

## The Parish Church of St John-at-Hampstead

### Music Notes ~ October 2025

Planning the music for October has been an enjoyable challenge, finding items to reflect both the varied themes of our morning Communion services this month, and the Biblical topics being covered in our sermon series. We have joyful music for our Dedication Sunday service on the 5th, with an all-German line-up of composers: Bach, Rheinberger, Brahms and Bruckner. In the evening we will be hearing in the sermon about prophecy, and for the anthems we highlight two Old Testament prophets, Ezekiel, through the lens of the famous spiritual 'Ezekiel saw the wheel', and Elijah, with three movements from Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*, including the favourite alto aria 'O rest in the Lord'.

The up-beat mood remains for our All-Age Harvest service on the 12th, when the young Mozart comes to our aid, with an organ Capriccio and Mass from his teenage years; we also have the old Harvest favourite 'Thou visitest the earth and blessest it' by Maurice Greene, who died a few months before Mozart was born. Faced with the legal theme of the Evensong sermon, Charles Stanford's *Beati quorum via*, setting the start of Psalm 119 seemed an obvious choice: 'Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord'. For the anthem we have a less familiar choice, a motet by the great early Renaissance Flemish composer Josquin des Pres. His motet *Memor esto verbi tui* also utilises Psalm 119, this time a chunk of verses set in two musical sections. Josquin's musical style often involved the quick overlapping of identical musical phrases between adjacent voice parts, but the notable prevalence of this quasi-canonic feature in this particular motet may perhaps reflect the notion of 'following the law'.

On the 19th the morning theme is racial justice, and our anthem *Resignation* by Florence Price is a deeply poignant work reflecting the tragedy of slavery, in which the only source of release and salvation is presumed to be in heaven. Most anthems and motets composed over the centuries have tended to contain words from the Old Testament - the Psalms in particular - and the Gospels, but texts from the Epistles came to be set to music more frequently from the nineteenth century onwards. Many anthems for the period of Holy Week and Easter came to be composed with texts from the Epistles, since the more narrative accounts of the Gospels leave little space for interpretation. Mendelssohn's motet *Um unsrer Sünden willen* sets verses from the letter to the Philippians, and was composed for use on Good Friday. It came to be sung in England with the text "For our offences Jesus took upon him humility, and unto death, even upon the cross, became he obedient...". The anthem *If thou shalt confess* is one of Stanford's lesser known works, but certainly well up to his usual standard, dating from 1885. It sets verses from Romans Chapter 10: "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved".

Spoilt for choice for settings of the Psalms for the final sermon in our series on the 26th, I decided to go with Palestrina as part of our celebrations of the 500th anniversary of his birth for a setting of one of the most delightful of Psalm openings: "Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks, so longeth my soul after thee, O God" (Psalm 84, as the Coverdale Psalter has it), and to round off the series with something highly exuberant we will sing a double-choir setting of Psalm 98 by the great Dresden composer Heinrich Schütz, who revels in the writer's mention of musical instruments. This psalm is given as an alternative to the Magnificat in Evensong the Book of Common Prayer, and it has often been employed for celebratory occasions and sung either in place of the Magnificat or as the anthem. The copies we have of this anthem in the choir library are an old edition with the German text written in Gothic script, so wish the singers luck in reading them!

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