a part? The Data show that Respondents had varying views on this, and the Nine Lessons present a particular version of the story, beginning at the Fall and ending at the Incarnation, with some noteworthy inclusions and omissions: for example, why are the Annunciation and the wise men included (even though the Church celebrates the Annunciation and Epiphany separately from Christmas) but Jesus' death and resurrection are not included? The choice of these particular Lessons may have influenced what is now considered to be the Christmas Story (by the Church as well as by Respondents); it is

possible that redefining the boundaries of the story might make the message clearer.

Are Jesus' death and resurrection part of the Christmas Story? 43

Respondents (just under 10%) mentioned death and/or resurrection in reply to Question 2. This Theme does not appear overtly in the Christmas Texts, though it is implied by references to salvation (for those who already know the Christian meta-narrative). When Milner-White set out to tell 'the tale of the loving purposes of God...to the Redemption', did he have Jesus' death and resurrection in mind? If he had known that his Bidding Prayer would still be being used 90 years later at a time when not everyone hearing it would have the relevant background knowledge, might he have worded his prayer differently?

David Brown criticises those who argue that crib and cross are inextricably linked, arguing that that is to place too narrow an interpretation on the Incarnation.⁶⁸ Yet it was evident from some Questionnaires that Respondents did see Christmas as an opportunity to reflect on themes of sin and suffering.⁶⁹

With this in mind, York Minster developed a practice of having, towards the end of the Service, a 'choir' carol looking ahead to the Cross: in 2006, it was *The Infant King*, which was discussed by all eight of the York Focus Groups, and which several Participants said they had found poignant.⁷⁰ The point is also made visually in the processions at the beginning and end of the York Minster Service: at the front, a banner with Adam and Eve

⁶⁸ David Brown (1999) p74.

⁶⁹ This was even more evident in Focus Group discussions, with Participants saying that they particularly liked *It came upon the midnight clear* because it addresses these themes.

⁷⁰ However, there was no such carol in 2007.

under a tree; and at the back, a banner with Jesus hanging dead on a similar tree.

Of course, the Christian meta-narrative does not end with Jesus' death and resurrection; an equally important question is whether more prominence could usefully be given to the Holy Spirit (mentioned by only five Respondents in reply to Question 2 and ranked last of the 15 ranked Themes) or other aspects of the Nicene Creed or Christian doctrine.

What additions might make the message clearer?

There are at least three possible ways of adding to the Service, in order to bring out the meaning more clearly.⁷¹ In this section, I draw mainly on the Pilot Study, because the Focus Groups discussed questions which could not be fully explored in the 2007 Study, but which proved to be relevant to the 2007 Study.

First, the addition of a short sermon or homily. The Service does not envisage a sermon, the idea being that the texts will speak for themselves (a view shared by the present Archbishop of York⁷²). But I explored the possibility with Focus Groups in the Pilot Study.⁷³ Most Participants thought a short homily would be a good idea (those in Derby had appreciated the homily they had heard, even though no one could remember what it had said, and those in York had appreciated a short impromptu 'speech' from the Archbishop). In one York group, two Participants (both regular members of the Minster congregation) were strongly opposed to the idea,

⁷¹ I am not suggesting altering the Christmas Texts: they are what draw many people in; but they could be enhanced.

⁷² Interview with Archbishop of York: 22nd December 2006.

⁷³ I conducted the Pilot Study in Derby Cathedral as well as York Minster: Derby had a homily at its carol service, so I asked all the Focus Groups to discuss whether or not this was a good idea in principle.

but were won round by a young student from overseas. If included, this would be an opportunity to make a single key point.

Secondly, including particular carols could help 'correct' the theology of the Christmas Texts. Focus Group discussions showed that the popular carols are popular mainly because of their tunes; carols with good tunes have become fixtures, bringing their theology with them, and this is not always helpful.⁷⁴

One carol which could help to embed a good theology of Jesus' Sonship and divine nature is *Of the Father's love begotten*, which (albeit with difficult language) uses the word 'begotten' firmly in the context of Christ's pre-existence:

*Of the Father's love begotten,
Ere the worlds began to be,
He is Alpha and Omega,
He the source, the ending he,
Of the things that are, that have been,
And that future years shall see
Evermore and evermore.*

This is a translation from a fourth-century Latin hymn. A different translation, *Of the Father's heart begotten* is more common (possibly because that is the version which appears in *Carols for Choirs*⁷⁵), but arguably more difficult to understand.

⁷⁴ e.g. *The First Nowell* combines biblical solecisms with profound theology.

⁷⁵ Willcocks (1987) p236.

There is an interesting comparison to be made between two carols by Charles Wesley: *Hark how all the welkin rings*, written in 1739 (later to become *Hark! The herald-angels sing*) and *Let earth and heaven combine*, written five years later (1744).⁷⁶ *Hark! The herald-angels sing* became popular when set to Mendelssohn's tune in the 1850s,⁷⁷ whereas *Let earth and heaven combine* has not (yet) caught on, possibly for lack of a good tune:

*Let earth and heaven combine,
And joyfully agree,
To praise in songs divine
The incarnate Deity,
Our God, contracted to a span,
Incomprehensibly made man.*⁷⁸

If this had become popular instead of *Hark! The herald-angels sing*, would the Respondents' theology now be different?

Some contemporary hymn writers have written some Christmas hymns with excellent theology, for example, *God's Surprise* by John Bell of the Iona Community, which makes clear that Jesus is God, ending each verse with:

*God surprises earth with heaven
Coming here on Christmas Day.*⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Bradley (1999) pp181-183.

⁷⁷ Bradley (1999) pp129-130.

⁷⁸ Bradley (1999) p184.

⁷⁹ Bradley (1999) p402.

Focus Group discussions indicated that Participants took more notice of unfamiliar words which they listened to (particularly when, as at York Minster, the words are printed for them to follow), than familiar words which they sang themselves. If so, letting people listen to unfamiliar carols with good Nicene theology could be effective.

A third way of conveying the Church's message more effectively would be to 'educate' the congregation appropriately. Some Respondents said that it had never before occurred to them to think about the questions the Questionnaire asked, and that they had found it helpful to do so. It is possible that, having done so, they then took more notice of the words in the Service. Participants in the Derby pre-Pilot Study (November 2006) reported doing this at Christmas 2006, and Participants in 2007 said that they would now take more notice of the words of carols; whether or not they actually did so, it is likely that for many people the experience of thinking and talking about the words of carols will be more helpful than unhelpful. Some Participants said that they would appreciate 'pre Christmas teach-ins'. An easier alternative would be to provide some commentary in the Order of Service: some cathedrals (though not York Minster) print an introduction giving an overall message, and modern technology offers many possibilities. Above all, listening to members of the congregation, as I did in this study, will help the Church to proclaim its message 'afresh.'

Christmas is not just for Christmas

The Data show that (with a few exceptions) Respondents recalled the Christmas Story in broadly similar ways, but attributed a wide variety of meanings to it; some of the meanings were consistent with Nicene faith

and some were not. Generally (though again with some exceptions) the responses given by frequent churchgoers were more consistent with Nicene faith and the responses given by Respondents who only go to church at Christmas were less so. If, for those Respondents who only attend church at Christmas, this is their only or main contact with Christianity (which cannot be assumed, but could be true of some), then it would not be surprising if their understanding of the Christmas Story were to remain unchanged from year to year. Therefore, if the Church is to accomplish its task of 'proclaiming afresh...', it needs to adapt the way it presents the Christmas Texts in carol services, if those who attend church only then are to receive the message the Church wants them to receive.

The Service presents the Christmas Texts, and presenting the Christmas Texts in this way on this particular occasion produced these Data, which reflect the Christmas Texts. So the Christmas Texts do indeed contain the principal messages which the Church believes itself called to proclaim, but for those whose only contact with the Church is at this particular service, those messages might be difficult to see and interpret. This is demonstrated by the fact that there were no significant differences between how frequent and Christmas-only churchgoers told the Christmas Story, but there were significant differences between the meanings they attributed to it, with frequent churchgoers attributing meanings which were closer to what the Church believes. Those who understood the meaning were apparently drawing on more than simply the annual repetition of the Christmas Texts.

In compiling a carol service, it is clearly desirable to consider what message is to be conveyed, and to ensure that the key aspects of that

message have in fact been included, preferably in ways that will get them noticed.

But the bigger challenge for the Church is not so much how to put across the *Christmas* message *at Christmas* (if that is in fact being received), but how to put across the message that the events we celebrate at Christmas are life-changing, world-changing and everlasting. Possibly the most significant finding of this study was that only five out of 446 Respondents made a clear connection between the Christmas Story and their own life, and only one of those stated that he had personally experienced its effects.⁸⁰ So maybe the emphasis should be not so much 'God became human, so let's celebrate', but a step further: 'Since God became human, how does that affect me?'; because Christmas is not just for Christmas.

⁸⁰ See Chapter 6: Theme 19.

Chapter 8

Concluding Theories

The purpose of grounded theory is to generate theories for testing in further research.

This study has generated ten theories, which might usefully be tested in various contexts. I state them as propositions, because they are propositions to be tested; by stating them in this way, I am not suggesting that they are anything more than hypothetical theories.

Theory 1

When telling the Christmas Story, people collectively include common Elements drawn predominantly from the Birth Narratives in Luke and Matthew, often in the order in which those Elements appear (if at all) in the Nine Lessons. It is reasonably easy to construct a Paradigm Story from stories told by many people, because they share many common Elements and a common structure.

This theory emerged from Chapter 5.

When asked to tell the Christmas Story, over 90% of Respondents collectively told a story which incorporated 20 elements (mentioned by more than 10% of Respondents), 18 of which were drawn from Luke's and Matthew's birth narratives, and two of which were 'traditional' details added to those birth narratives.

Theory 2

Although people tell the Christmas Story in many different ways, there are no clear patterns as between male/female; people of different age groups; Christians, non-Christians and Don't Knows; or frequent and less frequent churchgoers.

This theory emerged from Chapters 4 and 5

Replies did not differ as between Christians and non-Christians or as between frequent and infrequent churchgoers: instead, similar types of replies were given by Respondents across the board.

Theory 3

People attribute a variety of meanings to the Christmas Story, and although the Paradigm Story is not obviously a statement of Nicene faith, many people take a Nicene meaning from it.

This theory emerged from Chapter 6.

When asked to give the meaning of the Christmas Story, Respondents gave a variety of meanings reflecting various themes which appear in the Nicene Creed. Replies did differ slightly as between Christians and non-Christians and as between frequent and infrequent churchgoers: slightly more of the replies reflecting Nicene faith were given by Christians and by frequent churchgoers, though non-Christians and infrequent churchgoers also gave 'Nicene' replies.

Theory 4

The meanings people attribute to the Christmas Story vary as between frequent and less frequent churchgoers and (to a lesser extent) as between Christians and non-Christians; Christians and frequent churchgoers are more likely to attribute meanings consistent with Nicene faith.

This theory emerged from Chapter 6.

Theory 5

The Christmas Texts are a hinge/bridge between the Paradigm Story and Nicene faith, and may be influential in forming people's opinions about the content and meaning of the Christmas Story.

This theory emerged from Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

The Paradigm Story and the Themes do not obviously overlap and the Paradigm Story does not *on its own* convey a Nicene meaning, but the Christmas Texts as a whole (which include much of the Paradigm Story) *do* present Nicene faith. The Christmas Texts act as a hinge, connecting the Paradigm Story with the Themes. Therefore, a carol service in which the Christmas Texts are presented can help people to link Nicene faith with the Paradigm Story, and this may be borne out by the fact that Respondents attending the 2007 Service did in fact make such a link.

Theory 6

There is some confusion about the Person of Christ – particularly as to the relationship between God the Father and God the Son – and the Christmas Texts may have contributed to the confusion. Using other texts (particularly those describing the relationship between God the Father and God the Son) might assist better understanding.

This theory emerged from Chapters 6 and 7.

Theory 7

The Holy Spirit is not prominent in the Christmas Texts and is rarely mentioned when people tell the Christmas Story or state its meaning. This, coupled with misunderstanding of the Person of Christ, could lead to an unbalanced view of the Trinity.

This theory emerged from Chapter 6

Theory 8

Few people mention Jesus' death and resurrection in connection with the Christmas Story, but those who do so show an understanding of the meaning of the Christmas Story which is more consistent with the faith which the Church of England believes itself called to proclaim.

This theory emerged from Chapters 6 and 7.

Theory 9

When recounting the Christmas Story and its meaning in response to a questionnaire, few people relate the Christmas Story to their own lives.

This theory emerged from Chapters 6 and 7.

Theory 10

Within the framework of a traditional service of Nine Lessons and Carols, the faith which the Church of England believes itself called to proclaim might be conveyed more effectively through the addition of a homily, particular lessons and carols (supplement omissions or correct misunderstandings) and/or through educating members of the congregation.

This theory emerged from Chapter 7

APPENDIX 1: THE QUESTIONNAIRE

YORK MINSTER CHRISTMAS RESEARCH PROJECT 2007

We are conducting research into how people who attend our Christmas services perceive the Christmas story. By responding to this questionnaire you are agreeing that your responses will form part of the research data and may subsequently be quoted, but not so that you could be personally identified.

Please hand your completed questionnaire to a steward

- 1 Please tell the Christmas story in about 100 words, or list its main features (bullet points are fine).
- 2 Please say what you think the Christmas story means, in about 20 words.

