

## **From the Vicar - December 2023**

I hope that you are well – and more prepared for Advent and Christmas than I am?

Advent is, traditionally, for Christians, a time of waiting, as we watch and prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ. Traditionally, Christmas trees didn't go up in churches and houses until Christmas Eve, and Advent was marked as a distinct season occurring before the season of Christmas. Each year, though, supermarkets and shops seem to begin to celebrate Christmas earlier and earlier; and it becomes harder and harder to observe Advent before our Christmas celebrations begin! The shops are already full of Christmas food and gifts. And Christmas trees are already for sale and, in some places, up and decorated, with the lights switched on. Clergy – and, I expect, many Christians - leap backwards and forwards, during December, between the sombre reflective period of Advent, still observed in most churches and many homes; and the necessarily premature Christmas celebrations in schools, various carol concerts and other Christmassy events.

I love the rising excitement in Advent, as we get nearer and nearer to Christmas. One of my favourite Advent services is the annual Advent Carol Service in All Saints' Church, on Advent Sunday, and I do hope that many of you will join us in church on Sunday 3rd December, at 6pm, as the choirs of Ripon College Cuddesdon and All Saints' Church combine to mark the beginning of Advent with music, poetry, scripture and song.

I am delighted that, this year, we will be hosting an exhibition of seventeenth and eighteenth-century engravings and etchings, in All Saints' Church, to help us to reflect upon the Nativity and Infancy of Jesus of Nazareth – thank you, Robert. Please join us for a reception and open evening at 6pm on Friday 8th December, or contact Robert for a private viewing.

Another exciting addition to our usual Advent programme is a Candlelight Service of Nine Lessons and Carols, on Saturday 16th December, at 6pm. Please do join us in church for this beautiful,

traditional service. We will also have a less formal Crib and Christingle Service, on Christmas Eve, at the slightly later than usual time of 5:30pm. All welcome!

Some of our Advent and Christmas carols seem particularly poignant this year, as we continue to pray for the release of all the Israeli hostages held by Hamas, and the Palestinian political prisoners held by Israel, and as we continue to pray for a lasting peace in Gaza and the Holy Land. Many churches have debated whether to sing the traditional carols (including O Come, O Come Emmanuel; Lo, he comes with clouds descending; and O Little town of Bethlehem) this year, amidst the continuing conflict between Israel and Palestine. I have decided to keep the traditional hymns as part of our worship, and I hope that they will aid us in reflecting prayerfully on the scriptures we hear, on the words we sing, and on the amazing story of a God who loves the world so much that he gave his Son – to be born as one of us: a vulnerable baby born in an occupied country, in dangerous times, and forced to flee his homeland as a refugee. Please join me, this Advent, as we sing these hymns, in praying for a lasting peace in the Holy Land, and for peace on earth.

May God bless you in this time of waiting, and give you his peace.

With my very best wishes for Advent, Christmas and the New Year.

Revd Karen x