

NOTES FROM SOMEWHERE NEAR THE RECTORY

Tony Jefferis

What does the Advent Season mean to you? A calendar filled with daily treats? Keen anticipation of the coming of Christmas? Distaste for all the tawdriness associated with Christmas? The winter festive season incorporating Black Friday, Christmas, and the New Year?

Whatever you feel, we are now in Advent. It varies in length and begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas Day (between November 27 and December 3), ending on Christmas Eve. In the church it is a time of preparation for Christmas, celebrating the birth of Jesus and anticipating his second coming. It is a time of tradition: carol singing, services of nine lessons and carols, mince pies, mulled wine, roasted chestnuts, Christmas trees, charitable giving, and Santa Claus.

The name Santa Claus is an American modification of the Dutch “*Sinterklaas*”, itself a contraction of *Sint Nikolaas*. Saint Nicholas was born in what is modern-day Turkey, about 270 AD. His parents raised him as a Christian but they died when he was still a child. Tradition has it that he sold his inheritance to give to the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He was dedicated to serving God, and he became Bishop of Myra whilst still a young man. Then he was persecuted by the Emperor Diocletian, who imprisoned him with so many other believers that there was no room in the prison for “straightforward” criminals! Eventually he was released, and it is believed he helped write the defining (Nicene) creed of the Christian faith in 325 AD, before dying in 343 AD on December 6th, which is now observed as his saint’s day.

He is a very popular saint, the patron of children, sailors, debtors, pawnbrokers, wronged women, etc. In some European countries his day is observed with gifts for children and general celebration. In Holland, for example, I still warmly remember as a small boy visiting my grandparents in the Hague and being given chocolate letters and presents, three weeks before Christmas Day!

This made me appreciate the culture of others, which in turn, has helped me understand my own. So, whether or not you are familiar with the traditions of the British Christmas, please join us this Advent Season in singing carols at our carol services (one in each village) and enjoying mince pies and hot punch (with or without alcohol). We will do our best to make you feel welcome!

The Rector, Simon Cronk, is away