

St Swithun's Church Newsletter

For information and inspiration

December 2010

The true glory of God

There is so much about Christmas that is wrapped up in tradition. In this newsletter we'll hear a little bit about what Christmas means to our PCC, and it is a lovely insight into the church and family traditions that have meant so much to each PCC member. As a child, one tradition that my sister and I started was a Christmas performance each Christmas Eve. This involved a huge amount of preparation; the painstaking choice of carols to perform, the poems that needed to be written, the formulation of a programme, and of course the creation of the theatre space. Needless to say the event was, without exception, overtaken by a fit of the giggles – even if we had managed to perform the rest of the programme straight-faced, the last verse of 'We wish you a Merry Christmas' was guaranteed to see both of us in a heap on the floor convulsing with laughter. It was a tradition we maintained for years and is still a precious memory of Christmas past.

But it is good to break with tradition every now and again, even through something as simple as reading a different Bible version. We all have our preferred Bible versions (and perhaps we should pause here to be grateful not just for the widespread availability of the Bible, but the plethora of different Bible versions we have at our fingertips), but perhaps sometimes the

familiarity of the words diminishes the meaning contained in them.

I re-read the first chapter of John's gospel the other day in the Contemporary English Version, and I was struck again by the hope and power in the passage:

The Word became a human being and lived here with us.

We saw his true glory, the glory of the only Son of the Father.

From him all the kindness and all the truth of God have come down to us. (John 1:14)

This version speaks to me of a generous God, bountiful in nature, lavishing his goodness (kindness and truth) on the world he created. The true glory of God was demonstrated in humility and sacrifice, as he came to be in community with us. It is a simple yet profound message which we have the opportunity to communicate with our community through our many and varied services this Christmastime.

And as we do, my prayer is that you may be touched by the radiance of God's glory this Christmas. May you find him in the familiar traditions and in the unexpected. May you know God's kindness and truth as you celebrate the birth of his son with loved ones. And may you have a very Happy Christmas!

Em Coley



A Day in the Life of Mike and Lynne Harmon

Woke up, got out of bed....

Wake up early on Monday so that Lynne can drive up to the West Midlands to begin her working week as a counsellor. Mike has the luxury of lie-in until 6.45 before he rises to pedal to Wycliffe Hall for chapel at 8.15.

Found my way downstairs and drank a cup...

Lynne embraces each day with enthusiasm. She is energised by the changes she sees in the lives of young people and adults through her work. Mike dare not lie in as he has deadlines for essays, seminar papers and New Testament Greek.

And looking up, I noticed I was late...

Lynne loves the morning drive up the M40; it's a time to reflect and pray. Mike enjoys late evenings when all the lists have been ticked there's time to relax and read.

Lynne spends most days in schools in Dudley, in the West Midlands. Mike spends every day at Wycliffe Hall on the Banbury Road.

Lynne talks, text and emails colleagues, clients, Mike, family, friends and Mike (again). Mike talks to fellow students and Lynne. They both Skype their sons in Iceland and Australia.

Mike takes breakfast on the hoof and supper whenever he finishes work. Lunch is taken in college with other students. Lynne eats regularly and chews slowly. They always eat together on Thursday evening to celebrate Lynne's return.

Lynne drives, walks and occasionally cycles. Mike cycles into the city every day.

Lynne walks, reads and scores shops for bargains when she has time to relax. Mike plays golf, skis in the winter and windsurfs in the summer. They both enjoy motor-biking holidays in Europe.

Lynne prays and meditates while motorway driving, but always with her eyes open. Mike prays in the morning and at regular chapel services. They pray and read together as a regular Sunday activity.



A Carolling Tradition

Nadolig llawen i bawb. That's a cheerful or joyous Christmas to all. This is what we said to each other when we gathered in church on Christmas morning in the village of Dafen, South Wales where I grew up. Christmas started with the first Welsh service at 6am. The church was alight with candles as a symbol of the coming of the light of the world. Our vicar kept the sermon short to allow for lots of carols. We made our way home, hoping that Father Christmas had been kind to us. But that was not the end, as there would be three more services with carols that day until we were all 'carolled out'.

St Francis of Assisi introduced carols into a church service and the earliest known English one was written in 1410. Like most carols of its time it was only loosely based on the Christian story. Carols were usually written for a special purpose, such as a masque or a religious drama, and were dances accompanied by singing. The word *carol* comes from Greek and means to dance in a circle. It is not surprising that they were banned by Oliver Cromwell, who thought that Christmas should be a solemn day. But they survived, and were sung in secret in homes, and by Victorian times they became popular again.

