

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT

Christmas Joy?



Dear Friends,

I hope you are having a peaceful and happy Christmas!

A lot of time over Christmas, may well be spent having a big feast, meeting up with relatives and friends and watching films on television. Yes, of course it can seem over-indulgent, and in some ways it is, but we do need our feast days. In these days of winter we need light and warmth, and as we light candles put lights up on Christmas trees and decorate our houses, we gather together with people we love; this is a season of joy.

A feast day, a season of joy, (not just the 12 days of Christmas but also the four weeks of Epiphany) is a time when we think about what really matters to us. The people whom we meet and greet are an important part of what makes life worthwhile. Knowing that God loves us and sent his Son to be born as one of us, assures us that life is a gift of God to be used wisely and joyfully.

Why not a season of joy? Perhaps it seems a strange idea, that we should have such a time in the calendar, but don't we need that realisation that we can be joyful and hopeful? The world is full of problems, – how often is the news on the radio, when we wake up in the morning, good news? Not often, unfortunately. We also often have our own problems and anxieties too.

Yet God has good news for us, "good news of a great joy" as the Bible puts it. That is what the shepherds heard on the Bethlehem hillside and they made their way expectantly to see the Christ-child. It is this good news that can warm all our hearts as it did the

people in the story of Jesus' birth. The birth of this child brought hope to many people and as we celebrate he can bring new hope to each one of us.

We do know that Christmas in itself will not make all our problems and the world's great difficulties disappear. When we are bearing pain or coping with uncertainty it would be understandable if we felt less than enthusiastic about a time of rejoicing. No-one should feel coerced. But we believe that the Christmas message is one to bring the deepest and most profound joy, for in Jesus we can find one who was later to accept intense human suffering and who will draw near to us in our deepest needs, a saviour who can help us to see what is most valuable in this life and who will give us the fullness of eternal life in the next.

Yours in Christ,

Jo

Presents

*A hospital radio talk given by
Doug Loveridge.*

Christmas carols are usually about Jesus' birth – but a lot of Christmas songs are about Santa Claus. It makes sense, as many of us give and receive presents at Christmas. Santa Claus is coming to town, we are told, and "You'd better be good for goodness' sake". It is hard to disagree with that, but perhaps we need to remember that although Santa Claus comes from the generosity of St Nicholas, he was strongly promoted in the way we see today by an American soft drinks company and then taken on board by many more firms with useful presents to sell.

I have been thinking back, to try to recapture something good about the giving of presents. I remember as a child peering in through shop windows at Dinky cars and electric trains, and marvelling. There was a real sense of wonder about the idea that I might receive something like this as a present, for at that time we certainly didn't have much money to spare. One Christmas I was given a Scalextric by my parents, and it was one of the greatest marvels in the world, with two sports cars whizzing round the track. And like all young people in the early 60s I knew that my parents were giving the gift but it was mysteriously conveyed by Santa Claus.

There is something about the mystery and wonder of children's gifts which remains for me of the essence of Christmas. Because the true gift of Christmas is the coming of God's Son, Jesus, as a baby, a child, and there is a mystery and wonder about that also. As we grow older we all become used to the idea of presents, and some people become cynical. But the Christmas story can suggest to us that our world is touched by the love of God, that one day in Bethlehem something exceptionally wonderful happened.

It seems a shame that we sometimes cease to marvel and be amazed, perhaps because we have so many great inventions and possibilities in our modern world. I am glad that we have so much knowledge and potential, but if we lose the chance of having a childlike faith – in the best possible sense of a childlike wonder and trust – we are missing out on that great and mighty wonder, when God sent his son among us, the one to whom we sing carols with joyful hearts.

Growing together in Christ

"Growing Together in Christ" is a one year Adult Christian Learning course (from the Local Ministry Training manual), which is already available in various localities throughout the Diocese. Several parishes in the Deanery of Hertford and Ware are working together to present the course in this area.

The course has been designed for anyone who would like to learn more about the Christian faith and the Church and how both affect our daily living, and can also be used as a Foundational Course for a Local Ministry Team. It will also be invaluable to those who are exploring Reader ministry.

The course consists of three terms of six evening sessions and a half-day workshop, with one assignment per term. It covers a whole range of subjects but is purposely not an academic theological-college type course.

It is possible for individuals to attend single sessions that interest them, whether or not they have been invited to be part of a formal Local Ministry Team in the future. It is, however, envisaged that those anticipating becoming part of a team in their parish would attend the whole (three term) course.

All who successfully complete the Foundation course will receive the "Certificate of Learning: Foundation Course" issued by the Diocesan Board for Christian Development.

The first term of this course will run from January to March, in Christ Church Hall, New Road, Ware, on Thursdays

Evening sessions will run between 8.00pm and 9.30pm, with coffee available from 7.45pm, and cover the following topics:

- 29th Jan: *The Old Testament in a nutshell*
- 5th Feb: *The Gospels*
- 26th Feb: *St Paul's letters: their relevance today*
- 5th March: *God is One and God is Three*
- 19th March: *Jesus of Nazareth: Son of God and Son of Man*
- 26th March: *The Holy Spirit*

The half-day workshop is arranged for 14th February, 9.30am to 12.30, on the subject: *Different ways to study the Bible*

Application forms, due in by 26th January, can be found at the back of Church.