Dear friends,

# Praying that you have a very Happy Christmas and a wonderful new year!

**Sunday** was a tiring but very rewarding day with four services that included two Carol services – both very well attended – at St. Michael's and St. Peter's, and both followed by Mince pies and mulled wine. Amidst the febrile atmosphere we are living through we are modelling cool and calm heads and directing our energy towards worshipping God.

**At** the St. Peter's carol service, we raised over £300 for the "children's society" charity and I am pleased to announce that this winter we have collected £2470 (so far) from the RMC in unneeded winter fuel allowances £600 of which has been distributed to needy families via the headmaster at St. Peter's school to make sure that their Christmas time is a bit more comfortable while the rest gets sent to various charities and worthy causes. A magnificent Christmas gift to so many people.

**In fact,** Budleigh, East Budleigh and Otterton all have their respective "Relief in need" charities (I am a trustee on each one) which distribute help throughout the year but have all been extra generous leading up to Christmas.

# Friday 24th December - Christmas Eve

I am presiding at the Carol service at All Saints, East Budleigh at 6pm and at Midnight Mass at 11pm at St. Peter's.

# Saturday 25th December – Christmas Day

Archdeacon Trevor Jones is presiding at the 8am and the 10am at St. Peter's, Fr. Peter is presiding at the 9.30am at All Saints and I am presiding at the 11am at St. Michael's.

# Sunday 26th December – St. Stephen's Day (Boxing Day)

There is just ONE service across the RMC on Boxing Day after all the Christmas services, and I will be presiding at that 10am service at St. Peter's. There are too many readings to give my usual precis on their spiritual meaning or theological truths contained within them, so I'll give my interpretation of the Christmas mystery as a whole.

## Love came down at Christmas

The phrase "Love came down at Christmas" presumes a two-tier universe with God "up there" and us "down here". Nowadays of course we know there is no "up there", but we still know what is meant by that beautiful phrase. The love of God was revealed and made manifest at Christmas and came from within the created order. The realm of our Father in heaven is of a different dimension in His absolute essence but is also within us at every moment of our lives. This is the real meaning of the Christmas mystery, that God is with us and always was. The Orthodox church divides these two aspects of God into his "essence", which is unknowable, and lies beyond our comprehension – this is the God that we and Jesus refer to as the Father and the "energies" of God, the divine that can be seen, touched and directly experienced within this materiel world that was revealed to us through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. God made flesh, Jesus Christ, is known as the incarnation and provides a very different and positive understanding of redemption being not so much "cross- centred" but more centred in his being ever present to our lives. God's love for us is shown on the cross for sure, but the prior revelation of God with us – Emmanuel – was made known to us in the revelation of the incarnation at the first Christmas.  None of the elements of the Christ mystery can be separated out from each other for sure. The cross and resurrection and the giving of the Holy Spirit are the crowning glory of the more fundamental revelation that God is here, with us and always will be. God is Emmanuel – God is with us.

## The Christmas prayer I have chosen is the second part of the prayer known as the "Angelus" and combines the incarnation, passion, cross and resurrection into one concise prayer and prays that this Christ mystery dwells within us.

**Pour forth, we beseech you O Lord**
**Your grace into our hearts, that we**

**To whom the incarnation of Christ your Son,**
**Was made known by the message of an angel,**
**May be brought by his passion and cross**
**To the glory of his resurrection,**
**Through the same Christ our Lord.**
**Amen.**

Love and peace,
Martin