PLEASE TURN OVER

- 3 Are you (please tick one):
- ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
- 4 Are you (please tick one):
- ☐ Under 18
 - ☐ 18-24
 - ☐ 25-34
 - ☐ 35-44
 - ☐ 45-54
 - ☐ 55-64
 - ☐ 65+
- 5 Do you consider yourself to be a Christian? (Please tick one)
- ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
 - ☐ Don't Know
- 6 Apart from weddings, funerals and christenings, about how frequently do you attend church services? (Please tick one)
- ☐ Only at Christmas
 - ☐ More often than Christmas, but less often than once a month
 - ☐ Once a month or more
- 7 Please rank in order of importance (by numbering 1-5) up to 5 reasons why you have come to this service:
- ☐ I know someone taking part
 - ☐ I have come with family/friends
 - ☐ It's an important part of Christmas
 - ☐ I go every year
 - ☐ To celebrate the birth of Christ
 - ☐ To worship God
 - ☐ For the music
 - ☐ For the atmosphere/all-round experience
 - ☐ I like the tradition
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
- 8 If you are happy to be contacted in the future, please give an email address (preferred), or a telephone number if you do not have an email address.

.....

Thank you very much for your help.
This research is being conducted by The Revd. Rachel Phillips,
registered under the Data Protection Act 1998, No: Z9727634. If you would like to say more
about the Christmas story, please email christmasresearch@tiscali.co.uk

APPENDIX 2: GLOSSARY

Christmas Texts

The Nine Lessons, the Bidding Prayer and the Top Six Carols (as defined in Chapter 4)

Data

The Data in the Questionnaires

Data Set

All the Q1 Data or all the Q2 Data

Element

An Element of the Paradigm Story

Focus Groups

The focus groups which met during the Pilot Study

Paradigm Story

The story set out in the column headed 'Content' in Table 1A, weighted as set out in the column headed 'Variations from average mentions' in Table 1A.

Participant(s)

A participant or participants in any Focus Group

Pilot Study

The study described in Chapter 2

Theme

A theme set out in the column headed 'Theme' and amplified in the column headed 'Content' in Table 2A.

Questionnaire

The form of questionnaire set out in Appendix 1, used at the 2007 Service

Questionnaires

The questionnaires completed by the Respondents

Question [number]

The relevant numbered question in the Questionnaire

Q1 Data

The data contained in all the replies to Question 1

Q2 Data

The data contained in all the replies to Question 2

Respondents

The 446 members of the congregation at the 2007 Service who answered Questions 1 and 2 and whose replies constitute the Q1 Data and the Q2 Data

Service

The form of service of Nine Lessons and Carols, as conducted at King's College, Cambridge and York Minster on Christmas Eve every year

2007 Service

The Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols held at York Minster at 4.00 pm on Christmas Eve 2007

2007 Study

The study conducted around the 2007 Service

APPENDIX 3: DATA REFERENCE DECODER

Each Respondent quoted has a reference number, e.g. [000:F000]

The first number is the Questionnaire number. These numbers are not significant: they are simply numbers that I allocated when first collating the Questionnaires.¹ After the colon is M or F (male or female) followed by 3 digits:

1st digit = age group

- 1= under 18
- 2= 18-24
- 3=25-34
- 4=35-44
- 5=45-54
- 6=55-64
- 7=65+

2nd digit = Christian?

- 1 = Yes
- 2 = No
- 3 = Don't know

3rd digit = churchgoing frequency

- 1 = only at Christmas ('Christmas only churchgoers')
- 2 = more than Christmas, but less than monthly ('Medium churchgoers')
- 3 = at least monthly ('Frequent churchgoers')

A zero in any category indicates that the relevant question was not answered.

¹ Although I analysed only 446 Questionnaires, the numbers go up to 483, as I numbered them before excluding those who had not answered both Questions 1 and 2. Consecutive numbers might indicate that Respondents were sitting near one another and their Questionnaires were collected together.

APPENDIX 4: AUTHORS OF TOP SIX CAROLS

Once In Royal David's City: Mrs Cecil Frances Alexander 1848

Mrs Alexander, was married to the Anglican bishop of Derry (later Archbishop of Armagh). She wrote this carol specifically to teach children the section of the Apostles' Creed that deals with the Incarnation.¹

It came upon the Midnight Clear: Edmund Sears 1849

Sears was an American Unitarian Minister; this explains why this carol, though inspired by Luke 21:3-14, does not mention God, Jesus or his birth.

O little town of Bethlehem: Phillips Brooks 1867

Brooks was an Anglican (American Episcopalian) priest (eventually Bishop of Massachusetts); he would have been familiar with the Nicene Creed.

While Shepherds watched: Nahum Tate c1700

When Tate published this in an Anglican hymn book supplement, it was the *only* Christmas hymn authorised to be sung in the Anglican Church,² because it is a faithful paraphrase of Scripture (this was only 40 years after the re-establishment of Christmas following its abolition by Act of Parliament).

¹ Which is briefer than the equivalent section in the Nicene Creed

² Bradley (1999) p395

O come all ye faithful: John Francis Wade c1789; translated by Frederick Oakley, 1841 (verses 1, 2, 6) and William Brooke 1884 (verses 3, 4, 5)

Wade was Roman Catholic; the translators, Oakley and Brooke, were both Anglican: Oakley was ordained; Brooke was a convert from the Baptist Church.

Hark! The herald-angels sing: Charles Wesley c1769

Wesley wrote several thousand hymns as a means of teaching theology to ordinary people. This was an adaptation of an earlier Christmas hymn *Hark how all the welkin rings*, published in 1739.

Sources

The Penguin Book of Carols, ed I Bradley (1999), London, Penguin
www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com

TABLE 1A
Elements, with rankings and demographic variations

No.	Rank	Element	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
1	3	Mary	Jesus' mother was Mary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All references 386 (86.5%) Mary by name 364 (81.6%) 	386 (86.5%)	<i>No significant variations</i>
2	16	Miraculous conception	Jesus was conceived miraculously	123 (27.6%)	<i>Above average</i> Monthly or more +9% Male +9%
					<i>Below average</i> Female -11% Christmas-only -6%

TABLE 1A

No.	Rank	Element	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
3	13	Annunciation	It was announced that Mary was going to have a baby <ul style="list-style-type: none"> by an angel 194 (43.5%) Gabriel 131 (29.4%) 	215 (48.2%)	<i>Above average</i> Female +9%
					<i>Below average</i> Male -10%
4	5	Joseph	There was a man called Joseph <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All references 356 (79.8%) Joseph by name 335 (75.1%) 	356 (79.8%)	<i>No significant variations</i>
5	7	Bethlehem	Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David	335 (75.1%)	<i>No significant variations</i>
6	11	Census/tax/registration	A census/taxation/registration was ordered <ul style="list-style-type: none"> By the Romans 45 (10.0%) 	239 (53.6%)	<i>No significant variations</i>
7	9	No room	There was no room <ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was no room at the inn 115 (25.8%) 	271 (60.8%)	<i>No significant variations</i>

TABLE 1A

No.	Rank	Element	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
8	8	Stable	Mary and Joseph stayed in a stable <ul style="list-style-type: none"> All references 326 (73.1%) Stable 298 (66.9%) 	326 (73.1%)	<i>No significant variations</i>
9	1	Birth	There was a birth	443 (99.3%)	<i>No significant variations</i>
10	2	Jesus Christ	See Table 3	426 (95.6%)	See Table 3
11	17	Manger	Jesus was laid in a manger	99 (22.1%)	<i>Above average</i> Female +11% Christmas-only +9% <hr/> <i>Below average</i> Monthly or more -6% Male -10%

TABLE 1A

No.	Rank	Element	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
12	19	Animals	There were animals	73 (16.4%)	<i>Above average</i> Christmas-only +10% Age 25-34 +6%
					<i>Below average</i> Christian -6% Age 55-64 -8% Monthly or more -12%
13	6	Shepherds	There were shepherds	347 (77.8%)	<i>No significant variations</i>
14	14	Angel/heavenly host	An angel/angels/the heavenly host appeared <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to shepherds 171 (38.3%) to wise men/kings/magi 11 (<10%) 	199 (44.6%)	<i>No significant variations</i>

TABLE 1A

No.	Rank	Element	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
15	4	Wise men	There were wise men/kings/magi <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wise men 244 • Kings 108 • Magi 46 	378 (84.8%)	<i>No significant variations</i>
16	10	Star	A star appeared	243 (54.5%)	<i>Above average</i> Christmas-only + 6%
17	15	Herod	Herod was the king <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All references 149 • Herod by name 144 	149 (33.4%)	<i>No significant variations</i>
18	12	Gifts	Gifts were given to Jesus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By shepherds 32 (47.7%) • By wise men 207 (45.1%) 	219 (49.1%)	<i>Above average</i> Christmas-only +7% Female +6%

TABLE 1A

No.	Rank	Element	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
					<i>Below average</i> Monthly or more -7%
19	18	Flight	Mary, Joseph and Jesus escaped to Egypt	92 (20.6%)	<i>Above average</i> Age 55-64 +9% Monthly or more +6%
					<i>Below average</i> Under 18 -6% Christmas-only -6%
20	20	Slaughter	There was a mass slaughter of children	71 (15.9%)	<i>Above average</i> Christmas-only +9% Age 55-64 +8% Non-Christian +7%

TABLE 1A

No.	Rank	Element	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
					<i>Below average</i> Under 18 -6% Christian -6% Medium churchgoers - 11%

TABLE 1A

TABLE 1B

Elements in Christmas Texts

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Element 1 (ranked 3): Mary			
Jesus' mother was Mary	<p><i>Fifth Lesson</i></p> <p>And The virgin's name was Mary <i>Luke 1.27</i></p> <p><i>Sixth Lesson</i></p> <p>...to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife <i>Luke 2.5</i></p>	<p><i>Once in royal David's city</i></p> <p>Mary was that mother mild</p> <p>Love and watch the lowly maiden in whose gentle arms he lay</p> <p><i>O little town</i></p> <p>For Christ is born of Mary</p>	

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p><i>Seventh Lesson</i></p> <p>...and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger <i>Luke 2.16</i></p> <p><i>Eighth Lesson</i></p> <p>And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother <i>Matt 2.11</i></p>		
Element 2 (ranked 16): Miraculous conception			
Jesus was conceived miraculously	<p><i>Fifth Lesson</i></p> <p>To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph <i>Luke 1.27</i></p>	<p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb</p>	

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>Mary said unto the angel "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" <i>Luke 1.34</i></p> <p>"The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee <i>Luke 1.35</i></p>	<p><i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i></p> <p>Offspring of a virgin's womb</p>	
Element 3 (ranked 13): Annunciation			
<p>It was announced that Mary was going to have a baby</p>	<p><i>Fifth Lesson</i></p> <p>...the angel Gabriel was sent from God...</p> <p>And the angel said unto her "...behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son <i>Luke 1.26,30,31</i></p>		

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Element 4 (ranked 5): Joseph			
There was a man called Joseph	<p><i>Fifth Lesson</i></p> <p>...to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph <i>Luke 1.27</i></p> <p><i>Sixth Lesson</i></p> <p>Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth <i>Luke 2.4</i></p> <p><i>Seventh Lesson</i></p> <p>...and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger <i>Luke 2.16</i></p>		

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Element 5 (ranked 7): Bethlehem			
Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David	<p>Sixth Lesson</p> <p>And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem...with Mary.....while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered <i>Luke 2.4,6</i></p> <p>Seventh Lesson</p> <p>For unto you is born this day in the city of David <i>Luke 2.11</i></p>	<p>Once in royal David's city</p> <p>Once in royal David's city</p> <p>O little town</p> <p>O little town of Bethlehem</p> <p>O holy child of Bethlehem</p> <p>While shepherds watched</p> <p>To you in David's town this day...</p> <p>O come all ye faithful</p> <p>O come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem</p>	<p>...be it this Christmas Eve our care and delight to prepare ourselves...and in heart and mind to go even unto Bethlehem and see this thing which is come to pass...</p>

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>...the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem</p> <p><i>Luke 2.15</i></p> <p><i>Eighth Lesson</i></p> <p>...after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea <i>Matt 2.1</i></p> <p>...he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not</p>	<p><i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i></p> <p>Christ is born in Bethlehem</p>	

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>least among the princes of Juda</p> <p><i>Matt 2.4-6</i></p> <p>And he sent them to Bethlehem</p> <p><i>Matt 2.8</i></p>		
Element 6 (ranked 11): Census/tax/registration			
A census/taxation/ registration was ordered	<p>Sixth Lesson</p> <p>... there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed (and this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria)</p> <p><i>Luke 2.1-2</i></p>		

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>And all went to be taxed, every one to his own city <i>Luke 2.3</i></p> <p>...to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife <i>Luke 2.5</i></p>		
Element 7 (ranked 9): No room			
There was no room	<p><i>Sixth Lesson</i></p> <p>...there was no room for them in the inn</p> <p><i>Luke 2.7</i></p>		

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Element 8 (ranked 8): Stable			
Mary and Joseph stayed in a stable		<p><i>Once in royal David's city</i></p> <p>Stood a lowly cattle shed</p> <p>Not in that poor lowly stable...</p>	
Element 9 (ranked 1): Birth			
There was a birth	<p><i>Second Lesson</i></p> <p>...in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed <i>Genesis 22.18</i></p> <p><i>Third Lesson</i></p> <p>For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given <i>Isaiah 9.6</i></p>	<p><i>Once in royal David's city</i></p> <p>Where a mother laid her baby</p> <p><i>O little town</i></p> <p>O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth</p> <p>For Christ is born of Mary</p>	<p>...and the Babe lying in a manger.</p> <p>...the glorious Redemption brought us by this Holy Child</p> <p>...whose hope was in the Word made flesh...</p>

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>Fourth Lesson</p> <p>And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots <i>Isaiah 11.1</i></p> <p>Fifth Lesson</p> <p>...thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son <i>Luke 1.31</i></p> <p>Sixth Lesson</p> <p>And she brought forth her first born son <i>Luke 2.6</i></p>	<p>be born in us today</p> <p>While shepherds watched</p> <p>To you in David's town this day is born of David's line</p> <p>The heavenly babe you there shall find</p> <p>O come all ye faithful</p> <p>born the King of angels</p>	

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>Seventh Lesson</p> <p>For unto you is born this day...a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord <i>Luke 2.11</i></p> <p>Eighth Lesson</p> <p>...after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea <i>Matt 2.1</i></p> <p>Ninth Lesson</p> <p>And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us <i>John 1.14</i></p>	<p>Hark! The herald-angels sing</p> <p>Christ is born in Bethlehem</p> <p>Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace</p> <p>Born that man no more may die; born to raise the sons of earth; born to give them second birth...</p>	

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Element 10 (ranked 2): Jesus Christ			
The baby was Jesus Christ	See Table 3	See Table 3	See Table 3
Element 11 (ranked 17): Manger			
Jesus was laid in a manger	<i>Sixth Lesson</i> ..and laid him in a manger Luke 2.7	<i>Once in royal David's city</i> In a manger for his bed <i>While shepherds watched</i> And in a manger laid <i>O come all ye faithful</i> Poor and in the manger	...and the Babe lying in a manger.

