

Church Newsround – December 2008

St Peters Dunston Christmas Tree Festival

December 5th 6.30 pm

Carols in the churchyard. Accompanied by the Silver Sounds Brass Band. 'Light a Light' on the Christmas tree in memory of a loved one only £5.00 (proceeds shared with local charity). Seasonal refreshments (please bring mince pies). Bring a torch and a warm coat.

December 6th & 7th 2pm - 5pm

Come and view the Christmas trees in St Peters decorated by families and groups from the village. Free entry. Enjoy refreshments and listen to festive music. Bottle Tombola - Donations needed please. Colouring and games for children. Raffle. We hope you can join us. Contact Kay on 321780 for details

St Wilfrid's Church Hall SALE :- China, Toys, Books and general Odds & Ends. Tea & Coffee available. Saturday 6th December.

St Oswald's Candle lit Carol Service Sunday 21st at 4.30pm. Coffee, Mulled Wine & Mince Pies afterwards.

December 25th – Happy Birthday Jesus

Bishops Letter – Christmas - No Time to be Happy?

At no other time of the year do so many wish so often for so many other people to be happy. Cries of "Happy Christmas" fill the cold winter air as seasonal greetings are shared with family, friends – and complete strangers. Why?

Well, one reason is that because Christmas marks the birth of Christ, we say "Happy Christmas" to everyone just as we wish everyone to be happy on their particular birthday. Jesus is "everyman" so on His birthday we wish for everyone to be happy.

Also, just as we wish people "Happy Easter" because the resurrection of Christ is something which should gladden everyone's heart, so the good news of God incarnate as the Babe of Bethlehem should lift the spirits of everyone we meet.

However, we are left wondering whether the majority of people who wish each other "Happy Christmas" actually have the true meaning of Christmas in mind when they do so. Is it not just a figure of speech or a way of speaking?

We have got to say something, so "Happy Christmas" will serve as well as anything else.

Yes, it is a sort of mantra or social convention, but that should not lead us to conclude that it is totally vacuous or meaningless. The clue is in the word itself.

"Happy" has a history. It derives from the Nordic word "hap" which means

something which occurs by chance. So when we wish one another "Happy Christmas" we could just be saying "be lucky". But then we are reminded that some modern versions of the New Testament use the word "happy" to translate a Greek word which is usually rendered as "blessed" – so "blessed are the peacemakers" becomes "how happy are those who make peace".

This gets much closer to what Christians mean by "Happy Christmas". To be happy is not merely about being lucky. It is about being blessed by God with the gifts of love, acceptance and forgiveness which are ours by grace rather than chance.

"Happy Christmas" is not just a greeting: it is a prayer – a prayer for God's blessing to be on those we meet at a time of year when we especially remember how God in Christ came to meet us.

So may you all have a very happy and blessed Christmas.

+ John Lincoln

Mission Accomplished?

In March next year, if all goes according to plan, the new Metheringham Cross will be in place at the heart of our village. You may already have an idea as to what it will look like, from the picture on the War Memorial Garden notice board. It will certainly be a huge improvement on what we have at the moment, but what significance will it have?

The RNLI is, understandably, one of Britain's favourite charities, we delight in successful rescues! But, if there were no shipwrecks, no need for rescues at sea, it would be a completely pointless organisation - unless you like orange boats.

The church and its emblem of the cross would also be a pointless organisation, although it might be a popular club for those who like church services, if there was no need for each and every one of us to be rescued. Jesus entered this world at the first Christmas on a rescue mission and the cross was to be the means by which he was going to achieve it. Christians and non-Christians alike have every right to enjoy all the trimmings of Christmas – presents, parties, trees, decorations, family gatherings, mince pies, the lot – in moderation! But, come Twelfth Night, the party is over. The Metheringham Cross will, I hope, ask the question of those who pass by, 'What's the meaning of this?' The answer that Christians have freely received and long to share with others is that God launched an extraordinary rescue operation on the first Christmas Day, achieved it on the first Good Friday and celebrated it on the first Easter Day. The rescuer has arrived and the result? New life and eternal life for all who avail themselves of it – the most amazing Christmas gift ever!

