**Bishop Martin Warner - Christmas Carol sermon 2022**

From the moment the curtain went up I was mesmerised by the revival of Jonathan Kent’s 2006 production of *Tosca*. For catholic-minded clergy this opera represents a satisfying blend of work and pleasure, of story-telling and reality, of time and eternity.

It is set in Rome in 1800. Faced by the malevolence of Napoleon Buonaparte, the Church is persecuted, the Pope is forced into exile, Rome becomes a short-lived republic, and terror reigns.

But in the churches of the eternal City, life goes one. S Andrea della Valle provides the backdrop for *Tosca*, an opera that gives us devotion, liturgy, art, betrayal, brutality and self-interest in the astonishing misuse of power. These are the arenas in which human desire draws on all the forces of musical ingenuity in order to sustain our recognition that the sublime generosity of human love must have its origin in the divine, redeeming and eternal love of God.

We have not come here tonight to discuss opera, but we have come to explore the love of God. We are also doing this largely through music, in a world where the themes of *Tosca* resonate with news headlines from around the world.

Tonight the curtain goes up on a different work of art: the redemption of the human race and all creation, through Jesus Christ. In this drama, the curtain between truth and reality will be torn apart as crucifixion fails to contain the subversive force of the divine love and the veil of the Temple is torn from top to bottom. These are themes that will haunt us in Peter Worlock’s achingly beautiful carol, Bethlehem Down, and they invite from us the personal response of faith in Jesus Christ, so simply stated when we sing our final carol, “O come, let us adore him, Christ the Lord.”