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Element 12 (ranked 19): Animals			
There were animals		<p><i>Once in royal David's city</i></p> <p>Stood a lowly cattle shed</p> <p>With the oxen standing by</p> <p><i>While shepherds watched</i></p> <p>While shepherds watched their flocks</p> <p>by night</p>	
Element 13 (ranked 6): Shepherds			
There were shepherds	<p><i>Seventh Lesson</i></p> <p>There were in the same country</p> <p>shepherds abiding in the fields <i>Luke 2.8</i></p>	<p><i>While shepherds watched</i></p> <p>While shepherds watched their flocks</p> <p>by night</p>	

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
		<p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>See how the shepherds, summoned to his cradle</p>	
Element 14 (ranked 14): Angel/heavenly host			
An angel/angels/the heavenly host appeared	<p><i>Seventh Lesson</i></p> <p>...the angel of the Lord came upon them <i>Luke 2.9</i></p> <p>And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host <i>Luke 2.13</i></p>	<p><i>O little town</i></p> <p>The angels keep their watch of wond'ring love</p> <p><i>It came upon the midnight clear</i></p> <p>From angels bending near the earth..."Peace on the earth, good will to men..."</p>	<p>...be it this Christmas Eve our care and delight to prepare ourselves to hear again the message of the Angels...</p> <p>...and unto the fellowship of the citizens above may the King of Angels bring us all.</p>

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
		<p><i>While shepherds watched</i></p> <p>The angel of the Lord came down...</p> <p>And forthwith appeared a shining throng of angels praising God</p> <p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>Born the King of angels</p> <p>Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation...</p> <p>"Glory to God in the highest"</p>	

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
		<i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i> Hark! The herald-angels sing "Glory to the new-born King"	
Element 15 (ranked 4): Wise men			
There were wise men/kings/magi	<i>Eighth Lesson</i> ...there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem <i>Matt 2.1</i>	<i>O come all ye faithful</i> Lo star-led chieftains , Magi Christ-adoring	
Element 16 (ranked 10): Star			
A star appeared	<i>Eighth Lesson</i> "For we have seen his star in the east" <i>Matt 2.2</i>	<i>O little town</i> O morning stars , together proclaim the holy birth	

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>...and lo, the star, which they saw in the east went before them, till it came and stood over the place where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.</p> <p><i>Matt 2.9-10</i></p>	<p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>Lo star-led chieftains...</p>	
Element 17 (ranked 15): Herod			
Herod was the king	<p><i>Eighth Lesson</i></p> <p>...in the days of Herod the king <i>Matt 2.1</i></p> <p>When Herod the king heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him <i>Matt 2.3</i></p>		

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.</p> <p>And he sent them to Bethlehem</p> <p><i>Matt 2.7-8</i></p>		
Element 18 (ranked 12): Gifts			
<p>Gifts were given to</p> <p>Jesus</p>	<p><i>Eighth Lesson</i></p> <p>And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, frankincense and myrrh <i>Matt 2.11</i></p>	<p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>Magi, Christ-adoring, offer him gifts of incense, gold and myrrh</p>	

TABLE 1B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Element 19 (ranked 18): Flight			
Mary, Joseph and Jesus escaped to Egypt			
Element 20 (ranked 20): Slaughter			
There was a mass slaughter of children			

TABLE 1B

TABLE 2A**Themes 1-15, with rankings and demographic variations**

No.	Rank	Theme	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
Themes 1 to 12: Nicene Themes					
1	1	God	We believe in one God	218 (48.9%)	<i>Above average</i> Frequent +12% Christian +7% <i>Below average</i> Christmas only -9%
2	2	Jesus Christ	We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ	180 (40.4%)	See Table 3

TABLE 2A

No.	Rank	Theme	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
Themes 3 to 5: Person of Christ					
3	8	Son of God	The only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father	93 (20.9%)	<i>Above average</i> Female +6% <i>Below average</i> Male -6%
4	9	Divine nature	God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made	85 (19.1%)	<i>Above average</i> Frequent churchgoers +31% Male +17% Christian +12% <i>Below average</i> Non-Christian -7% Medium churchgoers -11% Female -17% Christmas only -18%

TABLE 2A

No.	Rank	Theme	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
5	3	Incarnation ¹	Was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man	171 (38.3%)	<i>Above average</i> Frequent churchgoers +18% Christian +8% <i>Below average</i> Christmas only -11%
Themes 6 to 12: Other Nicene Themes					
6	7	Kenosis ²	He came down from heaven	115 (25.8%)	<i>Above average</i> Medium churchgoers +6% <i>Below average</i> Christmas only -8%

¹ God or God's Son becoming human

² God humbling himself; God reaching down to humanity; becoming like us; lowly birth, humble circumstances

TABLE 2A

No.	Rank	Theme	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
7	4	Salvation/sin/forgiveness ³	For us and for our salvation... for our sake... ...the forgiveness of sins	155 (34.8%)	<i>Above average</i> Christian +7% Frequent churchgoers +9%
8	11	Death/resurrection ⁴	He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, He suffered death and was buried On the third day he rose again	43 (9.6%)	<i>Above average</i> 65+ +9% Male +7% Frequent churchgoers +6% <i>Below average</i> Female -9% Age 55-64 -10%

³ Saviour/salvation, redeemer/redemption, sin, forgiveness, atonement or similar

⁴ Death, cross, sacrifice, resurrection, Easter

TABLE 2A

No.	Rank	Theme	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
9	14	Fulfilment of prophecy	in accordance with the Scriptures ...who has spoken through the prophets	14 (3.4%)	<i>Above average</i> Age 45-54 +17% Age 55-64 +14% Christian +10% Frequent churchgoers +23% <i>Below average</i> Under 18 -7% (= zero) Male -8 Christmas only -9% Non-Christian -13% (= zero) 65+ -14% Medium churchgoers -14%

TABLE 2A

No.	Rank	Theme	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
10	13	Eschatology	He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.	33 (7.4%)	<i>Above average</i> Frequent churchgoers +14% 65+ +9% Christian +9% <i>Below average</i> Age 45-54 -6% Don't Know -7% Christmas only -12%
11	15	Holy Spirit	We believe in the Holy Spirit...	5 (1.1%)	Too few to be statistically significant

TABLE 2A

No.	Rank	Theme	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
12	10	Church/Christians	We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church	53 (11.9%)	<i>Above average</i> Christmas only +17% Non-Christian +12% <i>Below average</i> Frequent churchgoers – 9% Christian -10% Medium churchgoers -11%
Themes 13 to 15: Non-Nicene Themes					
13	6	Love/peace/ goodwill/hope		116 (26.0%)	<i>Above average</i> Christian +8% Male +7% <i>Below average</i> Non-Christian -6%

TABLE 2A

No.	Rank	Theme	Content	Number of Respondents mentioning	Variations from average mentions
14	5	Story		141 (31.6%)	<i>Above average</i> Male +6% Under 18 +6% <i>Below average</i> Age 45-54 -6% Age 55-64 -6%
15	12	Celebration		36 (8.1%)	<i>Above average</i> Age 18-24 +14% Age 25-34 +13% Medium churchgoers +12% <i>Below average</i> Frequent churchgoers -12% Age 55-64 -10% Age 65+ -10%

TABLE 2A

TABLE 2B

Themes in Christmas Texts

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Theme 1 (ranked 1): God			
We believe in one God	<p>First Lesson</p> <p>And they heard the voice of the LORD God...and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God...And the LORD God called unto Adam...And the LORD God said unto the woman... And the LORD God said unto the serpent...<i>Genesis 3.8,9,13,14</i></p>	<p>Once in royal David's city</p> <p>Who is God and Lord of all Set at God's right hand on high</p> <p>O little town</p> <p>And praises sing to God the King</p> <p>So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven</p>	<p>...the loving purposes of God...</p> <p>The Almighty God bless us with His grace...</p>

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>Second Lesson</p> <p>And the angel of the LORD called unto Abraham...By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD... <i>Genesis 22.15-16</i></p> <p>Third Lesson</p> <p>...and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The Mighty God... <i>Isaiah 9.6</i></p> <p>Fourth Lesson</p> <p>And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him...the spirit of</p>	<p>While shepherds watched</p> <p>Appeared a shining throng of angels praising God</p> <p>"All glory be to God on high..."</p> <p>O come all ye faithful</p> <p>God of God, Light of Light</p> <p>"Glory to God in the highest"</p> <p>Hark! The herald-angels sing</p> <p>God and sinners reconciled</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>knowledge and of fear of the LORD... quick of understanding in the fear of the LORD...the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD... <i>Isaiah 11.2,9</i></p> <p>Fifth Lesson</p> <p>...the angel Gabriel was sent by God...Fear not, Mary: for thou has found favour with God....and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David...shall be called the Son of God. <i>Luke 1.26,30,32,35</i></p>		

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p><i>Seventh Lesson</i></p> <p>...a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest <i>Luke 2.13-14</i></p> <p><i>Ninth Lesson</i></p> <p>..and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.</p> <p>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John</p> <p>To them gave he power to become the sons of God...nor of the will of man, but of God. <i>John 1.1,2,6,12</i></p>		

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<i>Note: every Lesson ends 'Thanks be to God'</i>		
Theme 2 (ranked 2): Jesus Christ			
We believe in one Lord Jesus Christ	See Table 3	See Table 3	See Table 3
Theme 3 (ranked 8): Son of God			
The only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father	<p>Third Lesson</p> <p>...unto us a son is given...<i>Isaiah 9.6</i></p> <p>Fifth Lesson</p> <p>He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest...</p>		

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	...that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God <i>Luke 1.32,35</i>		
Theme 4 (ranked 9): Divine nature			
God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made	Third Lesson ...and his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father , The Prince of Peace <i>Isaiah 9.6</i>	Once in royal David's city He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all For that child so dear and gentle is our Lord in heaven above	this Holy Child

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>Fourth Lesson</p> <p>And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him...<i>Isaiah 11.2</i></p> <p>Fifth Lesson</p> <p>He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest...</p> <p>The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the highest shall overshadow thee...</p> <p>...that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God. <i>Luke 1.32,35</i></p>	<p>O little town</p> <p>The dear Christ enters in</p> <p>O holy child of Bethlehem..</p> <p>O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel</p> <p>While shepherds watched</p> <p>A Saviour who is Christ the Lord</p> <p>The heavenly babe you there shall find</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>Seventh Lesson</p> <p>...a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord <i>Luke 2.11</i></p> <p>Ninth Lesson</p> <p>..and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men... <i>John 1.1-4</i></p>	<p>O come all ye faithful</p> <p>Born the King of Angels</p> <p>O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord</p> <p>God of God, Light of Light... Very God, begotten, not created</p> <p>Hark! The herald-angels sing</p> <p>Christ by highest heaven adored, Christ the everlasting Lord</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	That was the true Light , which lighteth every man that cometh into the world...He was in the world, and the world was made by him... John 1.9-10	Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail th'incarnate Deity Jesus our Emmanuel Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace	
Theme 5 (ranked 3): Incarnation			
He came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man	Fifth Lesson Thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son...The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee <i>Luke 1.31,35</i>	Once in royal David's city He came down to earth from heaven, who is God and Lord of all Lived on earth our Saviour holy	...whose hope was in the Word made flesh