The Rev'd John Tyrrell

Parish Registers

Funerals

We pray for those departed

Rosemary Ulliyatt Died 20th Oct 08.

Annie Hodson Died 25th Oct 08.

Baptism

Welcome to the Church

Isaac Bavaka Hill at St Wilfrid's 30th Nov 08.

Deanery Synod 16th October - Report

The Chief Exec of North Kesteven District Council, Ian Fytche, gave a talk on "Sustainable Communities". These are some of the points he made. The District population is now 104,000, but this will grow by 42% by 2026, and by 2029 there will be a 140% increase in people in the 75+ age group. So there is a need for more affordable housing, with local Doctors, Dentists etc. Transport needs to be improved. And although these are safe communities, with crime going down, there is a need to build respect between people - different age groups, immigrants etc. He pointed out that Fuel Poverty – where households use more than 10% of their income on fuel – is twice the national average in NKDC. This needs to be addressed. He realised what a huge resource the church people in the District are, and said NKDC is keen to listen and act on suggestions for building stronger communities. He is himself a member of his local church PCC, and his talk was positive, challenging and believable.

It was also reported that not all churches in the Deanery will have paid their Parish Share in full, and that next year's Parish Share will rise by 4.5%, which each church will pay, on top of any shortfall they may have incurred. And even though the Deanery cannot afford it at the present level of funds, the Bishop's Council have agreed that a stipendiary priest-in-charge be appointed, responsible for six parishes in the Eastern Cluster – Branston, Potterhanworth, Nocton, Dunston, Metheringham and Blankney, leaving Stephen Jones-Crabtree as incumbent of the Washingborough Group. For more information, please speak to your Deanery Rep or to Charles. Adrienne Jones, St Peter's Deanery Rep.

THANKS

We are now coming to the end of 2008 and on behalf of St Wilfrid's Church I thank all those who have supported the Church during the year in many different ways, planned giving, gift aid, donations, helping out at fund raising/social events including gifts.

As you are aware as treasurer my specific responsibility is looking after the finances and I therefore have to mention planned giving and gift aid which I have to say a big thank you because during this difficult period it is very often that charities, such as churches, can find giving reduces.

If anyone wishes to discuss planned giving, gift aid or how to remember St Wilfrid's in your "will" please let myself or one of the churchwardens know.

Bequests left to the church can have restrictions put on them e.g. Fabric Fund, Bell Fund or other actual gifts.

If you wish to enquire about any other aspect of church life please make contact with the Churchwardens

RTB

Dunston Parish News

All of us at St Peters are pleased to share with you all our Christmas events and services which we hope you will join us for and participate in. Our new family service is a delight and one not to be missed with all the village school children in attendance.

Additional Services for December;

12th Joint Carol Service 6pm

15th Family Service 2.15pm

Christmas Day 10am

Christmas Eve Midnight Mass - Chapel

Do join us for what promises to be a wonderful weekend.

Many of you will be aware work has started on repairs to St Peters and will be on going for several weeks. Please be tolerant to the minor disruption which is all in a good cause.

A huge thank you to those who worked hard to restore our church clock to working order and many people have commented on how wonderful it is to have the it chiming again. Special thanks to 'the official time keeper of Dunston.'

Thank you to all those who support St Peters through worship and our fundraising events which are all vital to the continuation of our village church and the wider community in Dunston.

Enjoy the festive season and join us in St Peters when time allows.

St Peter's School

The last few weeks have been as busy as ever and I have a lot to tell you!

On October 15th we held our annual non-uniform day for the People First charity who support children in the Bihar region of India and we raised over £120. On the 21st we had our Cluster Day when we join with children from Nocton and Potterhanworth Primary Schools for a variety of fun activities. Our first monthly church service was held at St. Peter's on the 23rd and was enjoyed by all.

In November we had a series of assemblies about Remembrance and on the 11th the children observed the two minutes silence immaculately. This was very moving indeed. The next day our shoeboxes were collected as part of Operation Christmas Child. Each child took their box personally to the van and I am pleased to say that we had 56 in total.

