

Events and Services for Advent and Christmas at St Helena's

Sunday 2 December	Christmas Fayre 3pm Christingle Service 6pm
Wednesday 5 December	Choir practice from 12 Luncheon Club Christmas Dinner 12.30pm
Sunday 9 December	9.30am Morning Eucharist Service
Tuesday 11 December	Ladies' Carol Service 10am, followed by refreshments
Wednesday 12 December	11am Advent 'Any Questions' with the Chaplain in the hot seat
Thursday 13 December	Christmas Dance
Sunday 16 December	9.30am Morning Service 6.30pm Nine Lessons and Carols, followed by mulled wine and mince pies
Tuesday 18 December	Christmas Coffee Morning in the Vicarage, from 10.30am
Wednesday 19 December	Advent craft morning in church from 10.30
Sunday 23 December	9.30am Morning Service
Christmas Eve	6.30pm Crib Service and Holy Communion
Christmas Day	10am Christmas Day Communion Service.

All are Welcome

St Helena's Church, Larnaca

Christmas Pastoral letter 2012



Dear Friends

In this part of the world we are very used to seeing the kind of woodcut nativity scenes that form the illustration of this Pastoral Letter. Some of us sometimes long for the familiar north European symbols and images of Christmas such as holly, ivy, mistletoe and spruce trees. But, surely, we have to admit that there is something incredibly appropriate about using olive wood to make these nativity sets. They remind us also that we are closer geographically to the events of Christmas than most of us have ever been, and that we live in a holy land. Jesus himself grew up among olive trees. He knew little or nothing of snow, and the people he spoke with and lived with were far more familiar with fig trees than figgy pudding.

That ought to make it easier for us to appreciate the underlying message of incarnation – that God became one of us and lived with us – than it is for those who have differently manufactured Christmases elsewhere. And yet we need to beware of too sentimental a religious view of this part of the world. Way back in the nineteenth century an American bishop thought that he could get closer to the real Christmas if he came to Bethlehem. What he found when he got there was just another town, not unlike the towns he had left behind in America. As a result of his experience he wrote the carol ‘O Little Town of Bethlehem,’ reflecting on the sheer ordinariness of the place and wonder that it should have been chosen in a special way with the conclusion that the way to find the real Christmas is for Christ to be born not in any particular place, but rather in each of us.

What does that mean in practice though? At its most basic it means not giving up on the world and not giving up on faith. Life 2000 years ago contained as many disappointments, disillusionments and dangers as does our life today. Many people had given up on hope and faith even if they tried to live good lives, as have many people today. There are plenty of reasons for that. As I write the people of Israel and Gaza are in the midst of war with many casualties and no apparent hope of peace. Evil seems to be

stronger than good in Syria. There is widespread disillusion about some of the results of the so-called Arab Spring. There is something particularly sad about hopes and expectations not being realised and met, when things promise much and produce little. And that is true of each of us personally as well as in the political sphere. Faith is a fragile thing, and easy to lose. Ironically it looks for evidence when of course faith is what you need to have when you do not have evidence.

The birth of Jesus was regarded by the first Christians as evidence of God’s continuing interest in his world. It was for them the engine for rekindling both faith and hope. And it happened in an ordinary place. In the Old Testament a prophet once spoke to a demoralised community and told them that if they wanted evidence that God still cared they should consider the birth of a child. The child of which the prophet spoke was to be called Emmanuel, meaning God is with us. Even in dark days people fall in love and give birth. Children play with whatever they can find for toys. Kites fly as well as missiles. Recently I was in the Lebanon at a time of crisis when Governments were urging their citizens not to travel there. But in fact life went on. People did their Christmas shopping, made a living, talked about their children’s schooling. It is in that ordinariness, in the midst of all that militates against faith and hope that God is to be found.

And that is a message of Christmas that is universal. Do come along to St Helena’s this year and help us to celebrate it afresh.

Sue joins me in wishing you all a very Happy Christmas

John Holdsworth **Chaplain**