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p><i>Sixth Lesson</i></p> <p>And she brought forth her firstborn son...Luke 2.7</p> <p><i>Seventh Lesson</i></p> <p>For unto you is born this day...a Saviour, which is the Christ the Lord ...and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger Luke 2.11,16</p> <p><i>Eighth Lesson</i></p> <p>Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea...Where is he</p>	<p><i>O little town</i></p> <p>Proclaim the holy birth</p> <p>The wondrous gift is given.</p> <p>The dear Christ enters in</p> <p>Descend to us, we pray</p> <p><i>While shepherds watched</i></p> <p>To you in David's town this day is born of David's line a Saviour who is Christ the Lord</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>that is born King of the Jews? ...they saw the young child... <i>Matt 2.1,2,11</i></p> <p><i>Ninth Lesson</i></p> <p>And the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us... <i>John 1.14</i></p>	<p>The heavenly babe you there shall find to human view displayed</p> <p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>Lo! He abhors not the Virgin's womb Very God, begotten, not created</p> <p><i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i></p> <p>Late in time behold him come, Offspring of a virgin's womb</p> <p>Hail th'incarnate Deity; Pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Theme 6 (ranked 7): Kenosis			
He came down from heaven	<p>Fourth Lesson</p> <p>...with righteousness will he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth. <i>Isaiah 11.4</i></p> <p>Fifth Lesson</p> <p>"Behold the handmaid of the Lord..." <i>Luke 1.38</i></p> <p>Sixth Lesson</p> <p>And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling</p>	<p>Once in royal David's city</p> <p>Stood a lowly cattle shed</p> <p>In a manger for his bed</p> <p>He came down to earth from heaven</p> <p>And his shelter was a stable and his cradle was a stall With the poor and mean and lowly lived on earth our Saviour holy</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn <i>Luke 2.7</i></p> <p>Seventh Lesson</p> <p>"...ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." ...and the babe lying in a manger <i>Luke 2.12</i></p> <p>Ninth Lesson</p> <p>He came unto his own, and his own received him not <i>John 1.11</i></p>	<p>Love and watch the lowly maiden, in whose gentle arms he lay</p> <p>Mild, obedient, good as he</p> <p>For that child, so dear and gentle is our Lord in heaven above</p> <p><i>It came upon the midnight clear</i></p> <p>Above its sad and lowly plains</p> <p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>Child for us sinners, poor and in the manger</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
		<p><i>While shepherds watched</i></p> <p>All meanly wrapped in swathing bands and in a manger laid</p> <p><i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i></p> <p>Pleased as man with man to dwell Mild he lays his glory by</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Theme 7 (ranked 4): Salvation/sin/forgiveness			
<p>For us and for our salvation...</p> <p>...for our sake...</p> <p>...the forgiveness of sins</p>	<p>First Lesson</p> <p>And unto Adam he said...cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out if it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. <i>Genesis 2.17-19</i></p>	<p>Once in royal David's city</p> <p>Lived on earth our Saviour holy Through his own redeeming love</p> <p>It came upon the midnight clear</p> <p>Beneath the angel-strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong; And man, at war with man...</p> <p>O little town</p> <p>But in this world of sin</p> <p>Cast out our sin and enter in</p>	<p>...from the first days of our sin unto the glorious Redemption brought us by this Holy Child</p> <p>...for peace upon the earth He came to save</p> <p>...or who by sin have grieved His heart of love</p>

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>Second Lesson</p> <p>And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed...<i>Gen 22.18</i></p> <p>Seventh Lesson</p> <p>For unto you is born this day...a <i>Saviour Luke 2.11</i></p> <p>Ninth Lesson</p> <p>But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God... <i>John 1.11</i></p>	<p>While shepherds watched</p> <p>A Saviour who is Christ the Lord</p> <p>Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men begin and never cease¹</p> <p>O come all ye faithful</p> <p>Child, for us sinners</p> <p>Hark! The herald-angels sing</p> <p>God and sinners reconciled</p>	

¹ N.B this goes further than Luke 2.14

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
		<p>Light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings</p> <p>Born that man no more may die; Born to raise the sons of earth; Born to give them second birth.</p>	
Theme 8 (Ranked 11): Death/resurrection			
<p>He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again...</p>		<p><i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i></p> <p>Risen with healing in his wings</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Theme 9 (ranked 12): Fulfilment of prophecy			
...in accordance with the Scriptures...who has spoken through the prophets	<p>Second Lesson</p> <p>... in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed... <i>Genesis 22.18</i></p> <p><i>The Third and Fourth Lessons are prophecies which the Church believes were fulfilled in Jesus</i></p> <p>Seventh Lesson</p> <p>For unto you is born this day...a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. <i>Luke 2.11</i></p>	<p>O little town</p> <p>...our Lord Emmanuel</p> <p>While shepherds watched</p> <p>...a Saviour who is Christ the Lord</p> <p>Hark! The herald-angels sing</p> <p>Jesus, our Emmanuel</p> <p>Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace</p> <p>Hail the Sun of Righteousness</p>	<p>...the tale of the loving purposes of God from the first days of our sin unto the glorious Redemption brought us by this Holy Child</p>

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p><i>Eighth Lesson</i></p> <p>And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet...Matt 2.6</p> <p><i>Ninth Lesson</i></p> <p>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light...John 1.6</p>		

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Theme 10 (ranked 13): Eschatology			
<p>He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.</p> <p>We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come.</p>	<p><i>The Third and Fourth Lessons include prophecies of the end times</i></p> <p>Fifth Lesson</p> <p>And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end</p> <p><i>Luke 1.33</i></p> <p>Ninth Lesson</p> <p>But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God...<i>John 1.12</i></p>	<p>Once in royal David's city</p> <p>And he leads his children on to the place where he is gone</p> <p>We shall see him, but in heaven, set at God's right hand on high; Where like stars, his children crowned, all in white shall wait around.</p> <p>O little town</p> <p>O come to us, abide with us...</p>	<p>...let us remember before Him those who rejoice with us, but upon another shore and in a greater light, that multitude which no man can number, whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we for evermore are one.</p> <p>...Christ give us the joys of everlasting life: and unto the fellowship of the citizens</p>

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
		<p><i>It came upon the midnight clear</i></p> <p><i>Verse 4 is about the coming 'age of gold'</i></p> <p><i>While shepherds watched</i></p> <p>Goodwill henceforth from heaven to men begin and never cease²</p> <p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>Sing all ye citizens of heaven above</p>	<p>above may the King of Angels bring us all.</p>

² N.B. this goes further than Luke 2.14

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
		<i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i> Born that man no more may die Born to raise the sons of earth Born to give them second birth	
Theme 11 (Ranked 15): Holy Spirit			
We believe in the Holy Spirit	<i>Fourth Lesson</i> And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him... <i>Isaiah 11.2</i> <i>Fifth Lesson</i> The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee... <i>Luke 1.35</i>		

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Theme 12 (ranked 10): Church/Christians			
We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church		<p><i>Once in royal David's city</i></p> <p>Christian children all must be mild, obedient, good as he</p> <p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>O come all ye faithful</p>	<p>...for love and unity within the one Church He did build...</p> <p>...whose hope was in the Word made flesh, and with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we for evermore are one.</p>
Theme 13 (ranked 6): Love/peace/goodwill/hope			
	<p><i>Second Lesson</i></p> <p>... in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed... <i>Genesis 22.18</i></p>	<p><i>Once in royal David's city</i></p> <p>Love, and watch the lowly maiden</p> <p>Through his own redeeming love</p>	<p>the tale of the loving purposes of God...</p> <p>...for love and unity within the one Church...</p>

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p>Third Lesson</p> <p>...and his name shall be called...The Prince of Peace <i>Isaiah 9.6</i></p> <p><i>The Fourth Lesson includes a prophecy of the peace which Christ will bring</i></p> <p>Seventh Lesson</p> <p>Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men</p> <p><i>Luke 2.14</i></p>	<p><i>It came upon the midnight clear</i></p> <p>'Peace on the earth, good will to men...</p> <p>And man, at war with man, hears not the love-song which they bring</p> <p><i>Verse 4 offers the hope of the coming 'age of gold'</i></p> <p><i>O little town</i></p> <p>The hopes and fears of all the years</p> <p>And peace to men on earth</p>	<p>...those who know not the Lord Jesus or who love him not, or who by sin have grieved His heart of love</p>

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p><i>Ninth Lesson</i></p> <p>And the life was the light of men...that all men through him might believe...the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world...to them gave he power to become the sons of God...<i>John 1.4,8,9,12</i></p>	<p>The angels keep their watch of wond'ring love</p> <p>We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell</p> <p><i>While shepherds watched</i> and to the earth be peace; good will henceforth from heaven to men begin and never cease.</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
		<p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>Fain we embrace thee with awe and love Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?</p> <p><i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i></p> <p>Peace on earth and mercy mild</p> <p>Light and life to all he brings</p> <p>Born that man no more may die Born to raise the sons of earth Born to give them second birth</p>	

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Theme 14 (ranked 5): Story			
			...hear again... <i>the tale</i> of the loving purposes of God...
Theme 15 (ranked 12): Celebration			
		<i>O come all ye faithful</i> <i>Joyful and triumphant</i>	
Non-ranked Themes: Theological/spiritual/secular; Faith; Response; Personal connection			
We believe	<i>Second Lesson</i> ...because <i>thou has obeyed my voice</i> <i>Genesis 22.18</i>	<i>Once in royal David's city</i> <i>Christian children</i> all must be mild, obedient, good as he	<i>In heart and mind to go....</i> ...those who know not the Lord Jesus

TABLE 2B

Content	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
	<p><i>Ninth Lesson</i></p> <p>He was in the world...and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name...<i>John 1.10-12</i></p>	<p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>O come all ye faithful</p> <p>O come let us adore him</p> <p>Who would not love thee, loving us so dearly?</p>	

TABLE 2B

TABLE 3
Names and descriptions used for Jesus Christ

Name	Q1	Q2	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Respondents using any name or description	426 (95.6%)	180 (40.4%)			
Christ	38 ¹ (8.5%)	70 ² (15.7%)	<i>Seventh Lesson</i> For unto you is born this day...a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord <i>Luke 2.11</i>	<i>Once in royal David's city</i> Jesus Christ her little child <i>O little town</i> For Christ is born of Mary The dear Christ enters in	...in the words which Christ himself hath taught us. Christ give us the joys of everlasting life...

¹ 14 also said 'Jesus'

² 25 also said 'Jesus'

Name	Q1	Q2	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
				<p><i>While shepherds watched</i></p> <p>A Saviour who is Christ the Lord</p> <p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord <i>(repeated in every verse)</i></p> <p>Magi, Christ-adoring We to the Christ Child bring our hearts' oblations</p>	

TABLE 3

Name	Q1	Q2	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
				<i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i> Christ is born in Bethlehem Christ, by highest heav'n adored Christ, the everlasting Lord	
Emmanuel	1 (0.2%)	4 (0.9%)		<i>O little town</i> Our Lord Emmanuel <i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i> Jesus, our Emmanuel	
God (applied to Jesus Christ)	1 (0.2%)	68 (15.1%)	<i>Ninth Lesson</i> ...and the Word was God <i>John 1.1</i>	<i>O little town</i> And praises sing to God the King	

TABLE 3

Name	Q1	Q2	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
				<i>O come all ye faithful</i> God of God, Light of Light, Very God...	
Jesus	338 ³ (75.8%)	111 ⁴ (24.9%)	<i>Fifth Lesson</i> ...and shalt call his name Jesus <i>Luke 1.31</i> <i>Eighth Lesson</i> Now when Jesus was born... <i>Matt 2.1</i>	<i>Once in royal David's city</i> Jesus Christ her little child <i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i> Jesus , our Emmanuel	...all those who know not the Lord Jesuswith whom, in this Lord Jesus , we for evermore are one.

³ 14 also said 'Christ'

⁴ 25 also said 'Christ'

TABLE 3

Name	Q1	Q2	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
King	8 (1.8%)	4 (0.9%)	<i>Eighth Lesson</i> Where is he that is born King of the Jews...? Matthew 2.2	<i>O little town</i> And praises sing to God the King <i>O come all ye faithful</i> Born the King of angels <i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i> Glory to the new-born King	
Lord	1 (0.2%)	2 (0.4%)		<i>Once in royal David's city</i> For that child, so dear and gentle is our Lord in heaven above <i>O little town</i> Our Lord Emmanuel	...all those who know not the Lord Jesus... ...with whom, in this Lord Jesus, we for evermore are one.

TABLE 3

Name	Q1	Q2	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
				<p><i>While shepherds watched</i></p> <p>A Saviour who is Christ the Lord</p> <p><i>O come all ye faithful</i></p> <p>O come let us adore him, Christ the Lord</p> <p><i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i></p> <p>Christ, the everlasting Lord</p>	
Messiah	2 (0.4%)	3 (0.7%)			
Redeemer	0	1 (0.2%)			

TABLE 3

Name	Q1	Q2	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Saviour	4 (0.4%)	34 (7.6%)	<i>Seventh Lesson</i> For unto you is born this day... a Saviour <i>Luke 2.11</i>	<i>While shepherds watched</i> A Saviour who is Christ the Lord	
Son of God God's Son	8 (1.8%)	93 (20.9%)	See Table 2B	See Table 2B	See Table 2B
Word	1 ⁵	5	<i>Ninth Lesson</i> And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us... <i>John 1.14</i>		...whose hope was in the Word made flesh...

