

From the Vicar - December 2024

I'm writing this in mid-November – but very conscious that it will be December, and Advent, by the time you read it.

I was commenting to friends this evening that I dislike November, when the days are so short and it gets dark so early, but I always feel better once Advent/December starts, with the excitement of carol services, Christmas lunches, parties, concerts, and the countdown to Christmas.

I'm looking forward to Advent and Christmas this year. It's always an exciting time of year. And I hope to see you at some of our services and events during December and January.

Of course, this year, most of us will be mindful of the situation in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and the Middle East, and our Christmas joy will be tempered by grief and sadness over the destruction of lives, homes, hospitals, schools, and businesses in the land where our Saviour was born, and where he exercised much of his healing and teaching ministry.

In August, I attended the Greenbelt festival, near Kettering. At the main Communion Service on the Sunday morning, there was a live link to the Tent of Nations – a Christian-run farm, and peace-making project, in the hills near Bethlehem; and members of the community there joined us for worship.

At the beginning of the service, we were all invited to pick up our bags, chairs and other belongings and relocate to another area of the large field in front of the main stage – a symbolic action reminding us of all the Palestinian people forced, by conflict, to flee their homes and become refugees. Locally baked loaves of bread, in paper bags, were then thrown into the congregation – much as food is distributed from lorries and vans in many conflict zones – and we were encouraged to throw the loaves of bread to those behind us in the crowd, trusting that the communion bread we passed on to other groups would be broken and shared, so that none went without.

We were encouraged to share our bread like those who are still searching for a safe home.

And then, during the service, we sang this adapted version of the Christmas carol, O Little Town of Bethlehem:

1.O little town of Bethlehem

How still we see thee lie

Beyond thy bleak and dreamless sleep

The deathly comets fly

And in your torn streets, haunted

By visions of the dead,

The walls don't shield and can't rebuild

A house of broken bread

2.O mourning souls, together

We feel the shining pain

A sacred light that's seeping out,

Tracing the next bloodstain

For light burns bright in darkness

And in this world of sin

Amidst the tears, the cracks and fears

Are how the light gets in

3.How vulnerably, how painfully

Your mothers now give birth,
As Ramah weeps and Rachel breaks
Her body on the earth
No ear may hear her sorrow
But in that deep release
A requiem of beauty still
Whispers its song of peace

4.O suffering child of Bethlehem
Whose wounds are always fresh
As love weeps from your ragged skin
And hope is housed in flesh
A newborn birthing all things new
When brokenness you mend
Where ruins stand and tears are stopped
And death is not the end.

This December, as we celebrate Advent and Christmas, let's not forget the agony and pain of so many people in the land where Jesus was born.

God bless, and love and prayers
from the Vicar x