

Dear friends,

Happy Christmas to Everyone

Having checked on how the first Christingle service went at All Saints, presided over by Rev. Jean Burrows and presided at two Carol services myself on Sunday at St. Michael's and St. Peter's, our Christmas services are up and running and "delivering Christmas" to appreciative congregations. But all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy and I've both hosted and been a guest at two lovely parties over the weekend as well – the only thing that is complaining is my waistline.

Note: There will be no email next week. Speak to you all you all in the new year!



Christmas Eve – Saturday 24th December

Reverend Jean Burrows will be presiding at the Christingle services at St. Michael's at 3pm and at St. Peter's at 5pm and I will be presiding at the Carol service at All Saints at 6pm and at Midnight Mass at St. Peter's (starts at 11pm). The midnight Mass readings are set III in the lectionary

Isaiah 52:7-10, Hebrews 1: 1-4 and John 1: 1-14

Sunday 25th December – Christmas day – White candle for Jesus Christ on the Advent wreath.

The Venerable Trevor Jones will preside at the 8am service at St. Peter's and I will preside at the 10am service. Canon Mike Williams will preside at All Saints and St. Michael's at 9.30 and 11am respectively. I have chosen set I for the Christmas day services which are as follows.

Isaiah 9: 2-7. This passage is an example of how a passage can be so relevant at different stages of history. Originally, this may have been composed for the coronation of king Hezekiah where a new king was symbolically “born” and was a sign of renewed vision, peace, hope and joy. It was probably used at different coronation services as well, each one heralding a new and fresh age. Christians took this sign of new hope, often dashed in the reality of many new kings of Israel as being finally fulfilled in the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Titus 2: 11-14. The Grace of God has appeared “bringing salvation to all” so the vision is universal but it also has the function of forming a dedicated “Israel-like” community of believers for whom there is an ethical dimension to how we respond. The term Saviour, used extensively in the scriptures is also used in the imperial cult to describe Caesar and problems with the translation of verse 13 leaves it very uncertain whether Jesus is being referred to as God (as in our translation) or not.

Luke 2: 1-14 (15-20). Luke sets his narrative of the birth of Jesus not against the political backdrop of the heavy-handed local king Herod but against the background of the Roman Empire. He gives Emperor Octavian his honorific title Augustus (bestowed on him in 27BC) and poets wrote of his peaceful ideals and how his reign would usher in a golden age based in virtue. Great hope was vested in him. Ancient monuments refer to him as “Saviour”. So, Luke presents the Roman empire as benign and full of hope rather than a belligerent aggressive bully. But the failed hopes and aspirations vested in Augustus soon turned to dust in the reality of vain, greedy and bloodthirsty emperors. The true contrast here is being made between the misplaced hopes and dreams placed in secular power and the true hope being offered by a true saviour.

Thought for the day

The fervour of the Argentinian fans following their side as they eventually triumphed over France in the world cup final was so passionate and single minded that it is easy to see why some people make the comparison between football and religion. The emotion, the crying, both in victory and defeat, the thinly veiled aggression, ecstatic singing are sights to behold. When football and religion get mixed together in sectarianism (Rangers and Celtic comes to mind) you have a cauldron that often boils over into barely controllable and dangerous chaos.

The devotion and love given to a side, (either a club side or a national one) is unmerited and generally showered unconditionally on “my” team.

If I were to make a comparison, In religious terms, Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Orthodox etc. might be our club side, our national team would be Christianity, Islam, Judaism etc but the game of football itself would transcend all of those subdivisions and be what unites us all – a belief in God, his goodness and the belief that God is morally good, true and merciful.

The worst traits of some football supporters is that their support can be completely uncritical leading to unjustified denunciations of all other teams and slavish support of a team even when you know things are wrong.

You can push all analogies far too far of course, but having a bit more fervour (devotion?) in religion might not sometimes be such a bad thing so long as we always remember that no matter what club (or denomination) we support or what country (or world Religion) we support, the game of football (or God himself and divine virtue) is bigger than everything else.

The Prayer for Today comes courtesy of CAFOD and is a prayer for individuals or families to pray for themselves and others this Christmas

Light a candle and remember that Jesus is the light of the world. Think about how you can share the light of Jesus in our world throughout the Christmas season.

You could say the following prayer together:

**God of light,
you came to live among us
to bring us life and light.
Hear our prayers as we celebrate your birth:
(*share your family's intentions here*)
Help us to be a light for others.
Amen.**

Love and peace,
Martin