

CHRISTMAS MORNING 2020

I hope that you have all read our first new and free, Quarterly 'News from St Mary's – Inside Out? I said there that "the Incarnation is a messy affair" and those words came to haunt me last Monday on Kingston Field!

If you were there, I too, had my wellies on the filthiest and wettest and coldest of nights and because I was there early...I thought in that 'glass- half- empty' kind of way, 'This is never going to happen!' All the Churches of Woodbridge may have spent over £1,000 for the big screen with the best sound and vision technology, but no-one is going to show. The gazebos were lit up with grown up Nativity characters in each, set up to re-tell their part of the story (including our own glamorous Magi from St Mary's)...and yes, I definitely thought the event was over before it had begun. But I was wrong.

The attraction and draw of a big outdoor singing of carols was too strong and some 300 were cheered to be part of something bigger than any individual church could do...so we sang our hearts out in the driving rain and muddy field and offered up our prayers. It was only the sheep and beasts of burden that were missing; otherwise we had it all!

We know the pandemic is bad news and that moving to 'Tier 4' tomorrow is scary as well. But I do believe that memorable Monday night to 'unwrap the meaning of Christmas' was fantastic. It took us out of our church 'shells' and divisions and, introduced some of that 'rawness' of Bethlehem, that sense of tiredness and anxiety how things would turn out...

As our poem at the back of your service sheet suggests, we can easily forget that "farm door with the thick smell of sheep" as well as the door open in our own time and generation, inviting us in to worship and adore the new-born Child, our incarnate Lord and Saviour.

The second tale I want to share with you concerning the messiness of the Incarnation is a more personal one. St Mary's Rectory in Church Street is No 11 in our own outdoor Nativity Trail around Woodbridge (hard copies are available to take home and sanitise)...

We needed to display the GIFTS of the Wise Men. Liz and I then had a lively debate about which lovely Georgian window to choose and should we keep the net curtains or let people see in? The study windows were ruled out because there are still unpacked books all over the floor and it would give a bad impression of disorganization. That left the kitchen windows...but which one? If the window on the right (and we had by this time decided to remove or lift up the net curtain), well the whole world could see us eating. If we chose the window on the left the world could see the kitchen sink and all our washing up – which hadn't been washed! Well some of you already know our final choice as you have visited the No 11 Stop and seen the Star appearing above the Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. You have also snooped in to check whether we have washed the dishes or not. That's cool!

It doesn't really matter if we call the Incarnation messy or not; the point is that God's coming to us as a fragile, vulnerable and ordinary human child is what makes our celebration of Christmas so real. Who helps with the washing up or the peeling of potatoes is something all of us do, something that Jesus did too. But the story doesn't quite end there. It is who that Jesus grew up to become and be for the world and for us which matters most of all. Just as it is vital for the Church today, to be as imaginative, creative, and joyful as possible in keeping the rumour of God's love for us alive. So I want to end with a Quaker's 'take' on all this: 'What the Donkey Saw' by U.A.Fanthorpe...

Happy Christmas, everyone!

