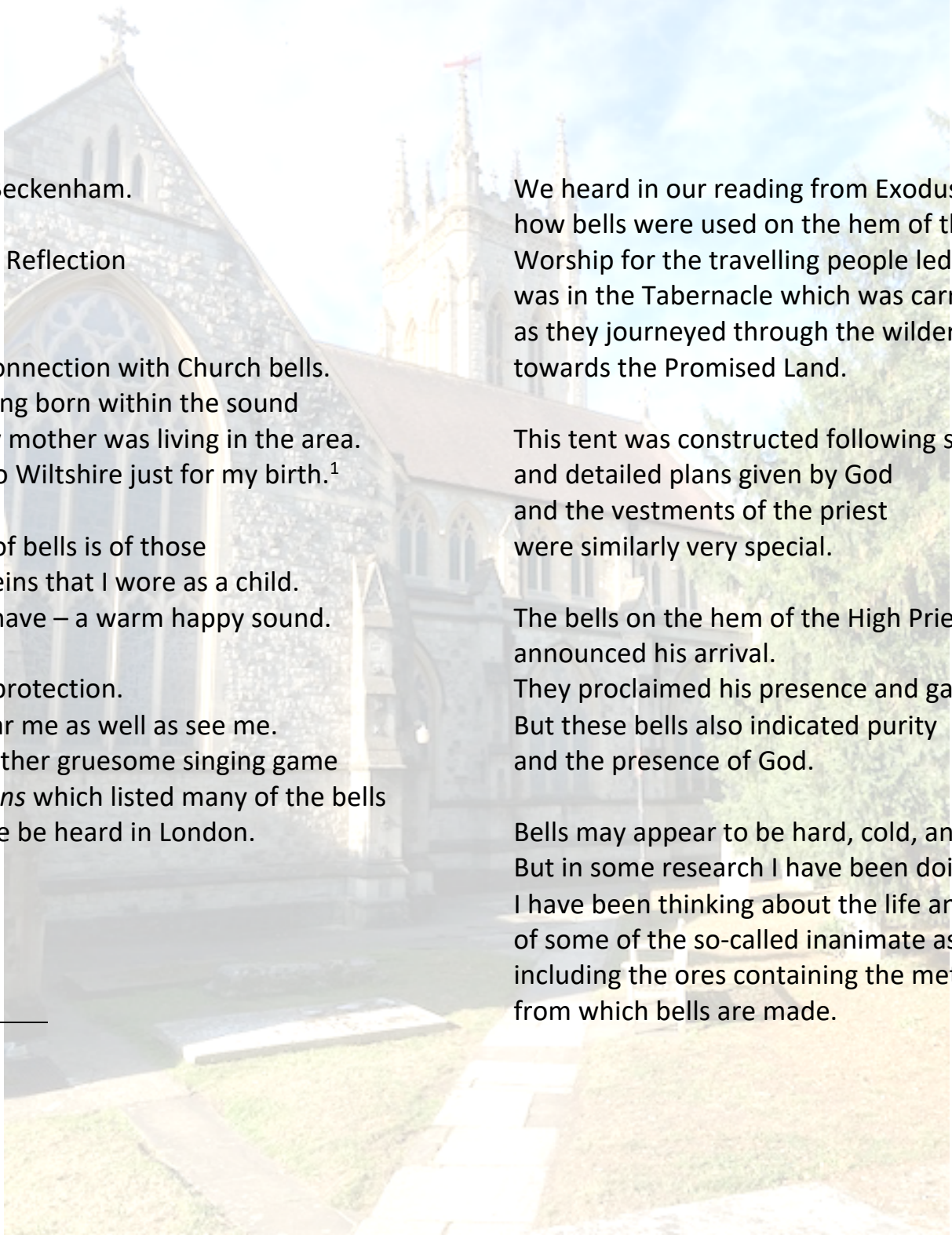




St George's Church, Beckenham.

Bell Ringers' Service - Reflection

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I have always felt a connection with Church bells.
I narrowly missed being born within the sound
of Bow Bells since my mother was living in the area.
But she was moved to Wiltshire just for my birth.¹

My first recollection of bells is of those
on the harness and reins that I wore as a child.
Some of which I still have – a warm happy sound.

These bells gave me protection.
My parents could hear me as well as see me.
Later I enjoyed the rather gruesome singing game
of *Oranges and Lemons* which listed many of the bells
that could at one time be heard in London.

We heard in our reading from Exodus
how bells were used on the hem of the High Priest's robe.
Worship for the travelling people led by Moses
was in the Tabernacle which was carried along
as they journeyed through the wilderness
towards the Promised Land.

This tent was constructed following specific
and detailed plans given by God
and the vestments of the priest
were similarly very special.

The bells on the hem of the High Priests robe
announced his arrival.
They proclaimed his presence and gave him protection.
But these bells also indicated purity
and the presence of God.

Bells may appear to be hard, cold, and lifeless.
But in some research I have been doing recently,
I have been thinking about the life and character
of some of the so-called inanimate aspects of creation,
including the ores containing the metals
from which bells are made.

¹ 1944

Earth and mountains, where metal ores are found,
are mentioned in the Bible as having
some of the characteristics of living beings.

Untouched bells seem inert but,
as Oscar Hammerstein reminds us,
*'A bell's not a bell 'til you ring it.'*²

Once they are struck
they take on a life of their own.
Each bell has its own tone and personality.
And in different contexts they can give expression
to our deepest emotions.

Together, bells can express the joyful feelings
of a community as they peal out for a wedding.

A single toll expresses the grief of a community.
The Lutine Bell rings once for a tragedy
and twice for a joyous event.

Our Sanctus bell tells all in the vicinity
that the solemnity of the Eucharist is taking place.

² Sound of music — Oscar Hammerstein

For me, bells are not inert or inanimate.
since they can encompass so
many of our moods and experiences.

When we think of the bells of a church
we automatically look up towards the sky,
which is by convention, the way to heaven.

Even though we are aware from reason and science,
that we will not find heaven by looking up,
as in a literal sense,
we feel uplifted when we hear the sound of bells.

For me they play their part
in a duet with the angels in heaven.
In a popular carol we hear:
*'And all the bells on earth shall ring
And all the angels in Heaven shall sing.'*³

Heaven and earth make a joyful sound together
in praise of God most high.

³ *I saw three ships*

We heard St Paul speaking of gifts.
He reminds us that, whatever our gift,
we all contribute to the one body,
the community of Christians.

And in the tower,
bodies and bells work together in harmony,
joining the voices of heaven
in the praise of God.

Poised as they are between heaven and earth,
may the bells and those who ring them
ring out this harmony of peace and joy.
Amen.

Joan Conway 11 October 2025

