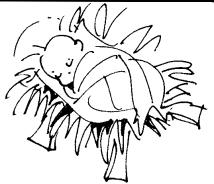


Link Up!



'But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.'
Galatians 4 v4-5

Events over Christmas & New Year:

On **Sunday 21st December** we will hold our Carol Service and will look at the final Advent theme of 'Reflect'. Visitors are welcome to join us for this service.

We will hold our **Christmas Day Family Service** on Thursday 25th December and this starts, as usual, **at 10.30am**. Another opportunity to invite visitors to join us.

Ken and Nicky will be holding an **Open House on Boxing Day from 11am – 4pm** for anyone from the church to join them **at the Manse**, 55 Stanley Green Road, Oakdale.

On **Sunday 28th of December** we will be joining with Parkstone Baptist Church for a Combined Service using the theme we have used in the past of 'Looking Back, Moving Forward'. The service at Parkstone starts at **10.30am**. If anyone needs a lift to this, please let Janet know.

Don't forget to join us on **Wednesday 17th December at 6pm** for a **Christmas Carol Singalong at the New Inn**. Ken is leading this, and it would be good to have a good number of church folk at this. Mince pies and mulled wine will be available for those who would like this.

I think the sense of wonder and excitement I used to feel in advent (and all the way through the Christmas season) used to start as soon as the Christmas lights went up in Chelmsford town centre... long before they were actually switched on. Seeing them putting out massive ladders and carrying armfuls of lights would give me a shudder of anticipation. It may have been sooner than that. It might have started to present in my being as we were learning Christmas songs in school and at church. (The work of learning those songs would usually start in September!)

These days, I wonder when the Christmas "feeling of magic" faded away. Did it start to retreat when I was at university? I did still have a sense of anticipation about going home and seeing my parents and sister, and the house would be festive, smelling of mince pies and other lovely treats. Well into my 20s/30s, my parents, my sister and I would make the trip to my godmother's house on Christmas Eve and stand with them around their piano singing Christmas carols before making our way to the midnight communion service at church to "see in" Christmas morning. I remember that more gentle sense of muted wonder at seeing the church all lit up with candles and to whisper "Merry Christmas" after communion was taken and midnight ticked over to early Christmas day.

So what do we do when/if the magic of Christmas fades? We continue to make an effort for the benefit of the next generation(s), we "put on a face" for the benefit of those around us and as Christians, we focus on the real meaning of Christmas and find other traditions towards encouraging our souls to a right attitude of worship. Getting involved in church activities, perhaps doing an advent Bible plan to help us prepare, giving to charity, making more effort to get out and visit others – these are all good and worthy things.

Into the New Year:

On **Sunday 4th January**, Janet Matterface will be leading the service with a theme of 'All things New?' The service will also include communion.

Then during the following few weeks, we will be starting a series on Biblical Prophecy.

On **Sunday 11th January** we will be looking at chapter 3 of the book of Malachi

On **Sunday 18th January** we will be looking at chapter 37 of the book of Ezekiel.

And on **Sunday 25th January** we will be looking at chapter 2 of the book of Daniel.

Sunday 25th January is also the occasion of our Annual service for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity with St George's C of E and St Mary's R C Churches. This will be held at St Mary's R C this year at 3pm.

Other Notices:

Ken will be on Annual Leave from Friday 26th December until Sunday 4th January. Please contact Janet if you need help during that time.

On Tuesday 20th January from 7 – 9pm there will also be a Churches Together in Poole event at St Edwards School in Dale Valley Road entitled 'The Church in action across BCP'. There will be speakers about responding to the Mental Health crisis and Responding to the increase in Domestic Violence.

Alissa Ford is starting her own cake making business and her price list and a selection of cakes she can offer are on the noticeboard in the lobby at church. Please complete the Order Form next to her list of cakes on the board including when you want your cakes by.

As we go through life, and the difficulties of it, we can find that not only have we lost the wonder of Christmas, but that we're finding it harder to feel positive at all. Some aspects of the Christmas Season culture in the UK are not "edifying". "Elf on the shelf" seems to be a fear based spirit, and not something I'd want in my house, for example. The endless ramp up to Santa coming – where everyone expects you to join in the narrative on that; the Christmas adverts on TV promoting endless gluttony and indulgence, along with the usually "idealised" family life; yearly Facebook debates about whether Christmas is really a Pagan holiday at heart. And I could go on and on about the sterilised "fairy tale" version of Christmas as shown on the front of most Christmas cards. But is it helpful/building us up to think on the negative and is that where God wants us to dwell?

God has placed us in the world as it is today and so we need to find out how to BE for Him in this time - for Christ's sake. Reaching out with all our hearts to take hold of the divine wonder, knowing that God has already reached out to us.

My mind wanders into the beatitudes - how we should hunger and thirst for righteousness, how we are blessed if we mourn in this world that has much sorrow, how we should be peacekeepers and so be true children of God. It seems to me that there are many opportunities for peace, righteousness and a mourning for all those struggling to meet the true Christ in this season of expectation.

And what about our sense of wonder and anticipation? I'm not sure I have a full answer to this, but I know the truth lies in a very real manger in a tiny place called Bethlehem, which was made ready to hold the tiny frail baby Jesus and also in the equally amazing truth that Jesus is truly God who took on flesh and became one of us – the eternal everlasting God humbled himself to the point of placing himself in a young woman's womb and simply existed there for about 9 months, in order to be born at just the right time.

Whatever difficulties, griefs, joys and hopes we are holding, let us all rest in this truth this advent and pray to make Jesus known where we have been placed.

May our heavenly Father bless and prepare us, by His Holy Spirit and authority, to shine brightly now and always - for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Kim Chaloner