⁵ Quoting John 1.1-5,10-14

TABLE 3

Name	Q1	Q2	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
Other Christological	1 ⁶	2 ⁷	<p>Third Lesson</p> <p>For unto us a child is born...and his name shall be called</p> <p>Wonderful Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.</p> <p><i>Isaiah 9.6</i></p> <p>Ninth Lesson</p> <p>That was the true Light <i>John 1.9</i></p>	<p>Hark! The herald-angels sing</p> <p>Hail the heav'n-born</p> <p>Prince of Peace</p> <p>Hail the Sun of Righteousness</p>	...this Holy Child...
Human description	43	0	<p>Third Lesson</p> <p>For unto us a child is born...</p> <p><i>Isaiah 9.6</i></p>	<p>Once in royal David's city</p> <p>Where a mother laid her baby</p> <p>For that child so dear and gentle...</p>	...and see this thing which is come to pass, and the Babe lying in a manger.

⁶ Holy Child

⁷ Ambassador(1) Spotless Lamb(1)

TABLE 3

Name	Q1	Q2	Nine Lessons	Top Six Carols	Bidding Prayer
			<p><i>Sixth Lesson</i></p> <p>And she brought forth her firstborn son...<i>Luke 2.7</i></p> <p><i>Seventh Lesson</i></p> <p>...and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger <i>Luke 2.16</i></p> <p><i>Eighth Lesson</i></p> <p>And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child <i>Matt 2.11</i></p>		...this Holy Child...

TABLE 3

TABLE 4
Elements and Themes (with rankings) and Names for Jesus Christ in Christmas Texts

Elements	Themes	Names
<i>First Lesson</i>		
	God(1) Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4)	
<i>Second Lesson</i>		
	God(1) Incarnation(3) Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Fulfilment of prophecy(14)	

TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
Third Lesson		
Birth(1)	God(1) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Son of God(8) Divine nature(9) Eschatology(13) Fulfilment of prophecy(14)	Child Wonderful Counsellor, mighty God, everlasting Father, Prince of Peace <i>(Not clearly applied to Jesus, but interpreted that way by the Church)</i>
Fourth Lesson		
Birth(1)	God(1) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Kenosis(7) Divine nature(9) Eschatology(13)	

TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
	Fulfilment of prophecy(14) Holy Spirit(15)	
<i>Fifth Lesson</i>		
Birth(1) Jesus Christ(2) Mary(3) Joseph(5) Annunciation(13) Miraculous conception(16)	God(1) Incarnation(3) Kenosis(7) Son of God(8) Divine nature(9) Eschatology(13) Holy Spirit(15)	Jesus

TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
<i>Sixth Lesson</i>		
Birth(1) Jesus Christ(2) Mary(3) Joseph(5) Bethlehem(7) No room(9) Census etc.(11) Manger(17)	Jesus Christ(2) Incarnation(3) Kenosis(7)	Firstborn son
<i>Seventh Lesson</i>		
Birth(1) Jesus Christ(2)	God(1) Jesus Christ(2)	Babe Christ

TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
Mary(3) Joseph(5) Shepherds(6) Bethlehem(7) Angel/Heavenly Host(14)	Incarnation(3) Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Kenosis(7) Divine nature(9) Eschatology(13) Fulfilment of prophecy(14)	Saviour
<i>Eighth Lesson</i>		
Birth(1) Jesus Christ(2) Mary(3) Wise men(4) Bethlehem(7)	Jesus Christ(2) Incarnation(3) Fulfilment of prophecy(14)	Jesus King Young child

TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
Star(10) Gifts(12) Herod(15)		
<i>Ninth Lesson</i>		
Birth(1)	God(1) Incarnation(3) Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Kenosis(7) Son of God(8) ¹ Divine nature(9)	God True Light Word

¹ Only-begotten of the Father

Elements	Themes	Names
	Eschatology(13) Fulfilment of prophecy(14)	
TOP SIX CAROLS		
<i>Once in royal David's city</i>		
Birth(1) Jesus Christ(2) Mary(3) Bethlehem(7) Stable(8) Manger(17) Animals(19)	God(1) Jesus Christ(2) Incarnation(3) Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Kenosis(7) Divine nature(9) Church/Christians(10) Eschatology(12)	Baby Child Christ Jesus Lord

TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
<i>It came upon the midnight clear</i>		
Angel/Heavenly Host(14)	Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Eschatology(13)	
<i>O little town</i>		
Birth(1) Jesus Christ(2) Mary(3) Bethlehem(7) Angel/Heavenly Host(14)	God(1) Jesus Christ(2) Incarnation(3) Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Divine nature(9)	Christ Emmanuel God King Lord

TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
<i>While Shepherds watched</i>		
Birth(1) Jesus Christ(2) Shepherds(6) Bethlehem(7) Angel/Heavenly Host(14) Manger(17)	God(1) Jesus Christ(2) Incarnation(3) Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Kenosis(7) Divine nature(9) Eschatology(13) Fulfilment of prophecy(14)	Christ Lord Saviour
<i>O come all ye faithful</i>		
Birth(1) Jesus Christ(2)	God(1) Jesus Christ(2)	Christ God

TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
Wise men(4) Shepherds(6) Bethlehem(7) Star(10) Gifts(12) Angel/Heavenly Host(14) Miraculous conception(16) Manger(17)	Incarnation(3) Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Kenosis(7) Divine nature(9) Church/Christians(10) Celebration(12) Eschatology(13)	King Lord
<i>Hark! The herald-angels sing</i>		
Birth(1) Jesus Christ(2) Bethlehem(7) Miraculous conception(16)	God(1) Jesus Christ(2) Incarnation(3) Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4)	Christ Emmanuel Jesus King

TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
Angel/Heavenly Host(14)	Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6) Kenosis(7) Divine nature(9) Eschatology(13) Fulfilment of prophecy(14)	Lord Prince of Peace Sun of Righteousness

TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
<i>BIDDING PRAYER</i>		
Birth(1)	God(1)	Christ
Jesus Christ(2)	Jesus Christ(2)	Holy Child
Bethlehem(7)	Incarnation(3)	Jesus
Angel/Heavenly Host(14)	Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4)	Lord
Manger(17)	Story(5)	Word
	Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6)	
	Divine nature(9)	
	Church/Christians(10)	
	Death/resurrection(11)	
	Eschatology(13)	
	Fulfilment of prophecy(14)	

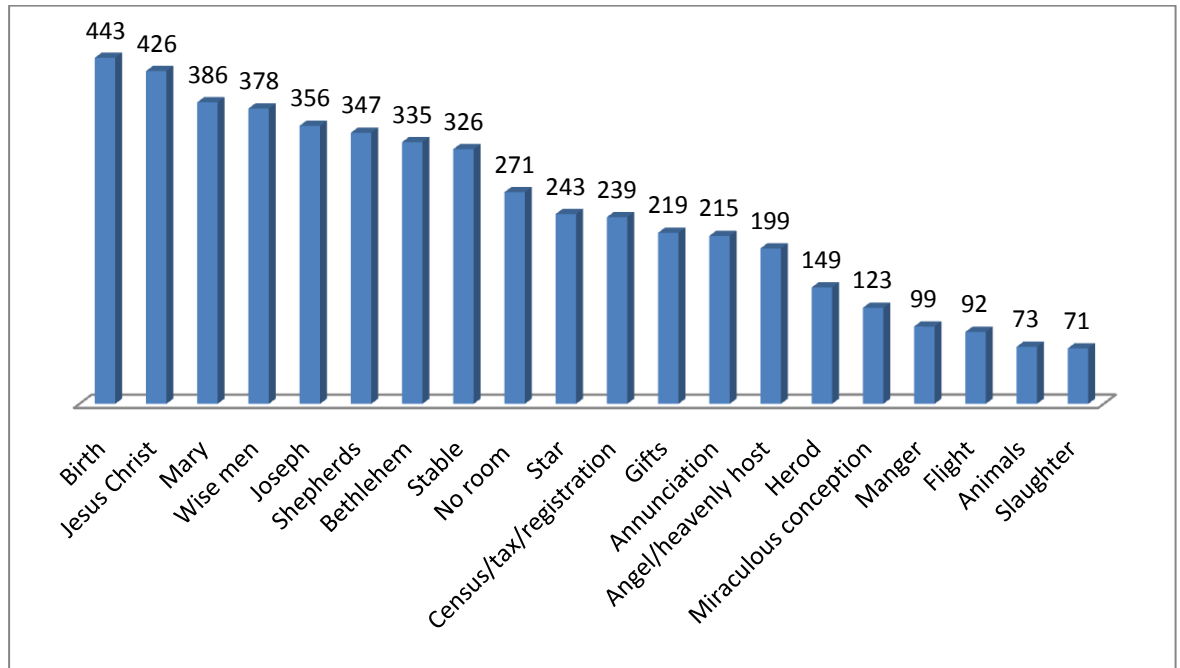
TABLE 4

Elements	Themes	Names
NOT IN NINE LESSONS		
Stable(8) Flight(18) Animals(19) Slaughter(20)	Story(5) Church/Christians(10) Death/resurrection(11) Celebration(12)	
IN ALL TOP SIX CAROLS		
	Salvation/sin/forgiveness(4) Love/peace/goodwill/hope(6)	

TABLE 4

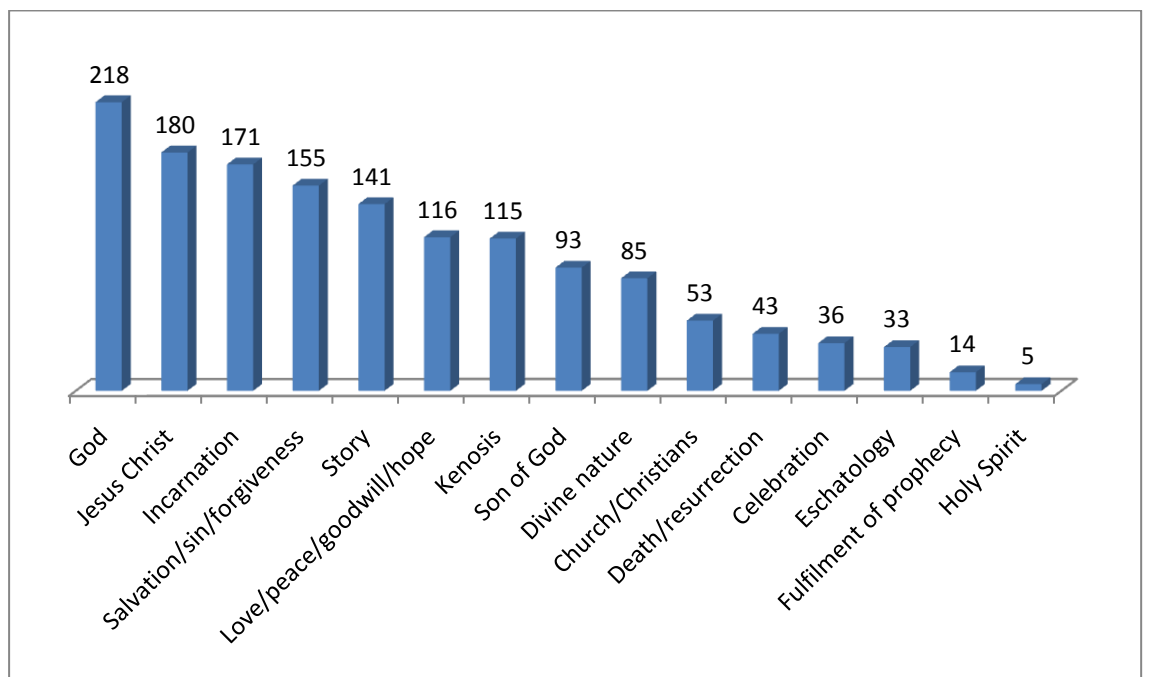
Graph 1 [pp51 & 112]

Paradigm Story Elements: number of Respondents mentioning



Graph 2 [p128]

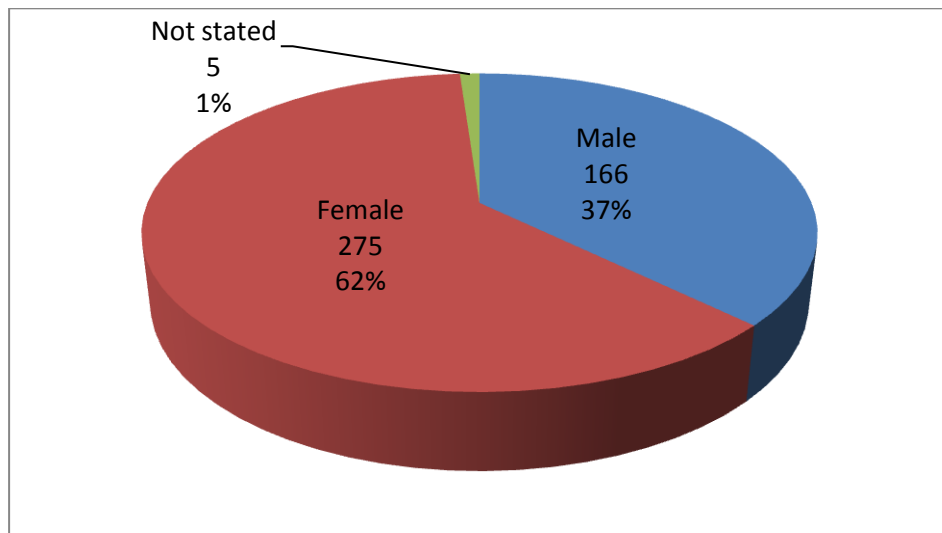
Q2 Themes: number of Respondents mentioning