On the 15th the Friends of Dunston organised a Family Games Evening in Dunston village hall. This was a great success with well over 70 tickets sold. Everyone enjoyed the quiz, beetle drive and bingo; and the children loved the disco at the end!

Finally, dates for your diary:

School Christmas Fayre, at school, Friday December 12th (3.00 until 4.30).

Christmas Play (Classes 2 and 3), Dunston Village Hall, Tuesday, December 9th, dress rehearsal in the afternoon and final performance at 6.30 (both by ticket only, please contact the school).

School Carol Service in St. Peter's, Monday December 15th at 1.45 (including a Nativity play by Class 1). All welcome!

Graham Boyall Headteacher

Metheringham Over 60's Club.

We have been very busy with our fund raising over the past few months and raised the magnificent sums of £220 at the Harvest, £291 at the Fayre & Feast and at the November Coffee Morning £641, a big thank you to all who gave so generously and then came to support us on the day of the event. At the Coffee Morning the Number of Sweets in a Tin was 110 this was guessed correctly by Wendy Karran. The Teddy's name was Cecil, as no-one guessed correctly our President was asked to choose a number from the list and the lucky recipient was Peggy McCormick. December meeting is the Christmas Dinner for those members who have qualified by attending the two requisite meetings and have a ticket for this event. Visitors are welcome to join us again in January 2009.

On behalf of the Committee I wish our Members, Friends & Supporters A Happy Christmas and All Good Wishes for the New Year.

Diary Dates.

9th January 2009 G & T

4th February Nick & Anita

4th March AGM

Ann Crooks. Secretary

Thousands turn to online prayer and advice as financial situation worsens

Web users looking for support during the current financial crisis have boosted traffic to a Church of England website section focusing on debt advice by over 70 per cent, and increased visitor numbers to the Church's online prayer page by more than a quarter.

The Matter of Life and Debt website section contains a new 'debt spiral feature' to help family threatened by the credit crunch, and useful advice for those worried about debt. It has seen a 71 per cent increase in traffic in recent weeks, and can be viewed by visiting www.cofe.anglican.org/debt.

A new Prayer for the Current Financial Situation has been viewed more than 8,000 times since it was published online in September - increasing traffic to the popular Prayers for Today section by 28 per cent. It can be found online at www.cofe.anglican.org/prayers.

Prayer for the current financial situation

Lord God, we live in disturbing days: across the world, prices rise, debts increase, banks collapse, jobs are taken away, and fragile security is under threat. Loving God, meet us in our fear and hear our prayer: be a tower of strength amidst the shifting sands and a light in the darkness; help us receive your gift of peace, and fix our hearts where true joys are to be found, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PP

Is climate change really serious?

Not everyone believes that climate change is happening, despite (in the UK at least) in recent years the warmest months since records began, and unusual rains and floods! When members of the general population were asked if they thought that global warming was a serious problem, two-fifths, 37%, in the UK

said it was not a serious problem, against just over half that proportion, 22%, in Europe as a whole.

A similar percentage in the UK, 39%, feels that the seriousness of worldwide climate change has been exaggerated in spite of melting ice-caps, rising ocean levels and shifts in weather patterns. Two-thirds, 68%, of those under 40 consider that global warming or climate change is the most serious problem affecting the planet against just two-fifths, 40%, of those under 55 (who tend to put poverty, lack of food and drinking water as the top problems). The Barna organisation has researched a similar question in the United States, but also specifically asked Christians their opinion as well. A fifth, 22%, of Americans are not certain that global warming is happening, and a further 15% haven't decided whether it is or not. That leaves 63% overall who do believe climate change is occurring, which compares with just 36% of Catholics and 45% of Protestants.

What is interesting about such statistics is a totally different question: What has to happen in order to convince people that something is true? How do people perceive information? Some Christian people, for example, seeing their own congregation growing, do not believe that numbers overall are declining. Seeing beyond the local is never easy, but as these figures about climate change suggest, absolutely crucial!

