

All Saints Alive

VICAR'S VIEWPOINT



Pass the Parcel

Dear Friends,

Most of us have played that wonderful children's party game of Pass the Parcel. There are many layers which are gradually unwrapped and eventually there is the real present at the centre. I wonder whether we may need to unwrap our Christmas from the many layers that have gradually attached themselves to the festival over the years and examine once again the real present inside?

When you play Pass the Parcel, there is something of a challenge to join in. Some people do so readily and wholeheartedly, others may need encouragement and cajoling. Some may even need to be left where they are! The journey of faith is a shared activity, and some of us take to it more readily than others – but having a faith which supports and guides us, brings us assurance and hope is something truly worth joining in with.

One aspect of Pass the Parcel which could put people off is that as the layers unfold, there can be activities to perform. These may be seen as fun ideas by many and others may regard them as a challenge; some of us may not want to suddenly stand up and sing "We wish you a Merry Christmas" – or "Last Christmas" – but others may relish it as fun. Faith is something which invites us to join in wholeheartedly, and while we may feel anxious that it may lead us to take a direction in life which we might otherwise not have, for most of us it is the fulfilment of life, leading us to more loving ways and giving us a hope beyond this world's problems.

The ultimate layer of our faith is the wonder of God coming among us in Jesus Christ. We

can find many different impressions of this in the carols, some of which may seem fanciful – was it really snowy, did he really never cry as a baby normally would, or did three ships really come sailing in?? – but once we focus on the unwrapped Christmas we realise that apart from the birth of Jesus all the other details are secondary. We come to rejoice in his birth and to embrace the new life which he came to offer us all.

Pass the Parcel is also a game where we can see people either holding on slightly to the parcel in the hope of receiving the final prize, or perhaps moving it on rapidly, scarcely touching it, and yet even they can be caught out sometimes when the music stops. For each of us, faith is something to be shared, to be passed on, for as others can help us in living faithfully, we can help them. God's love, shown in Jesus Christ, is the journey we are called to live out, and the prize which we will fully attain when this world's music is over.

This Christmas may we enjoy our party games and rejoice in our faith.

Love,
Jo

Christmas

In coming to the world in Jesus....

God knows,
God shares,
God cares.
God's arms are strong to hold our
weakness,
Overcome our fear,
His presence is peace
His love is there for us
Always.

Preparing for our Guests

We have a great opportunity to welcome guests over the next month into our amazing Church. We will be hosting Carol Services for all the primary and secondary schools in our parish and concerts and services for charities, Fire and Police as well as our own special celebration services. This means hundreds of children and adults visiting us who might not often go to church.

Just like welcoming guests into our home we have the privilege of welcoming everyone into church and this takes careful preparation particularly if we want people to feel at home and comfortable.

How are we making our home welcoming? How will we greet our guests? Can we set aside some of our concerns and show visitors where the best place is for them to sit?

Here's a few ideas:

1. Welcomers: This is a ministry of hospitality and there is no better time than this season to warmly welcome our church visitors. Even if you are fairly new to All Saints this is a really great time to greet others as it's such a time of celebration. We have a sign up board at the back of church so you can get involved and have the fun of seeing so many young people performing, proud parents and new imaginative, creative approaches to the sacred stories. If it's not too cold, someone just outside the main doors can be helpful to reassure people that they have come to the right place and advise on parking when it gets busy!

It's good to open our meeting room and toy cupboard doors just in case someone needs a bit of quiet time and it's good to make sure that pushchairs and wheelchairs are put in safe places with a good view so that everyone feels part of the service.

2. All Saints Christmas Cards Please take part in the delivery of these cards. You can do this by posting them through letter boxes in the parish, giving them to your friends and handing them out at the school carol services and concerts.

Please let people know what is going on at All Saints and, better still, invite them to join you at a service.

3. The Service: Remember that when people are new to the church they may need extra help and reassurance. There may well be the beautiful chaos of squirmy and excited children but imagine how amazing it feels to them when they come into this fantastic sacred space.

4 Social Media: If you are on Facebook or Twitter please comment on your favourite carol, service or church music and decoration and follow ours.

5. At the end of a Service. It's lovely to be able to engage in conversations with people after the service, showing how pleased we are that they have come and inviting them to join us again soon, handing out publicity that you think may be suitable for them (Messy Church flyers, All Saints Magazines, a brief history of the Church etc). If there are refreshments please stay and perhaps challenge yourself to talk to someone you don't know, perhaps asking them what they will be doing over Christmas assuring them of your prayers for them.

Poem for Christmas

Moonless darkness stands between.
Past, the Past, no more be seen!
But the Bethlehem-star may lead me
To the sight of Him Who freed me
From the self that I have been.
Make me pure, Lord: Thou art holy;
Make me meek, Lord: Thou wert lowly;
Now beginning, and alway:
Now begin, on Christmas Day.
G.M.Hopkins

*In our All Saints Christmas Card is this
Celtic blessing:*

May you be blessed
With the spirit of the season, which is peace,
The gladness of the season, which is hope,
And the heart of the season, which is love.