

Dear Friends,

I wonder how many more re-makes of “Do They Know it’s Christmas?” it will take to solve the world’s wrongs. I’m not knocking the idea, which I think is excellent, but there has to be a limit to the number of times it can be retreaded, and the question then is, do **we** know it’s Christmas, and do we know what that commits us to in terms of giving to the disadvantaged? I wonder what the people who wrote the lyrics had in mind. Do they know that this is generally a time of ostentatious spending and feasting and generally feeling good about life, and they can’t join in, perhaps. And there is the irony, because in most areas of the world where aid is needed, people have a much clearer idea of what the Christian religion believes Christmas is about, than we do in western Europe.

A seasonal advertisement for Scripture Union reports that Helen, aged six, believes that at Christmas we celebrate the birth of Simon Cowell. The so-called ‘Badvent’ award this year, for the most tasteless Advent calendar, has gone to Ann Summers. For each day of the Advent season, leading to the birth of our Lord, purchasers can retrieve a piece of chocolate shaped to represent different parts of the human anatomy. Do we know it’s Christmas?

What Christmas represents for those in the countries of West Africa blighted by Ebola, is hope: a reason to carry on in the face of overwhelming evidence of disaster and tragedy. And this hope is sincere. I have just read a report of a three day fasting prayer vigil in Liberia, organised by Christians who truly believe that because of Christmas this might make a difference. And in this culture of hoping against hope they are much closer than we often are to the witness of the Bible.

People in the time of the first Christmas were living in an occupied country. Many of them felt that the earth was old and weary – it had been going for a long time and there was little evidence for the claims that prophets and writers of old had made about a God who existed and was still interested in love, justice, righteousness and peace. They began to suspect that Christmas had actually happened when they saw the sick healed and the poor being honoured, and a new manifesto for religion being proclaimed. Do we feel that? How do we know Christmas has happened?

For myself, I feel that Christmas has happened in every situation that reminds me of the presence of God and his word, in our world, and in my life. I suppose that’s the idea of incarnation really. Those are the situations where community works, where loving or even sacrificial care is evident, where people give because it’s the right thing to do, without asking, what’s in it for me? They are the situations where forgiveness is given and accepted, where healing has tangible substance and where faith leads to creativity.

I could make a much longer list and I suspect that each of us could. I think what that points to is that Christmas is not just a season: it’s a way of living that accepts the reality of God made man, wants to live by the message he proclaimed, and gives that practical effect in a community of faith and hope. And that’s a community that teaches generosity, not because it’s a particular time of the year when we celebrate in a particular way, but because what Christmas represents is a reality in our lives for all of the year.

Sue and the Ministry team join me in wishing you all a blessed Christmas.

John.

Advent and Christmas at St Helena's

Throughout the season, the church will continue to meet on Sundays at 9.30 for our main weekly celebration of Holy Communion, to which all are welcome.

In addition:

Wed 3 Dec 1pm Luncheon Club Christmas Dinner in the Upper Room

Sunday 7 Dec 4 – 7.30 Annual Christmas Fair in the Church courtyard

6pm Christingle Service. All welcome – a collection will be taken for local children's charities.

Tuesday 9 Dec 10am Ladies' Carol Service (men also welcome). After the service there are seasonal refreshments in the Upper Room

Wednesday 10 Dec 11am Monthly Quiet Service (marking World Human Rights' day)

Wednesday 24 Dec 6.30 Crib service and Celebration of Holy Communion for Christmas Eve

Thursday 25th Dec 10am Holy Communion for Christmas Day

All Welcome

St Helena's Church Larnaca: Pastoral Letter Christmas 2014