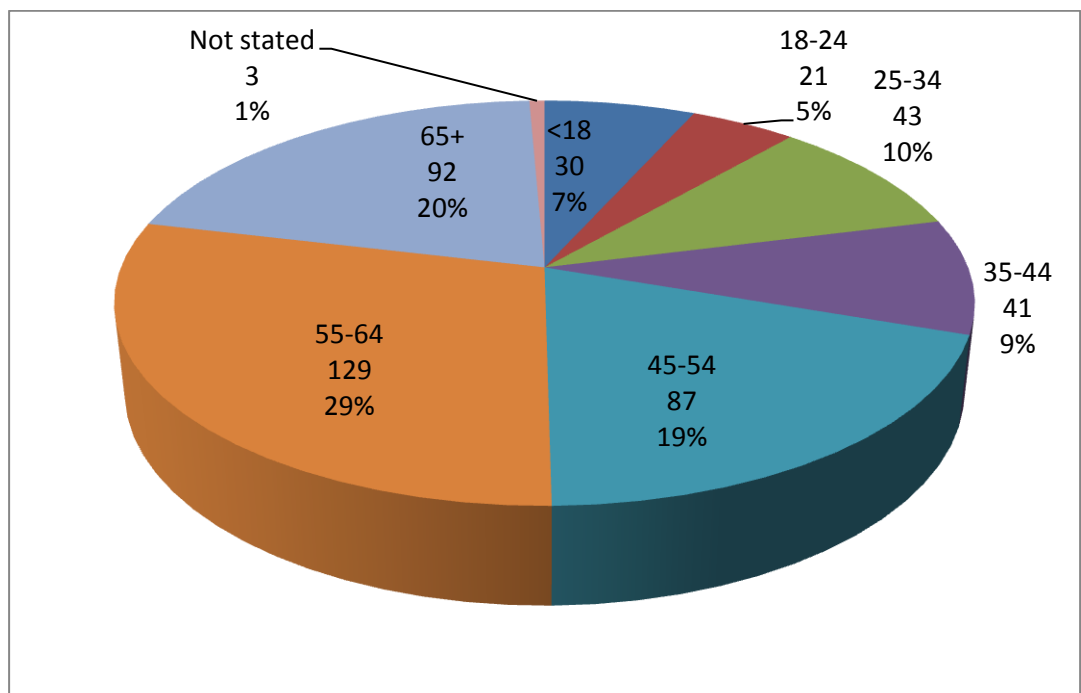
Pie Charts 1A,B,C and D [p33]

Demographic groups: all Respondents

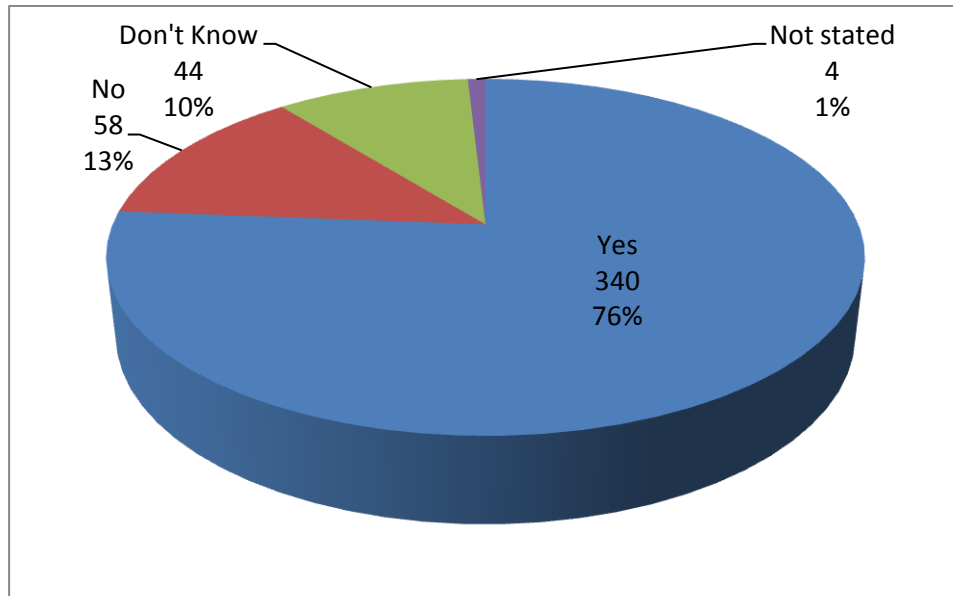
1A: Male/female



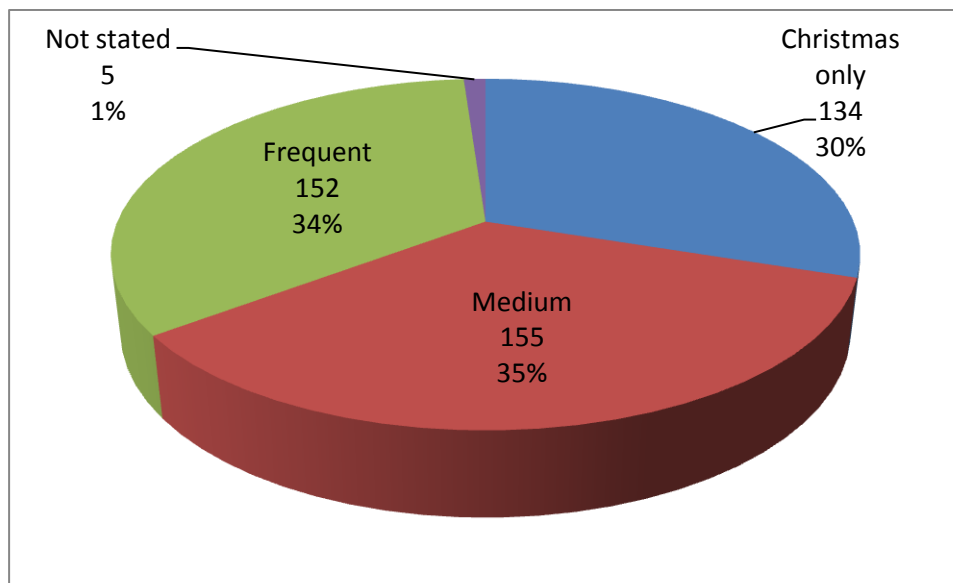
1B: Age groups



1C: Christian?



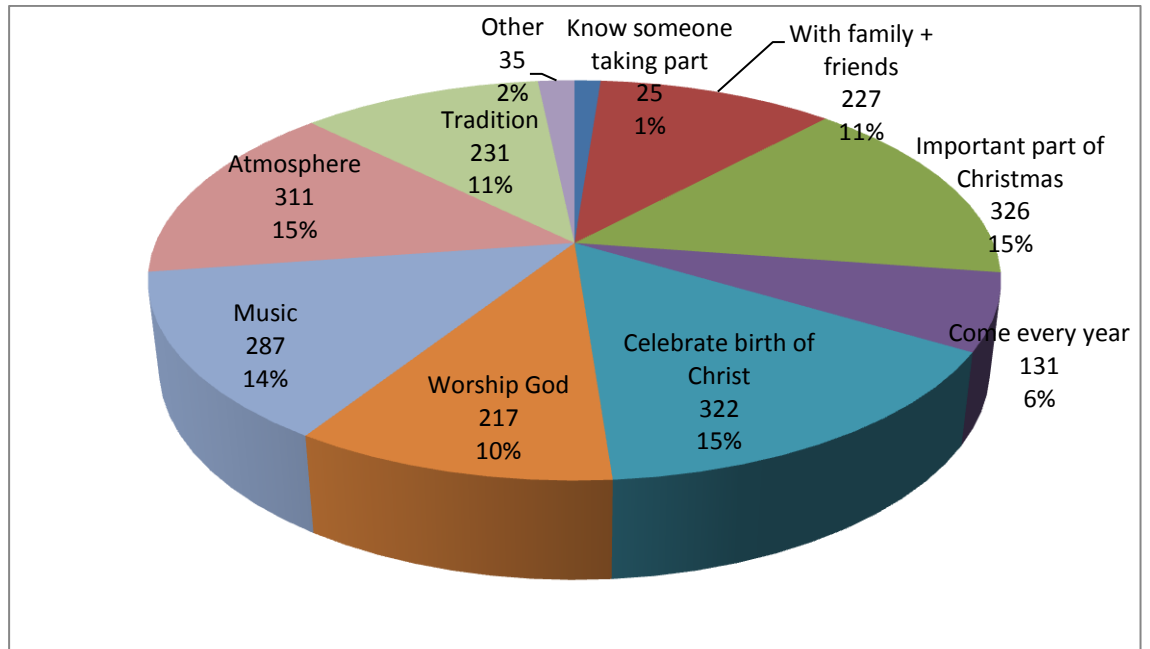
1D: Churchgoing



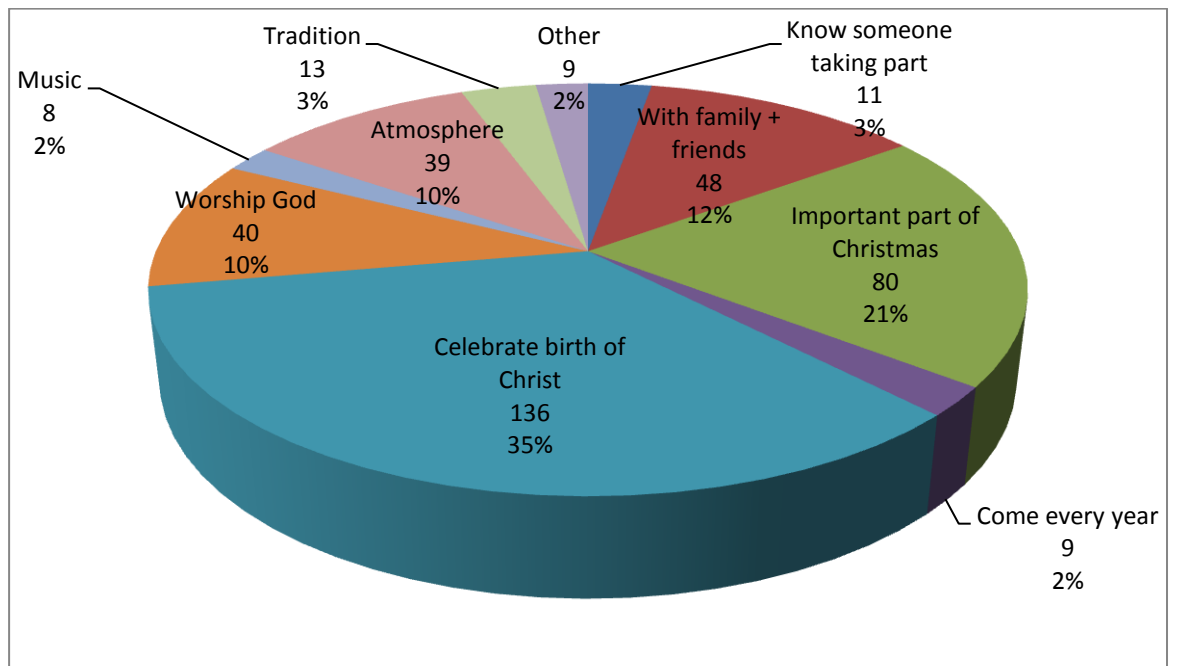
Pie charts 2A and B [p33]

Reasons for attending (Question 7)

