

Advent and Christmas Services at St Helena's -

4th December 5.30pm

Christingle

13th December 10am

Ladies' Carol Service (gentlemen welcome!) followed by refreshments

18th December 6pm

Nine Lessons and Carols

24th December 6pm

Crib Service

25th December 10am

Christmas Eucharist

There will be a Holy Eucharist starting at 9.30am on every Sunday.



Pastoral Letter ~ Christmas 2016

Dear Friends,

Last year at our Christmas Carol service in Perivolia, one participant wanted to signal her dissatisfaction. She had expected to come to community Christmas Carols, she said, not something that looked a bit more like a church service with prayers and readings. The impression I had was that she thought she had been brought there under false pretences.

That response is a little unusual. Even those who have no religious faith generally accept that carols are Christian songs with Christian intent – indeed sometimes an evangelistic intent of persuading us of the truth of Christianity – and as such they belong to a context of Christian worship. You don't expect Jingle Bells to feature in a service of Nine Lessons and Carols, and you should expect that a Carol singing occasion organized by a Church will be set in a context of worship wherever it's held. So, for the record, any of the advertised events this year that involve carols, will be occasions of worship.

That being said, in some ways the comment is understandable. So many features of Christmas celebration that once had religious significance have now lost that significance, so why not carols. Christmas trees can be any colour and are essentially being treated as home fashion accessories. Advent calendars are distinguished by what kind of chocolates they contain, and are just as likely to have pictures of Disney characters as they are to have pictures of angels. The link between mince pies and babies in a manger has long since been lost, and the main question about mistletoe (which was of course originally a pagan introduction) is who you might fancy kissing underneath it.

It seems to me that there are two approaches to Christmas common amongst those who want to avoid its religious significance

One is the celebration route in which food, parties, family get-togethers, crackers, decorations, Christmas number ones from the last forty years and Morecambe and Wise Christmas specials are significant features.

The other is the caring Christmas, dominated by charity appeals, volunteering for soup kitchens and night shelters, and involving an increased awareness of the poor, the lonely and the homeless in our midst.

Both of these approaches are, of course, capable of Christian interpretation. We celebrate God's becoming a human being. We celebrate the holy family. We celebrate the beginning of a journey that will give new meaning to our lives. And we have a special regard for the poor and disadvantaged, remembering not only the circumstances of Jesus' birth but also the ongoing Christian imperative to care for the marginalized. We have much common cause with non-Christians at this time, and for myself I am quite relaxed about secular Christmas expressions.

But what about the carols? For some they simply bring back memories of Christmas past and are an excuse for nostalgia. For others the beauty of Christian inspired music is an aesthetic experience in itself. But for us they are a part of keeping the story at the heart of the Christian Christmas alive, and a means of reflecting upon it. Some tell the story as the Gospels tell it. Some reflect on the message of peace for our own times, and many describe more fully the fate of Jesus and see the hope of the world not only in his incarnation but in his resurrection. It will be good this year to sing them as Christians. It will be good also to sing them with those who care and those who celebrate whatever their motivation. Happy Christmas to you all from Sue myself, Geoff and Deb.