

Service Music
January 29, 2012

Prelude - *Trumpet Voluntary* - This music has been attributed to the English composer Henry Purcell (1658-1695).

Chiming of the Hour - *Westminster Chimes*

Offertory - *The Passion of Christ Prefigured in His Birth and His Healing of the Paralytic* - “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.” Acts 4:27-28 (KJV) In many old paintings of the child Jesus and His mother, Mary, a very unusual subject sometimes appears — a tiny bird, the goldfinch. Often, the child Jesus is seen holding a small goldfinch in His hand (see the painting *Madonna of the Goldfinch* by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo on page two). A person might reasonably ask, ‘Why does a goldfinch appear in a painting of Jesus and His mother?’ Here is the answer: The goldfinch was portrayed as a symbol of the death of Jesus. The artist is telling the viewer that the child Jesus was born to die. The goldfinch prefigures the death of Jesus. But, why would the artist use the goldfinch as the symbol of Jesus’ future death? Perhaps the reason is that the goldfinch can be found around prickly thistle plants, suggesting the crown of thorns with which Christ was crowned at His crucifixion. I believe that the bird might also appropriately appear in a painting of Jesus healing the paralytic, for, in addition to healing the man, He also forgave the man’s sins, something which only God can do, a forgiveness which requires a sacrifice — Jesus’ sacrifice of Himself on behalf of the paralytic. I believe that Jesus prefigured His own death when He forgave the sins of the paralytic. Two hymns illustrate this prefiguring of Jesus’ death in His childhood and in His ministry of healing and forgiveness of sins:

- I. *A Stable Lamp*- In the text of this Christmas hymn, written by Richard Wilbur (b. 1921), the life of Jesus is portrayed, beginning with His birth. The author emphasizes the idea that the birth of the child Jesus, celebrated at Christmas, will result in His death on a cross. Much like the painting on page two, the author of this hymn prefigures the death of Jesus. I will play an Improvisation based on the tune of this hymn (*Andujar*). The tune was written by David Hurd (b. 1950).
- II. *How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds* - The text for this hymn, written by John Newton, can be found on page 94 in the Hymnal. Note the text of verse 1 and the first phrase of verse 2. Newton emphasizes the ability of Jesus to spiritually heal the soul of the believer, drawing the mind of the reader to also reflect on the crucifixion of Jesus and His breaking the power of sin at the cross. I will play an Improvisation based on the tune of this hymn (*Ortonville*). The tune was written by Thomas Hastings in 1837.

If you listen closely, you will hear the song of the goldfinch interspersed between the verses of the hymns, reflecting the prefiguring of Jesus’ death during His childhood and public ministry.