2A: Reason mentioned at all



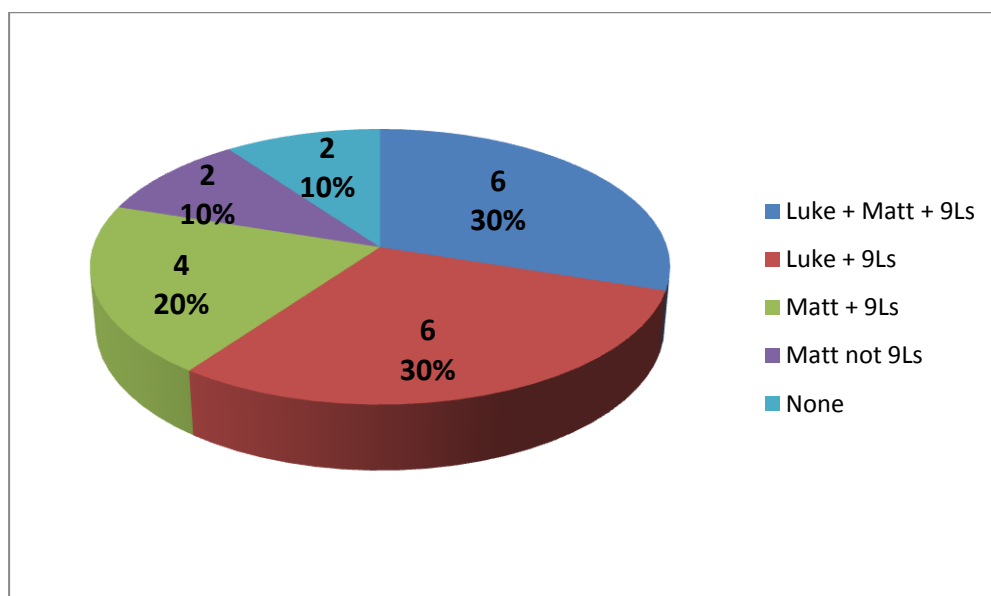
2B Reason ranked most important



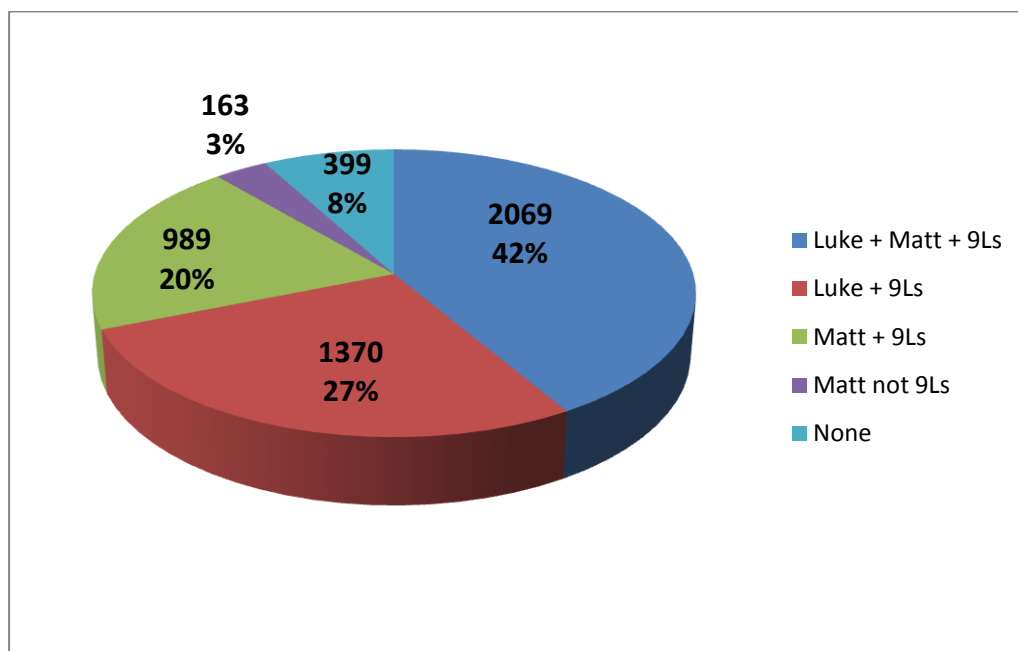
Pie charts 3A and B [pp114-115]

Elements in Luke, Matthew and Nine Lessons

3A: Sources of Elements: number of Elements



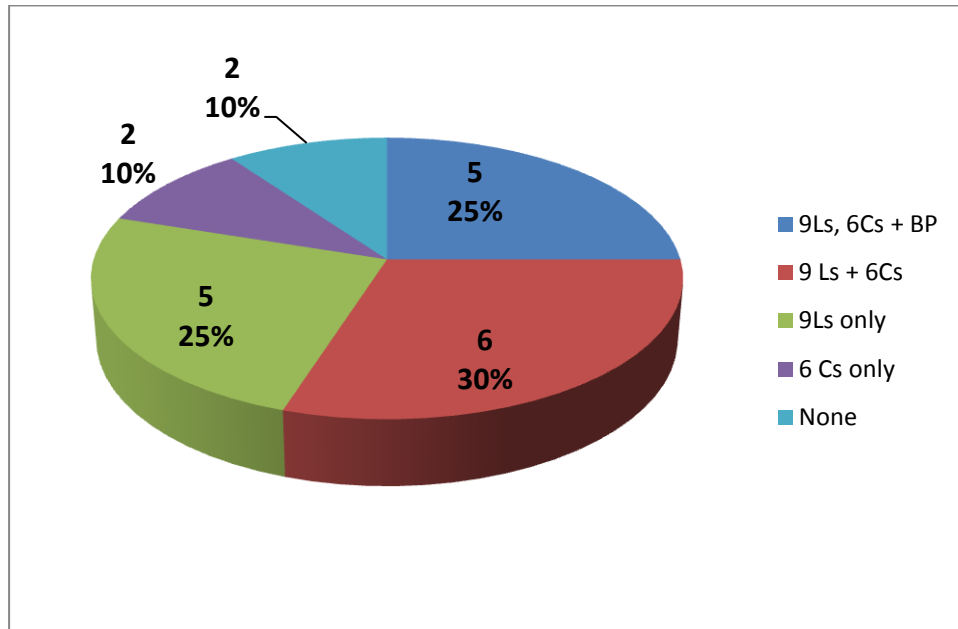
3A: Sources of Elements: number of Respondents mentioning



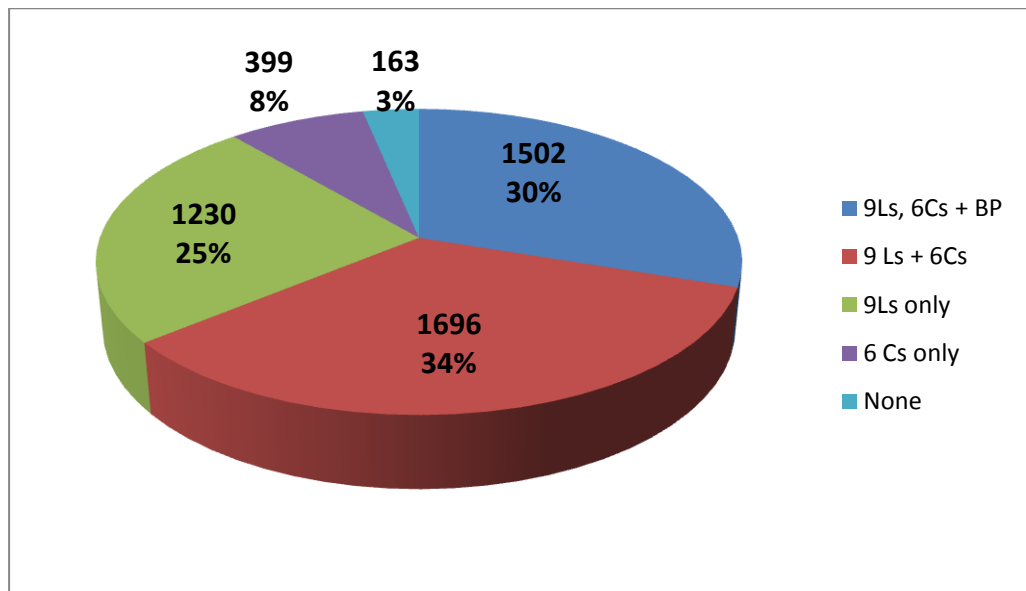
Pie charts 4A and B [pp114-116]

Elements in Christmas Texts

4A: Elements in Christmas Texts: number of Elements



4B: Elements in Christmas Texts: number of Respondents mentioning

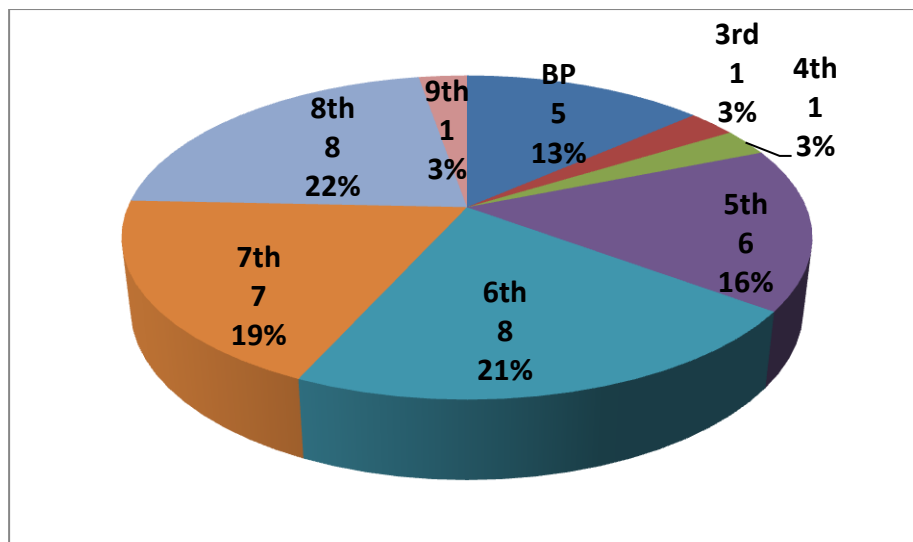


Pie charts 5A and B [pp115-116]

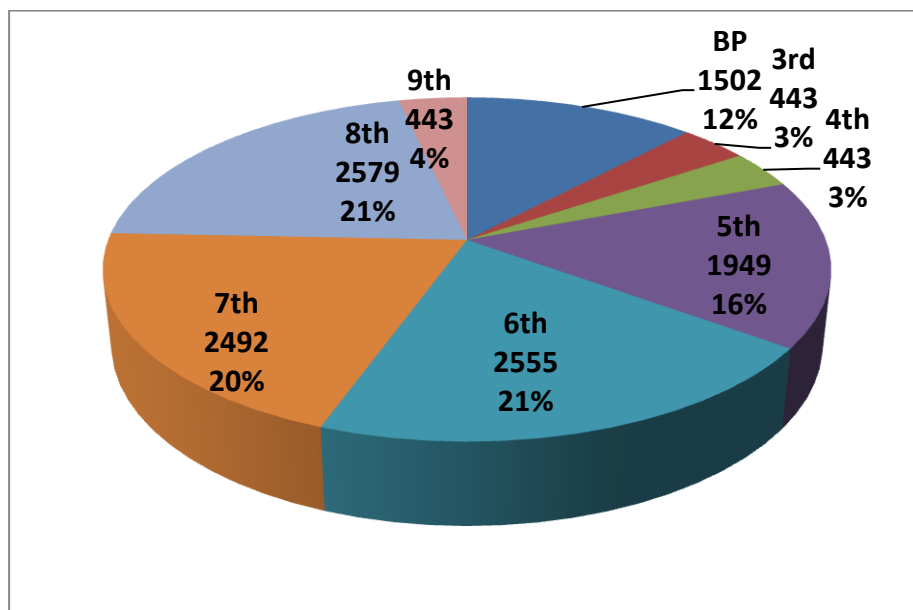
Elements in Bidding Prayer and Nine Lessons

Note: as no Elements appear in the First and Second Lessons, these Lessons do not appear in these charts.

5A: Elements in Bidding Prayer and Nine Lessons: number of Elements

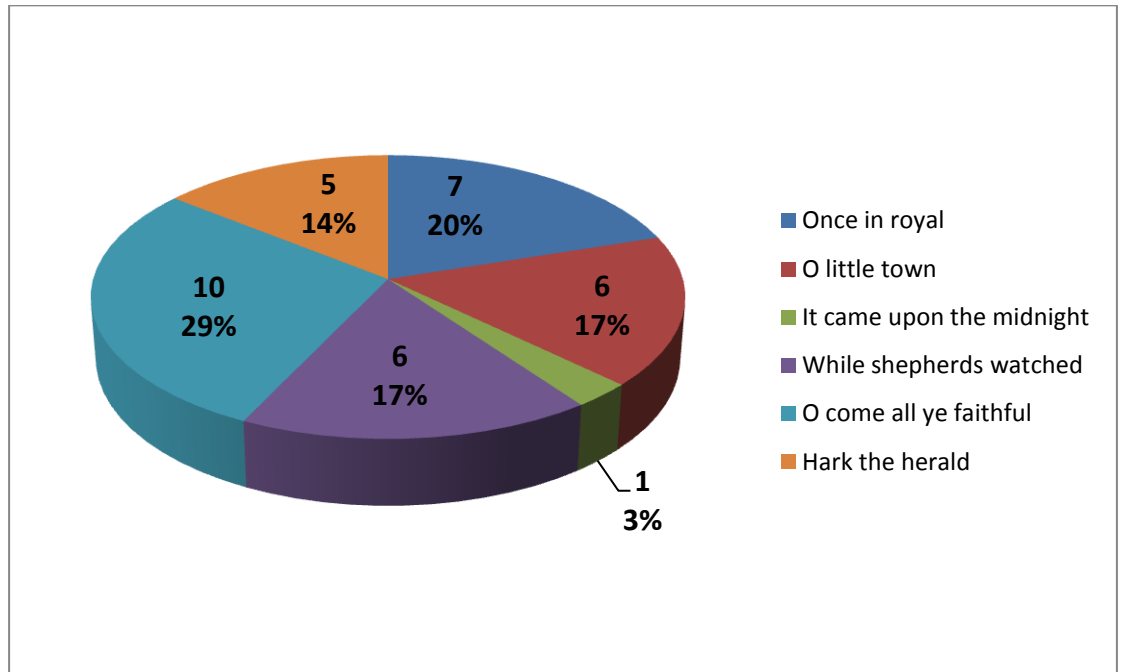


5A: Elements in Bidding Prayer and Nine Lessons: number of Respondents mentioning

