

Benefice E-Newsletter
Dawlish with Holcombe and Cofton
24th December 2023

So here it is Merry Christmas'

Christmas songs are like brussels sprouts: they only appear in December and you either love or loathe them - but either way they are an inevitable component of the festive season. Like distant relatives bounding into family homes at Christmas, every December sees a flurry of festive favourites flood back onto radio, t.v. and phone playlists. I have been reflecting on them and what they bring to mind in the last days of 2023. Will we be echoing the Andy Williams 1963 song:

'It's the most wonderful time of the year'?

Or Wizzard's 2013 song ***'I wish it could be Christmas everyday'?***



Or will we find ourselves asking the challenging questions of other perennial seasonal songs like ***'So this is Christmas and what have you done?'*** John Lennon's 1971 song 'Happy Christmas' which was written as a protest about the Vietnam War. Or perhaps hearing in our earpieces, Band Aid's 1984 cry of ***'Do they know it's Christmas'?***

In the words of my particular favourite, Slade's 1973 hit:

'So here it is Merry Christmas'

The last cards are delivered by the postal staff. Retail staff close their shops for a well-earned day off, no more presents can be bought before the BIG day. At last, it is time for the Christians and churches to celebrate Christmas. Hang on, haven't we already had our Christmas Tree Festival, our carol services, school carol services and concerts, and much more?

It is easy for us to become weary of Christmas about half-way through December and to realise that many of us struggle to keep Advent very well, if at all. As we rush around buying last minute gifts, sending cards and putting up decorations, it is easy to forget that in the church's calendar the Christmas season only starts as the sun sets on Christmas Eve. Then our crib services are held and



communion services are prepared, only then our churches lose the Advent colour purple for the white and gold of celebration for Christmas.



Churches and families all have their Christmas traditions that are cherished and work well for them, but I am aware that it has become increasingly difficult for many to keep Advent well and instead some wait for the coming of a Christmas that will not be immediately filled with hope and joy.

The church's Christmas season runs through to Epiphany on 6th January, although most of us will have already over-indulged long before then. I usually find that even before New Year's Day, I yearn for some 'ordinary' food that lacks the rich flavours and endless quantities I have had for some days.

It is easy for us to miss the key days in the church's calendar in these last December days between Christmas and Epiphany: St Stephens Day (26th), St John's Day (27th), The Holy Innocents (28th) Thomas Becket (29th) Some of them are difficult days for us to stop, remember and acknowledge as they point to much pain that has been borne by others as part of the church's tradition and faith story. It's really tough just after Christmas Day, to mark the first Christian martyr (Stephen-Acts 7), or the murder of Archbishop Becket or Herod's slaughter of infants (Matthew 2).



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However, perhaps these are a salutary reminder that this Christmas many will not enjoy the warmth safety and over-indulgence that some of us will. Many locally will struggle to make ends meet, or be suffering with illness or bereavement.



Across the world, we know only too well of those places- not least Bethlehem itself- where to have any celebration at all will be close to miraculous.

So may each of us at least pause in these coming days to give thanks for the privileges of the Christmas that we have, and to ask as we approach Epiphany how we might match the generosity of the Wise men in sharing what we have.

As my favourite Christmas song echoes in my ears it will then be a time for us to:

'Look to the future, it's only just begun'

On behalf of all who lead and enable the life and worship in our benefice Churches I offer our prayers and hopes for you all to know something of joy hope and celebration of the Christ of Christ..... mas.

Alan Smith

Benefice Services



24th December 4th Sunday of Advent

9.30am St George's – Christmas Communion
10am St Gregory's – Said Holy Communion
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

25th December – Christmas Day

10am St Gregory's – Family Communion

NO SERVICES AT ST GEORGE'S

NO SERVICES AT ST MARY'S

31st December – 1st Sunday of Christmas

10.30am St Mary's – Benefice Service Holy Communion

THERE ARE NO OTHER SERVICES IN THE BENEFICE ON THIS SUNDAY



7th January 2024

8am St Gregory's – BCP Holy Communion

10am St Gregory's – Greg's 10

Tuesday Prayer Meeting on Zoom

Join us on Zoom for a half hour of prayer at 9am on Tuesday 8th January.

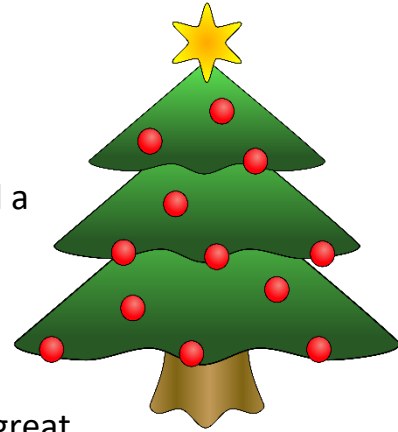
Thank you from St Greg's Churchwardens

We want to thank all Clergy, Lay ministers, Choir, Music group and all welcomers and other helpers for all of their help and hard work during this year of the vacancy. Have a Happy and Joyful Christmas and a Healthy New Year. We look forward to Linda and Steve coming to St Greg's in February. Please keep them in your prayers as they prepare to come to Dawlish.

Leena & Richard

Christmas Tree Festival

The recent Christmas Tree festival over 6 days was very well supported with 39 trees present. Over 200 people visited the festival and donated a marvellous £416.29. A BIG THANK YOU for all your support.



The Christmas Tree festival Bric-a-Brac stall managed by Graham and Jill Reynolds was fantastic – well done to Graham and Jill who manned the stall. Also THANK YOU to all those people that provided a great welcome to visitors by being available during the Festival.

All the monies raised will be donated to Local Charities which will be agreed in the next few days.

And the information you all want to know - the people's vote for favourite Christmas Tree was as follows: in first place: Dawlish Garden Society, in second place: Dawlish Armed Forced and Veteran's Breakfast and joint third place was the High C's choir and Dawlish WI. The Mayor's favourite tree was to Cofton St Mary's.

Christmas Tree Festival Concert

Many thanks to everyone who was involved in and attended, the Christmas Tree Festival concert as part of the Christmas Tree festival – a whopping £869.99 was raised for CAP!

Christmas Shoeboxes

To those of you who sent filled shoeboxes for Christmas to Ukraine and Moldova via CR2EE – THANK YOU!

Here are some pictures from just one of the places that have received them, a kindergarten in the Kyiv Olbast region of Ukraine. The smiles say it all!





There will be no Benefice newsletter next week – the next one will be circulated for the first week of the New Year. If you know someone who might like to receive it via email, please contact Sabrina in the church office and request to be added to the mailing list to ensure you're sent a copy each week.

Sabrina Annual Leave

I am now on leave – and the parish office will be unstaffed until Thursday 4th January 2024. I would respectfully ask that you do not email me at my personal email address with Church-related enquiries. If you have an urgent problem or need help, please contact the Churchwarden(s) at either St Gregory's, St George's or St Mary's as your first port of call with something important if it cannot wait until I am back from annual leave.



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: bevrays@outlook.com

Advanced notice: Bellringing Taster events



St Gregory's Bellringers will be holding two 'taster' events before their practices in January to give you an opportunity to meet some of the ringers, find out a bit more about what bellringing involves and have a first go at ringing a bell.

So, if you have ever wondered what goes on upstairs, or perhaps have rung in the past and are thinking of giving it another go, do come along to the church from 6.30 to 7.30 pm on Wednesday 10th or 17th January. We look forward to meeting you.

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