The carols we sing today paint a picture of the time when God became an inhabitant of the world that he made and that is why we sing them with gusto. The music is often based on folk tunes and one of the most enduring ones, 'Deck the Hall' is based on a sixteenth-century Welsh dance tune 'Nos Galan'.

The waiting is over, so let us all lift up our voices loud and clear as we sing 'Hark! the Herald-angels sing' and welcome our king.

Gerry Bowen-Thomas



Pause for Prayer

In the beginning was the one who is called the Word.

The Word was with God and was truly God.

From the very beginning the Word was with God.

And with this Word, God created all things.

Nothing was made without the Word.

Everything that was created received its life from him, and his life gave light to everyone.

The light keeps shining in the dark, and darkness has never put it out.

(John 1:1-5 CEV)

Prayers

Christ, born in a stable,
give courage to all who are homeless:
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, for whom the angels sang,
give the song of the kingdom to all who
weep:
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, worshipped by the shepherds,
give peace on earth to all who are
oppressed:
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, before whom the wise men knelt,
give humility and wisdom to all who
govern:
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Christ, whose radiance filled a lowly
manger,
give the glory of your resurrection to all
who rest in you:
Jesus, Saviour,
hear our prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ,
Son of the Father,
full of the Spirit,
hear our prayer,
receive our praises,
fill our lives.

Amen.



Behold I Stand

When the night is deep
With the sense of Christmas
And expectancy hangs heavy
On every breath,
Behold I stand at the door and knock.

When the floor is knee deep
In discarded wrapping paper
And the new books are open at page one
And the new toys are already broken,
Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

When the family is squashed
Elbow to elbow
Around the table
And the furious rush for food is over
And the only word that can describe the feeling
Is full,
Behold, I stand at the door and knock.

And when Christmas is over
And the television is silent
For the first time in two days
And who sent which card to whom
Is forgotten until next year,
Behold, I stand at the door.

And when the nation has finished celebrating
Christmas without Christ
A birthday
Without a birth
The coming of a kingdom
Without a King
And when I am
Forgotten
Despised
Rejected
Crucified—

Behold, I stand.

Gerard Kelly





Christmas is...

The PCC reflect on what Christmas means to each of them:

Roger Dennett: Christmas is celebrating the birth of Jesus. Time to be thankful for my wonderful family. Special time with Mary. Time to recall the wonderful Christmas times with my parents. Time to reflect on how I am living my life and pray for God's guidance over the coming year. Crackers.

Phil Martin: Christmas is a time for celebrating Christ's birth and what it means to us: a special time for family, friends and members of our church. Carols at Christmas are a particular joy.

Roy King: Christmas is a sparkling festival and celebration opportunity. Celebration time in which to think on and thank the Love, which through our creator, came in humility to make clear the radical love of God. Opportunity for enjoyment of Love coming still to be absorbed and shared with those around.

Barbara Boyne: Christmas is carol singing round the village, Nine Lessons and Carols. Visiting family, seeing grandchildren in their Nativity play; often angels, sometimes Mary or the Innkeeper! Walking through empty streets to Midnight Mass, being wakened by excited children, opening presents, Christmas lunch. For us the joy of Christmas.

Brenda Groth: Christmas is...returning from church on the afternoon of Christmas Eve in Germany and, when the skies are darkening, lighting the candles on the Christmas Tree, sitting in the candlelight and singing some carols, always including Stille Nacht, before it's time to open the presents.

Gerry Bowen-Thomas: Christmas is a magical season of joy. The church is warmly decorated and the children's faces are expectantly bright and sparkling. We are reminded that the story of the birth of Jesus is of patient endurance and courage and total obedience to the highest ideal. The waiting is over and we are reminded that soon it will be Epiphany, and the call will come to spread the good news. So happy birthday Jesus and to us all.

Mary Dennett: Christmas is a joy which begins with the warm feeling inside after midnight mass, the children at the nativity service and praising God with carols. It is the closeness and sharing with family and friends, the wonderment of grandchildren opening presents, and your own children still expecting family traditions and reminiscing of years gone by. It never fails.

Brian Baggott: Christmas is a time of frantic shopping when people go mad spending money on food that may not be eaten (not in our household) or on things that are not really wanted. But above all it is a time of happiness when the church family celebrates the birth of Christ.

Isabel Baggott: Christmas is excitement, family, colour, busy. I love Christmas, the shopping, preparing and the relaxing with family. We all pile into the kitchen and if things are not perfect no one minds. I love the pauses when we remember and wonder at the vulnerable God-given child born into a tempestuous world.