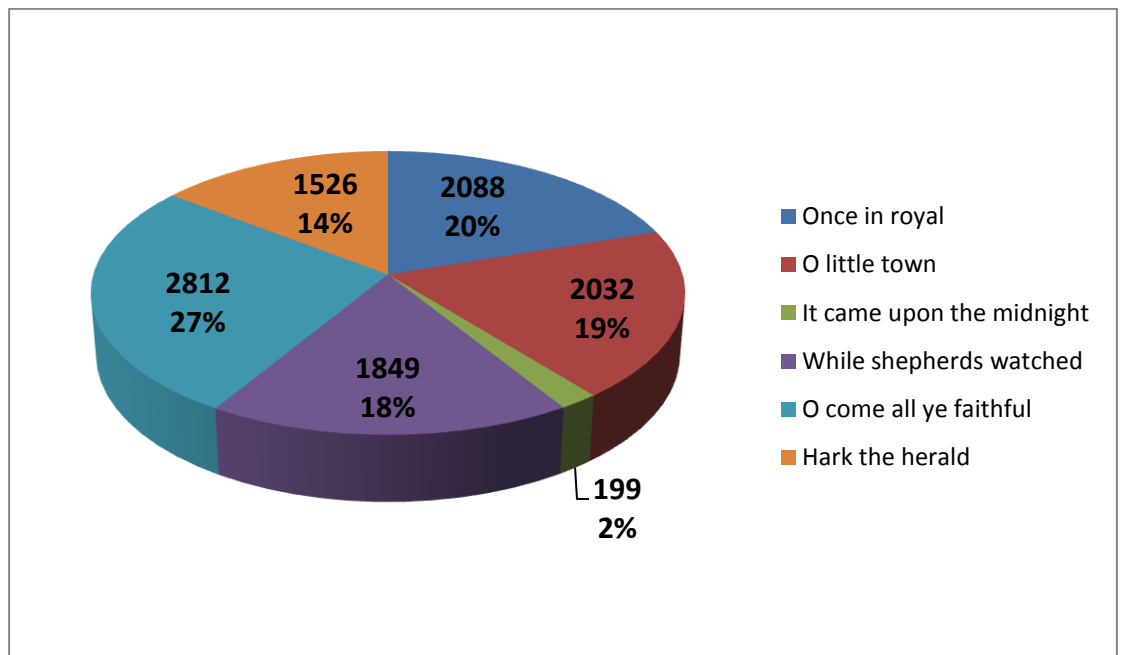


Pie charts 6A and B: Elements in Top Six Carols [pp115-116]

6A: Elements in Top Six Carols: number of Elements



6B: Elements in Top Six Carols: number of Respondents mentioning



VENN DIAGRAM 1

Elements (with rankings)
in Luke, Matthew and Nine Lessons

Nine
Lessons

Luke

Matthew

Luke and Matthew Elements in Nine Lessons

Birth (1)
Jesus Christ (2)
Mary (3)
Joseph (5) *
Bethlehem (7)
Miraculous conception (16)*

TOTAL 6

**mentioned in Luke Lessons
and mentioned by Matthew
but not in Matthew Lesson*

Matthew-only Elements in Nine Lessons

Wise men (4)
Star (10)
Gifts (12)
Herod (15)

TOTAL 4

Matthew-only Elements not in Nine Lessons

Flight (18)
Slaughter (20)

TOTAL 2

Luke-only elements in Nine Lessons

Shepherds (6)
No room (9)
Census/tax/regn (11)
Annunciation (13)
Angel/heavenly host (14)
Manger (17)

TOTAL 6

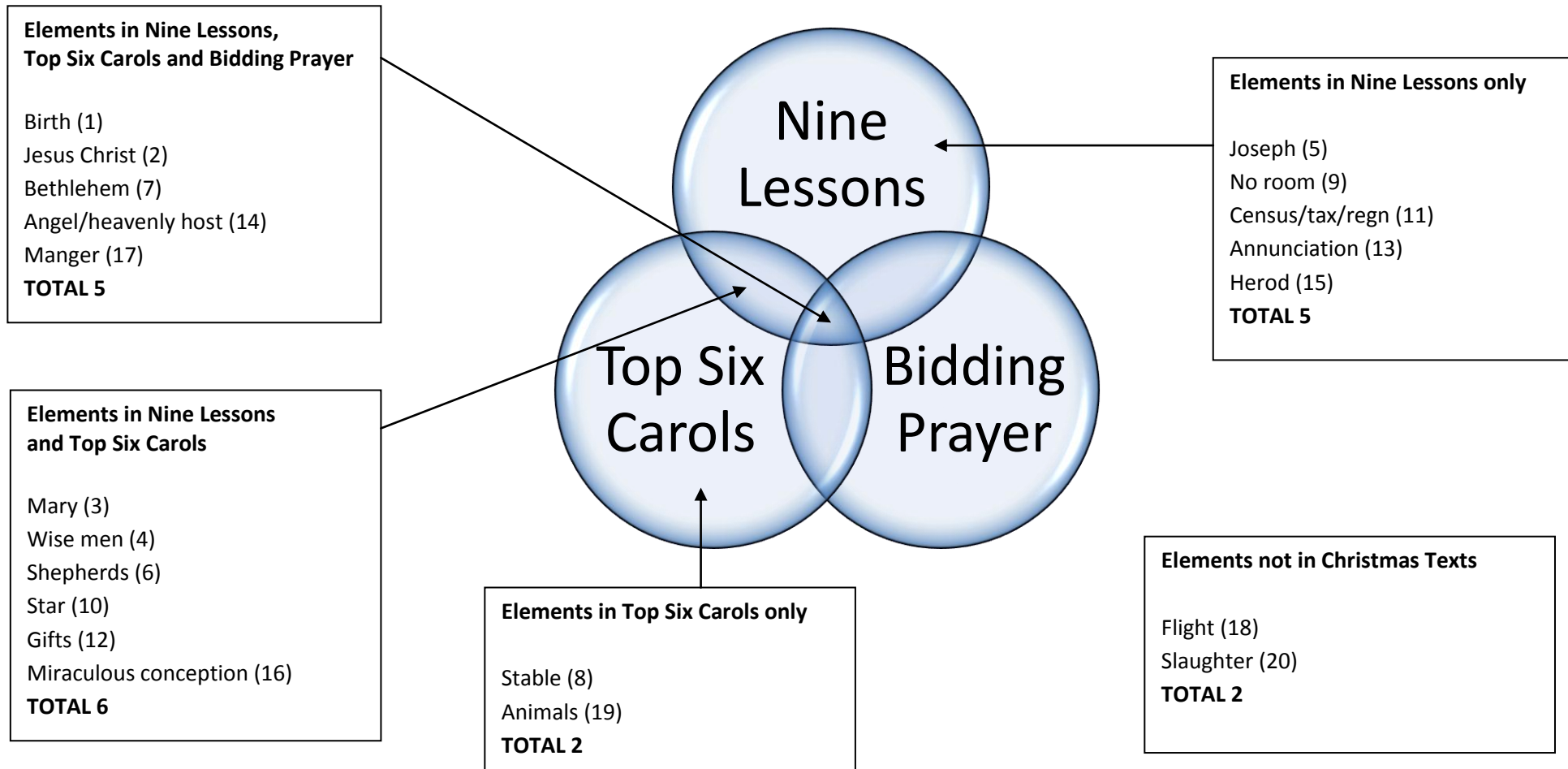
Elements not in Luke or Matthew

Stable (8)
Animals (19)

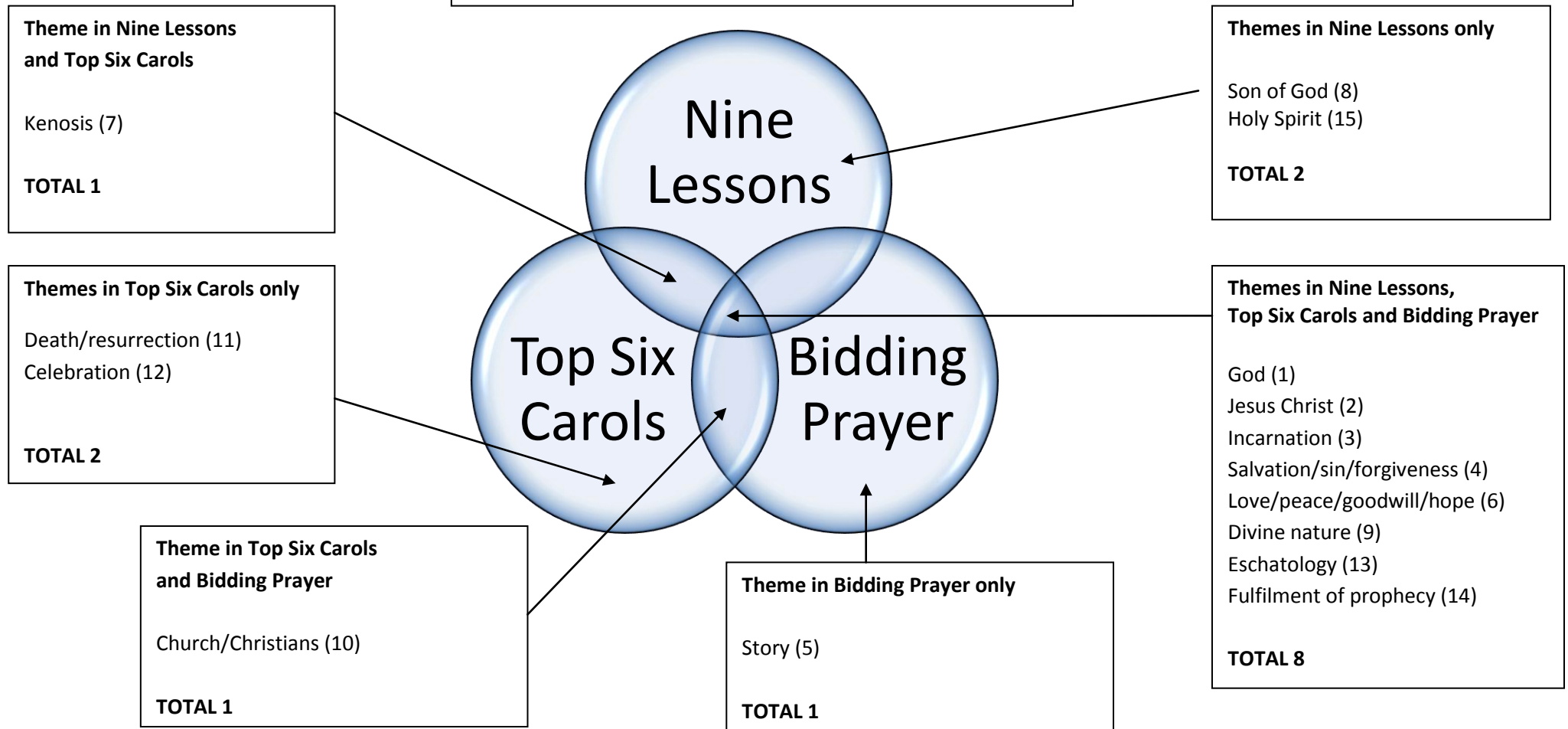
TOTAL 2

VENN DIAGRAM 2

Elements (with rankings)
in Christmas Texts



VENN DIAGRAM 3
Themes 1-15 (with rankings) in Christmas Texts



VENN DIAGRAM 4

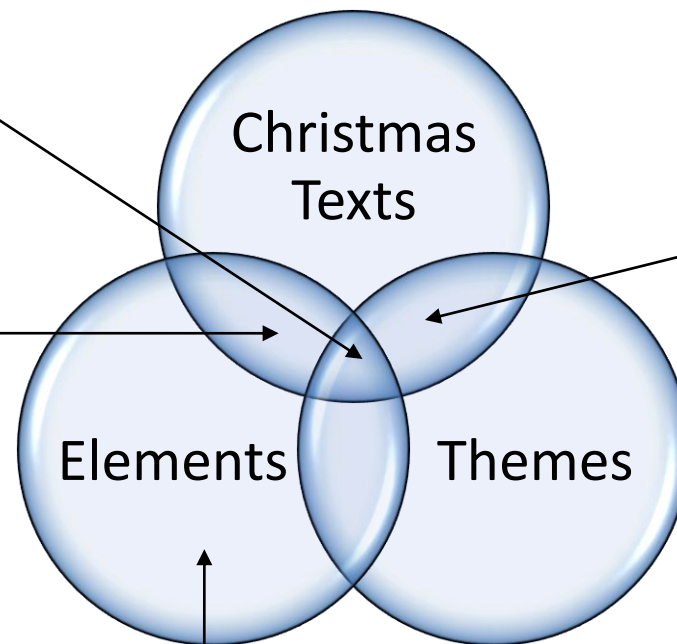
Elements and Themes in Christmas Texts

**Elements + Themes
in Christmas Texts**

Jesus Christ
Birth/Incarnation

TOTAL 2**Elements in Christmas Texts**

Mary
Wise men
Joseph
Shepherds
Bethlehem
Stable
No room
Star
Census etc
Gifts
Annunciation
Angel/heavenly host
Herod
Miraculous conception
Manger
Animals

TOTAL 16**Elements not in Christmas Texts**

Flight
Slaughter

TOTAL 2**Themes in Christmas Texts**

God
Salvation/sin/forgiveness
Story
Love/peace/goodwill/hope
Kenosis
Son of God
Divine nature
Church/Christians
Death/resurrection
Celebration
Eschatology
Fulfilment of prophecy
Holy Spirit

TOTAL 13

Bibliography

Methodology

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¹ All accessed 26 August 2010