

All Saints Alive

READER'S VIEWPOINT

Christmas – a time for us or a time for Christ?

Janet Bird

Christmas is coming – I know because I've been hearing "Jingle Bells" or "Merry Christmas Everybody" whenever I go shopping since the middle of October! It doesn't seem possible that it is a whole year since last Christmas, but I suppose that's just proof that I am growing older. When you're a child it seems like Christmas will never come, but as we grow older time seems to pass more quickly and every year seems shorter than the last.

Christmas at All Saints' this year may be different to those of the last 14 years because Bill Kemm retired in September, but we are all working together to ensure that all the usual services can take place. The Churchwardens are busy organising help from various local clergy as well as Gerry Booker, Geoff and myself. The choir are busy rehearsing for Advent and for the Nine Lessons and Carols and I have no doubt that the church will be decorated as beautifully as ever by the members of the Flower Guild.

To so many of us Christmas seems to mean that we are busier than ever. At church there are more services to organise and take part in. At home there are cards to write, presents to buy and wrap, food to buy and cook and perhaps parties to organise or go to. There is the constant fear that you have forgotten somebody or something and if you are like me there are probably lots of lists on doors and notice-boards. We can end up getting so stressed that we wish somebody would just cancel the whole thing!

But is this what Christmas is really all about?

Christmas is indeed a time for celebration – we are celebrating the birth of Jesus, but that doesn't have to mean spending more money than we can afford to conform to the media view of what makes a "good" Christmas.



I'm sure that most of us spend far more on presents and food than we should, and many of those presents will end up being exchanged after Christmas or donated to 'Bring and Buy' sales throughout the year.

However is it really necessary to spend a small fortune on presents to prove our love? Surely spending time with those you love is what really matters.

You may have noticed this year that a number of charities are offering 'alternative' Christmas presents.

Present Aid

You receive a certificate, rather than a gift, which states that money has been given to help provide something for somebody in need. Hopefully the knowledge that somebody else is benefiting will give you a comforting warm glow and be more satisfying than yet another tie or box of hankies!

Buy an animal >



Many of us make sure that we buy Christmas cards from charities or even give specific donations to charities at Christmas. Some people even give up their own Christmas to ensure that other people have as good a time as possible by working for Crisis, in London, or giving some time to help with the Christmas Alone party at Sele School here in Hertford. From personal experience, I can confirm that giving your time to help others is a greatly appreciated gift – and can be most enjoyable for everybody!



It is often said that we live in a society which is cash rich and time poor, and when walking around the shopping centres at Christmas this certainly seems to be true. We may try to make time for the people who are important to us, and you often hear people talking about spending quality time with their children or partners, but how often do we give ourselves quality time, time to just be ourselves?

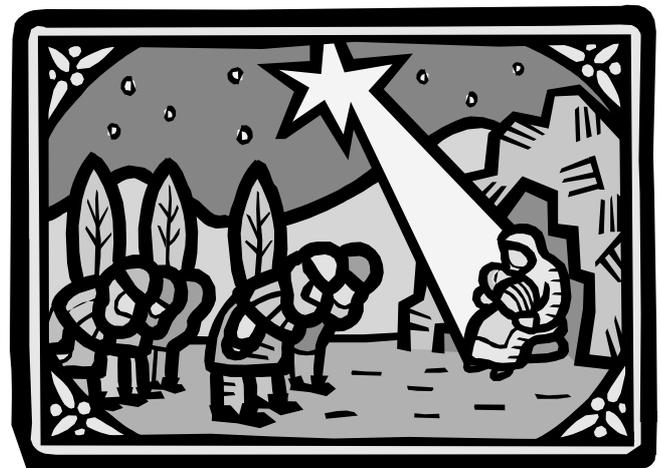
How often do we make quality time to spend with God?

It often feels as though we are jugglers trying to keep an impossible number of balls in the air by being all things to all people, and the added stress of Christmas makes it even worse. We may spend the Christmas holidays surrounded by our extended family - trying to please people of all ages, tastes and opinions, and then wonder why it doesn't always work.

Why do we celebrate Christmas? Why is this celebration more important than any other?

We are celebrating the birth of Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah.

God sent his Son into the world, as a tiny defenceless baby, human and vulnerable just like each of us. He came to teach us that we should love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and that we should love one another just as Jesus loves each of us. He died to save us from our sins, and he lives on in the hearts of all who love him.



Christianity is more than a religion, it is a way of life – and Jesus came to show us the Way. Christmas is a wonderful opportunity to follow Him by loving one another as he loves us and by making time for one another. Time is the most precious gift which we can give, time for those we love and time to give thanks to God for sending Jesus to be our friend and our Saviour.

However, and wherever, you will be spending Christmas this year may I wish you, and all those you love, a blessed, joyous and peaceful Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year.