Sandra Ward: Christmas is not for the faint-hearted in our house! Samuel and Oliver begin the countdown well before Fireworks Night and upcoming events are discussed as to whether they fall before or after Christmas - quite appropriate really. Ask them what Christmas really is and they will reply 'Jesus' Birthday', and it's so nice to hear those words from a small child in an increasingly commercial world.

Party of Light

I lost track of the number of people who, this year, commented to me how 'big' Halloween seems to have got. I agree. When I was a child, a few people went trick or treating (I never did) but there weren't the gruesome displays in shops for weeks on end, or the numbers of children (young and older) traipsing the streets.

I was groaned at by the whole of St Swithun's School the day after Halloween (and no doubt lost a bit of kudos!) when I admitted that I really don't like Halloween. It is a day that I find difficult and somewhat bewildering – people seem to enjoy celebrating a lot of what is dark and not-of-God.

So it was a wonderful tonic to enjoy the company of 25 children (and about the same number of adults) at the Party of Light. The church had been transformed by Rachel and Margaret Smith with wonderful displays on the theme of light.

As the children arrived, and thanks to the organisation of Lisa Scott Russell, we made all sorts of goodies on the theme of light (lanterns, candle holders, cards etc), we played a number of silly games, and then tucked into delicious food provided by the Social and Fundraising team.

Each child went away with a party bag containing all the things they'd made, some chocolate, a balloon and a magnet reminding them that 'Jesus is the Light of the World'. Thanks to everyone involved, it was a super event and will be repeated, not least because it brought some wonderful light into what is a rather dark day.

Em Coley



Drivers needed

The Archway Foundation (Oxford) has taken loneliness seriously for over 25 years. We received the Queen's Award in 2007 for achievements in the voluntary sector.

We now need more drivers with their own car to pick up from local homes in the central Oxford area, to drop off in the centre of Oxford at 7.30pm on Mondays, and to return passengers home for 9.00pm. This can be weekly, fortnightly or monthly. Petrol costs are reimbursed.

For further details see our website (www.archwayfoundation.org.uk) or contact Ray on 01865 790552 or office@archwayfoundation.org.uk.

This is one simple but effective way of making a real difference in peoples' lives. There are also opportunities in our Befriending Scheme.

Ray Atwood (Coordinator)

Invitation to a Celebration

St Swithun's people are warmly invited to the Village Centre on Saturday 15 January when we will be celebrating 'Kennington: a Fairtrade Village'.

A certificate of our new status will be handed over to the Chairman of the Parish Council and there will be a Fairtrade exhibition and Fairtrade refreshments.

Brenda Groth



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Something to Say?

Please send any contributions for the St Swithun's Church newsletter to the Editor, Jackie Smith.

We welcome text and/or pictures (in particular it would be good to build up a bank of pictures reflecting church life, so if you have any please do send them in).

Don't worry if writing isn't your thing – Jackie can help you with the right form of words.

Deadline for copy: 31 Dec 2010

Dates for your diary



Date	Time	Service
5 December	9.30am 6.00pm	Holy Communion Village Carols around the Tree Mince pies and mulled wine in Church
6-11 December		Festival Week
12 December	9.30am 4.00pm	Holy Communion Christingle Service
19 December	9.30am 6.30pm	Holy Communion Carols by Candlelight
24 December	4.00pm 11.30pm	Crib Service Midnight Communion
25 December	10.00am	Christmas Day Communion
26 December	9.30am	Boxing Day Communion
15 January		Village Fairtrade Celebration
17 January		Sing Along
18-25 January		Week of prayer for Christian Unity
23 January		Christian Unity All Age Service with Baptism (St Swithun's)
24 January	6.30pm	Christian Unity Mass (Good Shepherd)
25 January	2.30pm	Christian Unity Service (Methodist Church)
27 January	8.00pm	Pastoral Care Course (Church Hall)

From the Editor



For me, the best thing about Christmas is realising that God knows what it's like to be a human being.

He's not looking down on our struggles and successes from a disinterested distance, enjoying the luxury of being all-powerful. He is intimately concerned with our daily activities, our confusions, our enthusiasms, our doubts and questions.

This concern is not borne of a vague kindly disposition towards us, but rather of gritty personal experience, because God, in Christ, has gone through the whole thing: joy, loneliness, friendship, misunderstanding, grief, frustration, peace, love, and ultimately (to anticipate Easter...) death and the overcoming of death.

God's love for us is not condescending; it's real, and that is what we can celebrate at Christmas.

Jackie Smith