

Benefice E-Newsletter
Dawlish with Holcombe and Cofton
10th December 2023



Happy second week of Advent to you and hope your preparations are going well, both spiritual and secular. Only two more weeks after this to the celebrations.

Now for a confession (it's good for the soul). I am an arctophile - for the uninitiated, that is a collector of teddy bears. (See, you learn something new every day.) I know, I'm a sad case, but I can't resist them. My favourite I have had for 73 years on Christmas Day and he still has pride of place in my collection of bears, even though he is a little like me, rather battered and a bit bald in places. But he represents the happiness that children feel, when opening their presents on Christmas Day. Sadly, many children in this country and across the world do not always get these happy experiences now, that many of us had in our childhood.

My teddy also represents several customs which my family had established over the years and suddenly ended with my grandmother's death at the beginning of December, when I was eleven. Nothing was ever the same after that in spite of the efforts of the adults. But like so many customs, over the years they develop into others. And when I sat down to write this letter on what would have been the anniversary of my grandmother's death and subsequently my father, I realised that over the years I had established customs and traditions with my ever-increasing family. But, due to circumstances they have now all changed and new customs will be developed. And it is the same with so many families... In a moment, one's life can be changed forever whether for the good or for the bad. Will, last week wrote of how the anniversary of the death of his baby grandson has now been a focus of something more positive and rewarding for his family.

The seasons of Advent and Christmas do seem to have a number of traditions attached to them and we have long established traditions here... Take Advent as an example - I can remember when Advent services were more gloomy than Lent. No hint of carols, until the crib service, no school Carol concerts. The huge Christmas tree, delivered to St. Gregory's from the Luscombe estate could only be put up on Christmas Eve along with all the flower decorations and the crib. The Carol service was after Christmas when most people were heartily fed up with it all!





But, Alleluia, it is so different now. We let the children in to practice and perform their Christmas celebrations. On Wednesday the Funeral Directors held what has become a tradition, the ecumenical service of carols and readings that enables families to remember their departed and share memories, whilst experiencing again the love from God in their grief.

At St. Mary's on 21st will be a service for the longest night, where anyone who feels overwhelmed by all the Christmas celebrations can come to a much quieter, reflective service of readings, prayers and two carols, whilst remembering loved ones. This service seems to have also become a part of our advent traditions. A real joy now, is the Christmas Tree Festival. A chance to fling the church doors wide and welcome people in to discover our church communities and a maybe get a sense of the real meaning of Christmas. And who can resist a beautifully decorated, sparkly Christmas Tree.

Advent is a time of preparation for the birth of the Son of God; we ought to be happier about it, and show how glad we are to receive this precious gift of love from God. If we are not happy and excited about our preparations for Christ's Birthday, how can we expect those who do not have any faith to even begin to want to understand. Will suggested going carol singing before Christmas. That was something we used to do but mainly around the pubs - better pickings from them for the charities we were supporting! It is a great idea, and a way of proclaiming the message of Christmas.



I wanted to buy a pack of Christmas cards from a well-known supermarket this week and was disappointed to find that not a single card had even the slightest hint of the true meaning of Christmas. It could be 'polar bears sledging day', or 'rabbits playing in the snow day', but not Christ's Birthday. I wanted to shout out: 'Where is Christ in your Christmas' – 'Do you understand what this time is really about?' But I didn't fancy being arrested for being an idiot. And that is a sad reflection on me, that I was not brave enough to challenge the lack of the truth of Christmas. Maybe we should have more courage and speak up for our Lord at this time.



But sadly there is one thing that has not changed over the centuries and that is the level of poverty in the world. One tradition that tells us Christmas is coming, is the endless variations on the troubles of Mr.

Scrooge, whether traditional, musical or the muppet version, the theme is the same. The hardship of so many families, and the callous disregard from the rich. But this is one area we can help. Until a few years ago it was the custom at the Crib service to have a collection of toys for Dr. Barnardo's, until they announced they were not receiving any more toys. It was our way of doing something to help bring some joy to the children. There is still a great need for help as the level of poverty increases and the donations to the food banks are desperately needed as the demand grows. It is one way we can show our



love for our neighbour. Perhaps with the tins of soup and packets of pasta we can add some Christmas treats for these families.

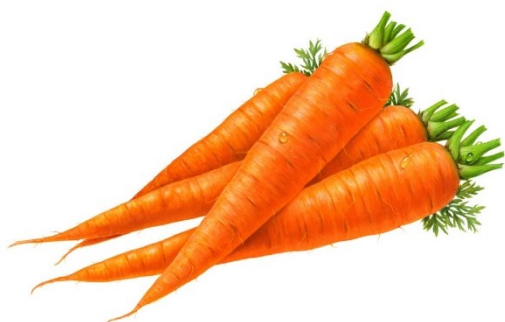


Despite being the story of the birth of a king, at the heart of the nativity are people who are marginalised and outcast. A young girl, Mary, chosen to give birth to the Son of God. Humble shepherds invited to be amongst the first to meet the new king. And Jesus himself, who was born in squalid conditions and soon became a refugee. Nothing Has Changed.

Thank you for reading results of my rambling thoughts and I hope that whatever family traditions to share this Christmas they will bring happiness to you all. Enjoy your Advent, rejoice at Christmas and give thanks for the gift of Christ from our loving God.

Just to leave you with a smile, I hope and funnier than the jokes you will get in your Christmas cracker, I have one of my favourite children's Christmas poems.

The Rabbit's Christmas Carol By Kit Wright.



