

This is Christmas

CELEBRATING THE *Heart* OF CHRISTMAS

December 14, 2025
5:00 PM



First Baptist Church
6501 South Hazel Street
Pine Bluff, Arkansas 71603
(870) 534-4741

Rev. Dalton Adger, Pastor
Dr. Bryan Bolton, Music and Children

The Music Ministry of First Baptist Church presents
This Is Christmas - Celebrating the Heart of Christmas
December 14, 2025 | 5:00 pm

Organ Prelude.....Janine Tiner

Welcome to Worship Dr. Bryan Bolton, Music and Children

Carol No. 89—*O Come, All Ye Faithful*.....ADESTE FIDELES/Arr. Richard Huggins & Richard Kingsmore

Invocation.....Kenny Bonds

Christmas Overture: A medley of four festive carols, “Angels, We Have Heard on High,” “Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus,” the Sicilian Mariner’s Hymn, “O Sanctissima,” and “O Come, All Ye Faithful” encapsulates the spirit of the season and serves as a thrilling orchestral prelude to the opening choral selection.

This is Christmas Love: Mary McDonald’s original words and music are the memorable theme of this musical work. Set in a festive 6/8, this joy-filled choral anthem heralds in the good news of our gift from the Father above.

Rejoice! Emmanuel: The familiar words of the 15th century chant, VENI EMMANUEL, are set to the beloved traditional English tune GREENSLEEVES in this dramatic Advent offering. A brief, original cadence by Mary McDonald is seamlessly woven into the arrangement both in the middle and conclusion of this passionate summoning of the arrival of the Messiah.

He Shall Be Called: An ethereal introduction brings us quietly to the voice of Mary as she embraces her unexpected but anticipated role as the mother of this Christ-Child, Jesus! Supported by choral undertones singing to the holiness of the Name of Jesus, she rises to the calling placed upon her and in recognition of the Child she carries.

Glory Shone Around: As if coming from off in the distance, the percussive opening of this selection carries us to shepherds dutifully tending their sheep. An angel appears to them with the news of the birth of Jesus and instructions to go, find the manger, bow down and worship the Christ-Child. This energetic setting utilizes lyrics paraphrased in 1700 by Nahum Tate, “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks” juxtaposed with the lesser-known hymn-tune, SALVATION (attributed to Robert Boyd, 1816). Together, they craft a fun dynamic between heaven’s calling and their earthly mission.

He is Born, the Holy Child: The 19th century traditional French carol IS EST NE’ (“He is Born”) jubilantly rings in the birth of Jesus. Observing both the humble nature in which Christ was born and a call to the Magi to attend the child, this arrangement is, in effect, a clarion call that something grand has taken place. This dance-like setting infuses the heart of the listener with the sense of great anticipation – for God’s Son has now been born and we must rejoice!

Sleep in Peace Tonight: Reflecting on this small child who would be King, peace is restored in the nativity with angels hovering, shepherds kneeling, a mother and father keeping watch, and a baby sleeping. The tenderness of this original ballad serves as a gentle reminder of a peace only Christ can bring has come in the form of a baby. This Prince of Peace brings reconciliation between God and humanity and signifies God’s gift to us.

This is the Child, This is the King: As the summation choral anthem in this larger work, the question is both asked and answered: “Who is this Child of Mary?” “He is the Child of Mary! Jesus, Messiah, Emmanuel, God with us!” This powerful original is a grand statement of the purpose in Christ’s coming for Christmas only tells us the beginning of the story. Easter and the cross will tell us how it ends.

Repeat the Sounding Joy: A medley of familiar carols are artfully joined together in this jubilant arrangement that opens with resounding joy! “Joy to the World,” “Hark, the Herald Angels Sing,” and “Good Christians, All Rejoice!” lift both heart and song in echoes of tradition as we celebrate the joyful news of the birth of Jesus.

This is Christmas Love: This brief restatement of the theme brings this musical to a rousing, festive conclusion reminding us of the true meaning of Christmas and the love sent down to us from heaven. This is the heart of Christmas! - *Program Notes by Mary McDonald*

The Sanctuary Choir Performs at Carnegie Hall

First Baptist Church's Sanctuary Choir joins national voices for a sold-out Christmas celebration in New York City

How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Ask the members of the Sanctuary Choir—because they have done it again. On Monday evening, December 1, 18 choir members stepped onto the iconic Isaac Stern Auditorium/Ronald O. Perelman Stage to join hundreds of singers from across the nation in Distinguished Concerts International New York's (DCINY) triumphant holiday concert, *This Is Christmas!* conducted by composer Mary McDonald and accompanied by the DCINY Orchestra. This performance marked the choir's second appearance at Carnegie Hall—a milestone for the singers and an experience they will not soon forget.

The choir's first appearance was in 2019 after auditioning at McDonald's invitation. Minister of Music and Children Dr. Bryan Bolton explained that McDonald, a longtime family friend, encouraged the choir to submit a video audition. After their debut, they became alumni of DCINY, opening the door for future opportunities. When the invitation came last year to return for this fall's performance, the choir eagerly accepted and began months of preparation.



A concert poster is displayed on the Carnegie Hall marquee, announcing the performance.



Group photo of Act 1, "This Is Christmas."

A Night of Music and Majesty.

The singers performed in Act 1 of the three-act concert alongside 18 choirs, totaling about 275 voices. After completing their portion, they moved to the audience to enjoy Acts 2 and 3, and later joined all participants for the grand finale, the singing of the *Hallelujah Chorus*. A thrilling moment for everyone involved. Following the concert, each group attended a reception near Carnegie Hall.