© Dr Peter Brierley is a church consultant who may be reached on peter@brierleyres.com

Winter Solstice

A Midwinter festival has been a part of life since pre-Christian times. When the hours of daylight are fewest, the warmth of the sun weakest, and life itself seemingly at a standstill, our ancestors, the pagan peoples of Europe and Western Asia, kept festival by lighting bonfires and decorating their buildings with evergreens.

Perhaps they believed that the dying sun could be enheartened by fire, and the life of the buried seed assured by the presence of evergreen branches. With the advent of Christianity, the Spring gods became identified with Christ, and the birthday of the sun with the birthday of the Light of the World.

The early church father Tertullian did not approve of Christmas decorations. "Let those who have no light in themselves light candles!... You are the light of the world, you are the tree ever green...." But by the time of St Gregory and St Augustine, four centuries later, this had changed. Pope Gregory instructed Augustine not to worry about harmless outward customs, as long as the right God be worshipped through them. And so many Anglo-Saxon customs were never discarded, but simply endowed with a new significance.

By 1598 one John Stow of London wrote how: "Against the feast of Christmas, every man's house, as also their parish churches, were decked with holme, ivie, bayes, and whatsoever the season of the yeare afforded to be greene."

PP

St Nicholas

Father Christmas seems to be as old as Europe. Once he was Woden, lashing his reindeer through the darkness of northern midwinter. Then he encountered the Church, and She transformed him into a saint, the much-

loved Nicholas, Bishop of Myra (in south-west Turkey) in the fourth century. St Nicholas became the patron saint of children, and was given 6 December as his day.

Since the 6th century St Nicholas has been venerated in both East and West, though virtually nothing is known of his life. Some believe he may have been one of the fathers at the Council of Nicea (325), imprisoned during the Emperor Diocletian's persecution.

According to legend, Nicholas was an extremely generous man. He revived three schoolboys murdered by an innkeeper in a tub of pickles. He rescued three young women from prostitution by giving their poverty-stricken father three bags of gold. (Hence the use of three gold balls as the pawnbroker's signs.)

Over the centuries many, including children, sailors, unmarried girls, pawnbrokers and moneylenders have claimed him as their patron.

Perhaps it was on account of S Nicholas' generosity that in recent centuries children began to write little notes sometime before 6 December, to tell him about the toys they specially wanted. These notes were then left on the windowsill at night - or else on a ledge in the chimney.

But St Nicholas Day chanced to lie in the magnetic field of a much more potent festival.... and after awhile his activities were moved towards Christmas. Then in Bavaria the children still left their notes on the window sill, but they addressed them to Liebes Christkind - Krishinkle as they knew him - and the saint's part in the matter was simply to deliver the letters in heaven.

The most popular result of the cult of St Nicholas has been the institution of Santa Claus. He is based on Nicholas' patronage of children and the custom in the Low Countries of giving presents on his feast. Santa Claus has reached his zenith in America, where the Dutch Protestants of New Amsterdam (New York) united to it Nordic folklore legends of a magician who both punished naughty children and rewarded good ones with presents.

PP

Winter Walking

If you plan to eat too much this Christmas Day, why not at least stagger out for a traditional Boxing Day walk?

The Festival of Winter Walks is the Ramblers' Association's annual festival of walks which are open to everyone. There are many hundreds of walks happening across England, Scotland and Wales. Visit: www.ramblers.org.uk/winterwalks or www.mapoffestivalwalks for details.

Possible Christmas Reading ?

The Vicar of Baghdad - fighting for peace in the Middle East

By Canon Andrew White, Lion Hudson, £9.99

"I live with a price on my head ...The kind of people that I spend my time engaging with are not usually very nice. On the whole nice people do not cause wars ."

Andrew White is one of a tiny handful of people trusted by virtually every side in the complex Middle East. Political and military solutions are constantly put forward, and constantly fail. Andrew offers a different approach, speaking as a

man of faith to men of faith. Compassionate and shrewd, gifted in human relationships, he has been deeply involved in the rebuilding of Iraq. His first-hand connections and profound insights make this a fascinating document.