I'm sick as a parrot,
I've lost me carrot,
I couldn't care less if it is Christmas Day
I'm sick as a parrot
I've lost me carrot
So get us a lettuce or.....GO AWAY!

May you have plenty of carrots this Christmas!

And may I thank you all for the amazing, love, support, and prayers I have received from so many of you over this year. I am sure if Barry was able, he would thank you as well. Have happy joyful Christmas and I pray that 2024 will be a year of peace for you all. Love and blessings - Margaret.

Benefice Services

10th December: 2nd Sunday of Advent

9.30am St George's – Morning Worship

10am St Gregory's – Holy Communion

11am St Mary's – Holy Communion



13th December

10am St Gregory's – Midweek Holy Communion

6pm – St Gregory's – Christmas Tree Festival Grand Opening

17th December: 3rd Sunday of Advent

9.30am St George's – Holy Communion

10am St Gregory's – Greg's @ 10

11am St Mary's – Holy Communion

4pm St Mary's – Carol service

6.30pm St Gregory's – Carol service

Tuesday Prayer Meeting on Zoom

Please do join us on Tuesday at 9am for a half hour of prayer.

We meet on Zoom. Just click on this [link](#) or go to

<https://zoom.us/join> and enter: Meeting ID: 575 020 5964 and
Passcode: 850653.



Advanced notice: Men's Breakfast

The next one will be held at St Gregory's, on January 8th at 9am. (These are always the first Monday of the month – unless there's a bank holiday!) If you're a man who enjoys breakfast and would like to come along, please do contact Ray Williams directly:

bevray@outlook.com

St Gregory's Kids Swap Shop

The final Swap Shop of 2023 was a resounding success – thank you to all the volunteers who make it happen each fortnight. The next one will be 16th January, 9am-11am at St Gregory's.

St Gregory's Coffee Group Rota

Many thanks to Jill and Graham Reynolds who for many years were the main driving force behind organising the St Gregory's coffee group rota and were frequent volunteers for making refreshments after Sunday services. Jill and Graham are now stepping back from this. Many thanks to both of you!



Shoeboxes for Moldova & Ukraine

Many thanks to everyone who sent Christmas shoeboxes for Moldova and Ukraine – here's the contribution from St Mary's, friends and staff at Cofton Holidays who put together a whopping 18 shoeboxes!

St Greg's Christmas Tree Festival

The grand opening of the festival will be at 6pm by the mayor on the 13th December, followed by a short carol service. **We are still looking for volunteers to help steward during this event** – if you can help, please sign up on the sheet in the lower narthex.

St Greg's Christmas Tree Festival Bric-a-Brac stall

Jill and Graham Reynolds kindly have agreed to run a Bric a Brac stall while the Christmas Tree festival is running. If you have any unwanted gifts or Christmas-themed Bric-a-Brac that could be donated, please contact Jill and Graham directly at:

reynoldsgraham587@gmail.com
or leave donations in the church office.

Christmas Tree Festival Concert

A wonderful afternoon of festive music & song featuring some amazing groups from our local community.

Featuring.....

Combined choirs of St Gregory's & St George's
Gatehouse Primary Academy School
Chordettes Acappella Chorus
Dawlish Rockwaves
The High C's

Saturday 16th December 2023
At St Gregory's Church, Dawlish

Concert starts: 3:00pm

Free entry but all donations will be welcomed

All proceeds go towards Christians Against Poverty (CAP) in Teignbridge, specifically to help families struggling in the current financial crisis & spread some seasonal joy around the Dawlish area.



St Gregory's Christmas Tree Festival

Grand opening by the Mayor Wednesday 13th December 6pm
followed by festive music in church
(bring a torch!)

Thursday 14th 11am-1pm & 3pm-6pm

Friday 15th 2pm-6pm

Saturday 16th 11am-3pm followed by festival concert

Sunday 17th 12 noon-3pm

Sunday 17th Carol service 6.30pm

Monday 18th 12 noon-4pm

Benefice Christmas Events in December

Tuesday 12 th	Ladies' Lunch at Amelia's, Cofton Holidays
Wednesday 13 th	Opening of the Christmas Tree Festival in St. Gregory's, 6pm
Thursday 14 th	Carols and Readings for Christmas at St Mary's Church Hall, 7pm with the High C's and followed by refreshments
Sunday 17 th	Carol Service at St, Mary's Cofton, 4pm Carol Service at St. Gregory's, 6.30pm
Wednesday 20 th	Carol Service at St. George's Holcombe, 4pm
Thursday 21 st	Service of the Longest Night, St Mary's, 4pm



Christmas Eve services in the Benefice

9.30am St George's – Christmas Communion
10am St Gregory's – Said Holy Communion for the 4th Sunday of Advent
4pm – St George's – Crib service
4.30pm St Mary's – Crib service
5pm St Gregory's – Crib service
6pm St Mary's – Christmas Communion
11pm St Gregory's – 'Midnight' Communion

Christmas Day

10am St Gregory's – Family Communion

NO SERVICES AT ST GEORGE'S

NO SERVICES AT ST MARY'S

31st December

10.30am Benefice Holy Communion at St Mary's.

THERE ARE NO OTHER SERVICES IN THE BENEFICE ON THIS SUNDAY

If you would like any support, or someone to talk to, or you are aware of someone else who would appreciate contact please ring one of the following:

Margaret Noel: 01626 863148

Will Halse: 01626 866054

Ceri Lee: 07739 936286
