

Hello everyone

And so we are in Christmas Week. The lights are up, trees are twinkling, schools have finished for their Christmas holiday after a flurry of special events. The other day I was asked to go and speak to the young children about how Christians celebrate Christmas.. so as I am lifting the beautiful knitted Baby Jesus out of the box, resting in his manger there was an excited shout out before me.. there's Santa.. as Santa indeed walked past the window and waved happily, and the children bounced with excitement at the sight. It reminded me of how much I used to love taking the children to see Santa, shopping, enjoying the music playing in the background, decorating the home and sharing time together. Time with children is so special. Although, I did reflect with some sadness that baby Jesus lost out on this occasion.. the sight of a little baby in a manger did not manage to compete with Santa.

And so, I have continued to reflect this week on the contrast of the pull of this material world against the simplicity of the first Christmas. Mary and Joseph, were called by God to leave their family and familiar surroundings, to travel a long difficult journey to somewhere remote, with Mary heavily pregnant. Arriving in Bethelhem there were no plush guest rooms or hotels for them, no family saying come in have a warm drink.. welcome. Instead, they found themselves destitute, in need of help, at the point of Mary about to give birth. Rescued by a considerate Inn-Keeper who offered his stable, the only place available - and here in this lowly place Jesus the 'Messiah' was born - a king, born in lowly surroundings, without a crown.. just wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

And then.. the Angel visited the Shepherds in the fields, lowly and outcast by society but called by God to be the first to visit the baby Jesus, to bow down to him, to worship Him and to symbolically offer a lamb. God knelt down and blessed those who seemed unimportant, thought unworthy of by society, and he lifted them up and called them forth to see the most wonderful sight... he 'kissed them on the cheek' and blessed them. Next the wise men or the 'Sages' of their time.. came to visit. They had set off months before, led to find the baby Jesus by a bright star shining in the sky. They brought gifts.. special gifts.. gold, frankincense and myrrh.. gifts of great symbolic importance which heralded Jesus' death at Easter. Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, our Lord, was born in love, swaddled in love, visited in love, ministered to all he met in love and he died out of the most incredible sacrifice of love for us all.

This week as my reflections continued I thought about families who are struggling to cope this year, with rising prices, and so many pressures placed on them by expectation and society's demands.. and I (and many of you) gained pleasure in gathering together hampers to give to certain families in need.. extending the hand of love.. keen to 'kiss them on the cheek' to say, you are loved. Let us share this burden together. Thank you to all who helped, to all who contributed. Anything which remains will be sent to the foodbank as need is very high this year.

I posted a picture on the church facebook pages this week which says we are all innkeepers.. but will we let Jesus in this year?

And so Santa may be a modern representation of Jesus.. the giver, the happy, cheery voice of joy to those he meets, but for me, Jesus is the reason for the season. It is Jesus who we come to

worship this Christmas.

**Here are our services for this Sunday:**

Chalgrave Church 9.30 am Holy Communion

Toddington Church 11.00 am Holy Communion

Tingrith Church Nativity Service 3.00 pm

Harlington Church 9.30 am Holy Communion Service

Westoning Church Nativity themed service 11.00 am - please come dressed as a nativity character if you wish.

Online zoom Upper Room Service 6pm

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88981856814?pwd=SIArT05NMXZ3ckNlSENGTDB1b3Q5Zz09>

For details of how to join please contact Revd Linda

**Next week's services:**

**Monday 20th December**

9.30 am Morning Prayer **Toddington**,

11.00 am Advent Course at the Rectory

The Coming Light, **Harlington** 8.00 pm - a service of readings and carols with the Quintet Choir

**Wednesday 22nd December**

A Service of lessons and carols with the Quintet Choir 7.30 pm Toddington

Harlington Churches Together sing carols outside the parade of shops with the Salvation Army Band 6.30 pm

**Thursday 23rd December**

Funeral at Chalgrave Church 1.00 pm

Wedding at Harlington Church 2.00 pm

**Friday 24th December - Christmas Eve**

**Chalgrave**

3.00 pm Crib Service

11.15 pm Midnight Mass

**Toddington**

4.30 pm Crib Service

10.00 pm Midnight Mass

**Harlington (you are advised to please book places on the church website)**

Crib Service 4.15 pm

Midnight Communion 11.15 pm

**Tingrith**

8.00 pm Christmas Communion

**Westoning**

Crib services 3.00 pm and 5.30 pm (you are advised to please book places on the church website)

10pm Christmas Communion

**Christmas Day and Boxing Day services**

**Chalgrave** no services at church. We will join a benefice service at Toddington Church

**Toddington** - 9.30 am Holy Communion on Christmas Day and 10.00 am Holy Communion on Boxing Day (both are benefice services)

**Harlington:** 10.00 am Christmas day family service (no communion), Boxing Day 9.30 am Holy Communion

**Westoning:** 10.00 am Christmas Day Communion Service and 11.00 am Boxing Day Holy Communion Service

Tingrith: No services at church. We will join a benefice service at Westoning Church.

As we look forward to this week Nigel and I wish you and your families a very happy Christmas. We thank you for all your support, giving in so many different ways, for your enthusiasm, for your love and for being very special church family. May you enjoy a blessed, joyful and healthy Christmas.

We send our love to you

Linda and Nigel