

Dear friends,

The weekend started with a candlelight procession down Budleigh High Street by the children from the primary school from St. Peter's church to the Methodist church where we heard the Christmas story and the children sang carols. It was absolutely freezing!!



Then on Saturday we were treated to an absolutely marvellous concert by Exeter university chapel choir at All Saints church. These students are entirely self-funded and all are doing other degrees (There is no music department at Exeter university). They were brilliant and my highlight was a rendition of my favourite carol "O Holy night" which was so popular they

ended the night by singing it again. I had never heard of the carol until it was requested by a lady in a care home in Margate, when I was a young curate, so we quickly learnt it and sang it at the carol service in the home. The lady died soon after and it has occupied a special place in my heart ever since.



Our services happened as usual (except with some unfortunate microphone trouble at St. Peter's all day) with people braving the icy weather to turn up and worship.

While writing this I am looking forward to (?) my annual revue with our Archdeacon this morning and I have heard that Colaton Raleigh church has officially started a consultation about coming over and joining the RMC. But not to worry about that now – we have bigger fish to fry.

Sunday 18th December – 4th of Advent – the Blessed Virgin Mary (Pink candle)

A very busy day. I will be presiding at both Eucharistic services at St. Peter's and the venerable Trevor Jones will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11am respectively. I will then be presiding at 4pm Carol service at St. Michael's and the 6pm carol service at St. Peter's and Rev. Jean burrows will preside at the Christingle service at All Saints at 3pm in the afternoon. Here are the readings for the normal morning services.

Isaiah 7: 10 – 16. The famous prophesy in Isaiah about a “young woman” giving birth to “Immanuel” – which means God is with us. The word Isaiah uses does not unambiguously suggest a virgin and in the first instance this is supposed to be a sign for king Ahaz in the 8th century BC, but of course it is not time limited and this sign was claimed by Matthew in his gospel to have been fulfilled by the birth of Jesus. A claim that has been upheld and celebrated by Christians ever since.

Romans 1: 1-7. Paul makes his claim that Jesus is at the same time a human being – a Jew descended from the line of David and also declared to be the Son of God through the resurrection. It is pointless trying to come up with any systematic theology regarding the person of Jesus here. When did Jesus become Son of God? At his resurrection as Paul implies here, at his baptism as in Mark, at his conception as in Luke and Matthew, at creation as in John? What they all articulate is the triumph of God breaking through into the human consciousness.

Matthew 1: 18-25. The circumstances surrounding the conception of Jesus is told from Joseph’s point of view. His suspicions were apparently allayed by a dream in which Jesus’ conception was declared to be a work of God rather than any human male and Joseph’s involvement is ruled out by the line that states that he had no sexual relations with Mary until after Jesus was born. This emphasises that this Jesus is part of a dramatic new development in God’s involvement and interaction with humanity – our salvation history. The naming of Jesus is more important than the manner of his conception. The Hebrew meaning of the name Jesus is “God is our salvation”, which Matthew helpfully tells us non-Hebrew speakers in his text. The other name, more a title, given to him is Emmanuel – God is with us. The presence of Jesus with us frames Matthew’s gospel which ends with the words “And behold I am with you till the end of the age”. Jesus the man may have been localized to a certain time and space, but his Spirit, the presence of God is omnipresent.

Thought for the day

That we have been able to maintain so many services across three busy churches while I have been, officially at any rate, on my own in the RMC, has only been possible through the valued help and support of so many retired priests giving their time to support our collective ministry. That is why I have invited them all, including our church wardens, to a special Thank you party at the vicarage this Saturday. Special thanks must also be paid to Fran, our administrator, who has to coordinate so many different people with different

personalities and different strengths to make sure that our ministry across what is quite a wide area, is maintained with hardly any hiccups at all. (Organizing clergy has sometimes been likened to herding cats). The dedication and hard work of our wardens must also be acknowledged. Turning up not only to the usual services but having to plan and coordinate weddings baptisms and funerals throughout the year. The church is famously described as being a body and no part of the body is unimportant. PCC members, flower arrangers, church cleaners, choir members, bell ringers, flag raisers, coffee makers, meal preparers, and everyone who turns up to participate in our worship. I consider myself blessed that I am involved with such a wonderful community and thank God for all the green shoots I see where people respond to God's call on their lives, time and talents. I am taking the time to say a big thank you now, while most people are still in situ before disappearing to be with family for Christmas. Have a very happy Christmas and a blessed new year.

The Prayer for Today is by David Silk

**Almighty and everlasting God,
You have stooped to raise fallen humanity
By the child-bearing of blessed Mary;
Grant that we who have seen your glory
Revealed in our human nature,
And your love made perfect in our weakness,
May daily be renewed in your image,
And conformed to the pattern of your son,
Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Love and peace,
Martin