

Advent Calendars have become a familiar feature of Christmas anticipation. Beginning on December 1st (usually before Advent) and ending on Christmas Eve, I can remember when they were filled with different religious images and pictures, rather than chocolates. The idea is to mark each day as special on the countdown to Christmas, and it has occurred to me that actually there are a number of special days through December that are worth reflecting on as we approach the festival of Christmas, and that help to focus on different aspects of its significance. So here is an abbreviated and rather different Advent Calendar.

December 1st is marked throughout the world as World AIDS Day. This may seem to have little significance for many of us but in parts of the world AIDS is still a huge scourge, affecting many lives. In parts of Africa, including in our partner Diocese of Thika, the Mothers Union has a major role in health education and sees this as a key part of their Christian vocation. I can well remember attending a church service in Uganda some years ago and when it came to remembering the deceased in the intercessions, the list seemed endless. Someone told me that that was just this week's dead, and that now time off work was only allowed for next of kin; otherwise no work would be done. That reminds us of the priorities of the wider world and the hope and need for healing.

December 6th is St Nicholas' Day. This Greek saint is particularly associated with children, to whom he was, it is said, extremely generous. His generosity extended beyond that. The three balls sign outside pawnbrokers, that badge of local poverty, is said to originate in a gift he made. That reminds us of the gift of children, and the scourge of poverty that also blights many lives, and the hope and need for justice.

On December 7th, US flags fly at half mast in remembrance of the attack on Pearl Harbor that brought the USA into the second world war. That reminds us of the peace we have enjoyed during most of our lifetimes, and the need

to have structures and institutions that make war less likely. It also reminds us of our personal responsibility to overcome hatred with love.

Since 1948, December 10th has been marked as International Human Rights Day. After the war, and in knowledge of the Holocaust, the concept of a 'crime against humanity' evolved, and with it the need for a Universal Declaration of what Rights belong simply to being human. That reminds us of the need for international understanding, to see our common humanity and to respect the dignity of all.

A movable feast, this year the Jewish festival of Hannakuh will be celebrated from December 2nd – 10th. This recalls the success of a Jewish resistance movement, which fought the occupying power who had seemed to want to destroy Jewish culture. When they re-entered the Temple in 167BC they found sufficient oil to light the Temple light just for one day, but in fact it lasted eight days, and so the feast has that duration still. It is sometimes called the Festival of Lights. We need always to remember, whoever we are, that we are not the only people who have a history and culture. Some of those those who believed otherwise were slave owners, and who wants to be classed with them.

And, as ever, there are other Christian lights, people we call saints who have enlightened others and reflected the love of God in their own times, that we still remember during this month. Perhaps the best known is Saint Lucy (Santa Lucia) who is especially important in the celebrations of Scandinavians.

Each of these days gives us something to think about and something to pray about. Happy Advent, and when it arrives, on behalf of Fr Geoff and Deb, and of Sue and myself, a very Happy Christmas and fulfilling new year

Forthcoming Events

Every Sunday we have a celebration of Holy Communion at 9.30 am. All are welcome.

Dec 11 10.00am - Ladies' Carol Service. This is a service open to all, but which maintains a traditional title. It lasts about half an hour and is followed by mince pies in the Upper Room.

Dec 16 6pm - A Service of Nine Lessons and Carols. This traditional service follows the core narrative of Christianity and puts Christmas in a Biblical perspective.

Dec 18 6pm - Carols at Pervolia. This popular seasonal service takes place at our Pervolia charity shop, and is followed by refreshments.

Dec 24 6pm - Crib service and first Eucharist of Christmas. At this service the Christmas crib is assembled. Children are especially welcome to help with that. This is also a Eucharist for those unable to come on Christmas morning.

Dec 25 10am - Holy Eucharist for Christmas, with Carols.

St Helena's Anglican Church Larnaca



Pastoral Letter Advent and Christmas 2018