



Hello All,

Well, as my 6th Christmas here fast approaches I wonder at how quickly time is flying! Because we travel so fast through life and are often so busy at this time of year it can be so easy just to go through the motions of Christmas: the Christmas shopping, a visit to Santa, decorating the house, certain events like the lighting of the Christmas tree or a trip to the Panto or a Crib Service, the school nativity, the work Christmas party,

visiting family on the same days and the like.

These are all good traditions but there is a danger: a danger that we just go through the motions of Christmas without reflecting or appreciating why these traditions are good. All these familiar things are good because they help us to engage with the season, help us feel rooted in the past and they give us a sense of belonging to our families and communities. This Christmas amongst all the frantic activity of trying to get it right for yet another year, why not take a moment to reflect on the traditions you have and the blessings that they are meant to bring. And here's a thought: if they don't bring the blessings you expect, why not stop doing them and start new traditions or at least make sure they bring you the blessings they are meant to?

There is the tradition of reading from the first chapter of St John's Gospel as the climax of 9 Lessons and Carols and also on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. This might seem strange to some as there is no mention of shepherds, stars or stables. But those words "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God" and that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" is **THE** blessing that Christmas is all about. Here we are told that God's word is the messiah: is Jesus, and through the person of Jesus, God isn't some distant, far off Deity but is with us and alongside us, through all our joys and sorrows, successes and failures, and in our pain and sufferings. This blessing is why this dark time of year was chosen to celebrate this understanding of a God who dwells with us. Because in that first chapter of John's Gospel we also hear that Jesus "is the light that shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it". Jesus can shine in the darkness of all of our lives if we can just let Him.

All the other expected traditions of Christmas will be apparent across the benefice this year from Crib Services to 9 lessons and carols, Carol services to Christmas Day Communion, as well as newer traditions such as Beer and Carols and the Bethlehem Midnight Service on Christmas Eve at Siggleshorne where instead of Midnight Mass we mark, with a similar service starting at 9:30, midnight in Bethlehem (22:00hrs GMT).

This issue of the Newsletter covers both December and January and I would like to take the opportunity to thank all those from our communities who have supported both me and the mission and ministries of our churches over the last 12 months. I couldn't fulfil my role here without you.

May I also take this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a very Blessed New Year!

Yours in Christ.

Revd. Andy Simpson