

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT



The light IS coming!

Dear Friends,

December is a very intense month, isn't it? The very fact that it is the "end of the year" has always made it seem profound, connected with the passing of time. 2016 will soon be over, and we may well ask what we have valued or achieved, whether it has been a good year for the world in general, and look ahead to the next twelve-month period. The changing of the seasons is something that people have always connected with, as the solstice on 21st means that we begin to move again from darkness to light.

"From Darkness to Light" is the theme of our Advent Carol Service (27 November) when we reflect on our need of God and sing "O come, O come Emmanuel", recognising that we and our world are so very imperfect and need the awareness of a loving and saving God to give us meaning and direction in life. Among all the busy preparations for the festive season, Advent helps us to be aware of our human need and helps us to look forward to celebrating the joy of the coming of Christ. The whole of Advent is a time of spiritual preparation, and despite the tinsel and presents in the shops, the nativity plays in schools, the adverts and even the early carol services (for groups who will not be available during the holiday) we need to hold back a little and consider why we need the light of Christ and the presence of God in our lives. Do consider joining the Advent Challenge.

The year has been as mixed as one could imagine, and I am sure we can all identify good things which have happened to us as well as situations we really would prefer to have not happened. Advent and the

coming of Christ means that we need to recognise that we are part of a fallen humanity, and we too bear responsibility for the way we fall short of the loving way which God calls us to. We see our own human failings in those who have governmental power, and for many of us the political developments of recent times give us cause for concern for our nation and our world. Jesus was born into a nation partly run by a tyrannical ruler, Herod, and by the Roman conquerors who were also capable of great things and appalling acts. Darkness and light, as ever, intertwined.

Jesus' birth is meaningful to the world today because he does bring light into the darkness of the world and of our lives within it. The image that "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it", which we hear at the summation of our Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols, means that there is hope for us all. Human foolishness and sinfulness has been given a chance of newness and redemption. We do not need to live in the "darkness" of the ignorance of God, but we can embrace through faith in Jesus, the new life of love and peace. God is made real for us in a living, human person who is born among us, who experiences all our human feelings – good and bad – and who lays down his life for us in showing the fullness of God's love. Through faith in him, we can be sure that that eternal life is ours in this world and beyond.

I wish you a happy and joyful Christmas, and I do hope that you will want to share with us in spiritual preparation and in joyful praise during December. May the freshness of a new-born baby lead you to a deeper

faith and hope in God, aware that we can be agents of love and peace in this troubled world which Christ came to save.

Every blessing, Jo

Christmas: A Reflection from a proud Grandfather

Christmas? Okay, let's be personal. And real. Jesus was a baby, and we celebrate his coming among us at Christmas. Well, for me, right now, this connects strongly with the fact that we have a baby in our home. Our grandson Alexander will be three months old on Christmas Day, and he is adorable. Every morning we see him as he lies in his Moses basket, and if he stirs I can pick him up and cuddle him, comfort him. It's rather like the old days when our three sons were born, with the well-known added grand-parental bonus of being able to give him back.

It would have been like that for the Holy family, and naturally when Jesus was not "away" in his manger, Mary would have been holding him and feeding him, and cleaning him when needed – and loving him despite sleepless nights and the child's dependence on those around him or her. For us in the Vicarage, holding our new arrival is just so wonderful, he is great to cuddle and hold, and if he falls asleep on you it makes you want to just stay like that – perhaps forever, if possible.

This closeness and love is a wonderful feeling, we enjoy it, and so too the baby needs it – not just the physical care but the psychological environment of love, which is surely transmitted along the way. And although it is a physical holding, it is really a spiritual experience too. Holding a baby makes us think about life, about our values, about what is truly meaningful, and what we hope for the future.

We don't have the chance to be really soppy very often, and a baby grows and becomes independent (mostly!) But it is not just a passing phase, it is real life, a vital aspect of it. So welcoming the Christ-child

should surely include some 'soppiness', for if our grown-up lives have taught us that we do often need to be tough we still need the gentleness, the acceptance and – yes – just the love which is actually human life at its best. I have a feeling that when in the Rocking Carol we sing of a "darling, darling little man" we should not shy away from what it means for welcoming Jesus and all he means to us. And when we sing "I love thee Lord Jesus" we adults can still mean it; it isn't just for kids. We need it, don't we? O come let us adore Him!

Doug Loveridge



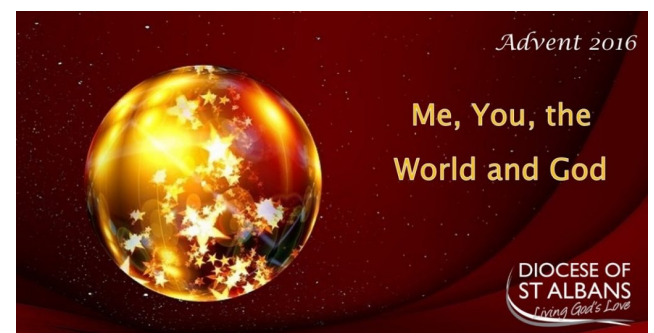
'The Challenge' takes place each year in Advent and in Lent.

When signed up, you will receive an email each day, including:

- a verse from the Bible
- with a Reflection on that verse
- and a suggested Prayer

Tim Lomax, Director of Mission introduces this season's Challenge:

We are pleased to let you know that we are running the Advent Challenge, 'Me, You, the World and God' this year.



We hope that you will wish to be included, and do please share with others who you think may enjoy The Challenge.

You can sign up at our website:

Live the Challenge

(<http://www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/live-the-challenge/>)