PP

I Can Make Angel Things for Christmas

by Joceyln Miller, Lion Children's, £5.99

Angels are part of the magic and sparkle of Christmas. This book provides lots of ideas on how to borrow some of the angels' legendary sparkle for making decorations, cards, gifts, treats and more.

Step by step instructions make it easy for everyone to get great results using paper, paint, glue, and - of course - foil, glitter, sequins, tinsel, and anything else that sparkles!

At the same time, the angel theme provides the perfect link to the Nativity story and the values that are at the heart of the Christmas festival.

PP

What are angels like?

Try asking school children that question, and you'll get some imaginative replies!

Like these....

I only know the names of two angels. Hark and Harold. - Gregory, 5

Everybody's got it all wrong. Angels don't wear halos anymore. I forget why, but scientists are working on it. Olive, 9

It's not easy to become an angel! First, you die. Then you go to heaven, then there's still the flight training to go through. And then you got to agree to wear those angel clothes.

Matthew, 9

Angels work for God and watch over kids when God has to do something else. Max, 7

My guardian angel helps me with maths, but he's not much good for science. Henry, 8

Angels don't eat, but they drink milk from holy cows. Jack, 6

Angels talk all the way while they're flying you up to heaven. The basic message is where you went wrong before you got dead. Daniel, 9

When an angel gets mad, he takes a deep breath and counts to ten. And when he lets out his breath, somewhere there's a tornado. Reagan, 10

Even in those days

A Sunday school teacher asked her class why Joseph and Mary took Jesus with them to Jerusalem. A small child replied: 'They couldn't get a baby sitter?'

Angel tidings

The little boy was to be an angel in the Christmas play and his one line was: "Behold, I bring you good tidings." He asked what tidings were and his mother explained that the word meant news. On the night of the play, the youngster had stage fright and, after a long silence, blurted out: "Hey, have I got news for you!"

Christmas Carols

One night Freda went carol singing. She knocked on the door of a house and began to sing. A man with a violin in his hand came to the door. Within half a minute tears were streaming down his face! Freda went on singing for half an hour, every carol she knew - and some she didn't. As last she stopped. The man had continued to weep gently throughout her performance. "I understand," she said softly. "You are remembering your happy childhood Christmas days. You're a sentimentalist!" "No, not exactly," he replied in a choked sort of voice. "I'm a musician!"

Let's have a less wasteful Christmas this year

Amid all the rejoicing at Christmas, it is easy to forget our good intentions about recycling. Overwhelmed by a mountain of discarded packaging, tinsel, food scraps and other rubbish, we have so much to distract us. But it's worth giving some thought to ways in which we can minimise the waste that is created during the festivities.

An estimated one billion Christmas cards and 85 square kilometres of wrapping paper will have to go somewhere. Turkey foil wrap alone will create 3,000 tons of waste.

Also looking for a home will be loads of old electronic gadgets (displaced by new ones). Thousands of mobile phones will be exchanged as gifts (15 million are replaced in the UK each year). According to a survey, each child will expect to receive ten presents, on top of those from parents - and 40 per cent of the toys will be broken within three months.

Hardly any batteries are recycled despite the toxic substances they contain. Although green and blue recycling bins are becoming a familiar sight, the UK still lacks an extensive recycling infrastructure. The nation still creates 150 million tons of rubbish each year, of which 80 per cent is buried. Landfill space is rapidly running out.

The good news is that this year over a million Christmas trees will be recycled and turned into ash or mulch by local authorities, many of which will arrange collection. But that still leaves six million that will be thrown out with the rubbish or left to rot in back yards or gardens.

So what can we do on an individual level? If you have an old mobile phone lying around, you could give it to Community Fonebak, a scheme that recycles phones or repairs and redistributes them around the world (Tel 01708 683436). The project will also give donations to your favourite charity. Christmas cards could be taken to the special bins provided in (or outside) supermarkets. "Think before you throw" is a good motto for all of us. PP