A Five-Day Residency of Growth and Preparation.

The choir's journey to the stage was as meaningful as the performance itself. Choir members spent five days and four nights in New York—a true residency that included more than 10 hours of rehearsal led by Mary McDonald in the Pope Auditorium at Fordham University-Lincoln Center. Those rehearsals focused on proper breathing, vocal technique, musical style, and artistic expression, with McDonald offering insights that refined and elevated the choir's sound. "The really cool part about the choir, the rehearsal time, is that you're sitting next to someone you may never see again. But for this moment, we are making music together and lifting up the name of the Lord in such a secular environment," Bolton said. "Mary's music glorifies God from start to finish."

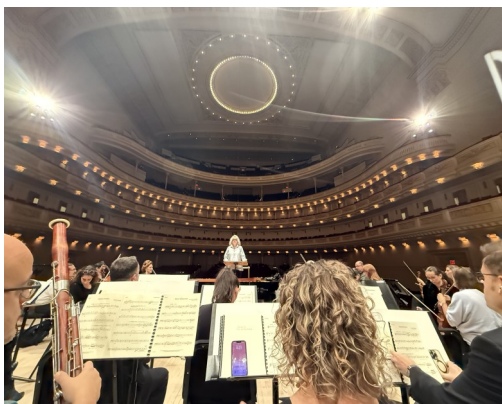
There were moments in rehearsal when music and ministry blended seamlessly. McDonald not only shared her inspiration and motivation for bringing her work to life, but she also sprinkled in humorous stories from her career, keeping the atmosphere light and joyful. Her warmth extended beyond the podium as she interacted with several directors in the choir—friends she has known through the years—creating a sense of family among the singers. She and her daughter, Beth McDonald Smith, who accompanied both rehearsals and the performance, exchanged knowing smiles and nods across the piano, their emotions mirrored in the choir's passionate sound. Many of the singers spoke of the spiritual encouragement they felt standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Christians from across the country, united in worship through song.

New York at Christmastime.

Between rehearsals, the choir made time to experience the city's seasonal magic. They attended the Radio City Christmas Spectacular starring the Rockettes, ate together at two wonderful New York restaurants, and took a harbor cruise that flowed between the skylines of New York and New Jersey, concluding with a pass by the Statue of Liberty. Some members of the group enjoyed a carriage ride through Central Park, visited Times



Mary McDonald, composer of "This Is Christmas," conducts during the performance.



An awe-inspiring view of Carnegie Hall's legendary stage during rehearsal for the big performance.

Square, Rockefeller Center, Grand Central Station, St. Patrick's Cathedral, and Macy's. With Christmas preparations in full swing—shop windows magnificently decorated, theaters bustling, streets busy with holiday shoppers—the city felt like a celebration in motion. The chill in the air only heightened the atmosphere: steam rising from street grates, the aroma of grilled and fried street food, and the hum of anticipation that seems to define New York in December.

Bringing It Home.

For the Sanctuary Choir, the Carnegie Hall experience was both artistic and spiritual. They return home with refined skills, fresh musical insights, and unforgettable memories of singing on one of the world's greatest stages. More importantly, they bring back the joy of shared worship, the strength of Christian

fellowship, and a powerful reminder that music—especially at Christmas—can lift hearts, unite communities, and point all who listen toward hope.



Mary McDonald conducts rehearsal in the Pope Auditorium at Fordham University-Lincoln Center.



The group enjoying a meal at Landshark's in Times Square.



From the Dress Circle: Acts 1 and 2 prepare for the 'Hallelujah Chorus' during rehearsal at Carnegie Hall.

Production Personnel

Pastor Rev. Dalton Adger
 Musical Director Dr. Bryan Bolton+
 Narrator Kenny Bonds
 Organ Janine Tiner
 Piano Erin Bolton
 Chamber Orchestra
 Violin Abraham Martinez
 Violin Karen Jarboe
 Viola Christie Bonds
 Cello Daniel Ebner
 Double Bass Jonathan Huggins
 Piano Janine Tiner
 Percussion John Parker Keaton
 Projection Cindy Crowder
 Sound Marc Stratton
 Videographers Dan Crowder, David Nichols
 Billy Stone

The Sanctuary Choir & Friends

<u>SOPRANO</u>	<u>ALTO</u>	<u>TENOR</u>
Erin Bolton	Ouida Beck	M.H. Bitely+
Jacquisue Carr	Pat Bethea	Earl Keaton+
Cheryl Dowell+	Susan Bitely+	Royace Keaton+
Beth Harris+	Gayle Holley	Vernon Walker+
Tina Keaton+	Cuba Keaton+	
Debbie Langley+	Barbara Miller	<u>BASS</u>
Rana McClain+	Kandy Moore+	Glenn Crain
Anna Redman+	Shari Taylor	Max Fleming+
Ann Smith+	Linda Work	Tommy Fowler
Renee White+		James House+
Candy Weaver		Lynn King

+Denotes Carnegie Hall Participant

In Memoriam

The Poinsettias have been placed by the Music Memorial Fund in Loving Memory of the people who have faithfully served in the Music Ministry of First Baptist Church.

**Join us for our Christmas Eve
 Candlelight & Lord's Supper Service
 Wednesday, December 24 at 5:00 pm**

Sunday Worship at First Baptist

9:00 am ~ Television Broadcast on Fox 16
 9:45 am ~ Sunday School (classes for all ages)
 11:00 am ~ Morning Worship with Extended Teaching
 Care for Babies and Pre-schoolers

Join us for worship in-person or watch our livestream at fbcpinebluff.org/media or facebook.com/firstpinebluff/live.