

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

Although we are back in lockdown again, this time the churches can remain open for communal worship. I am aware that some of you will wish to continue to worship in church whereas others may feel that it is prudent in their particular circumstances to stay at home. It is important that you do what is right for you and I know we will all respect each other's decision. In the next day or two I will be discussing with the Churchwardens how St Andrew's can best serve the needs of the whole community and I will be writing to you again later in the week.

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

6th January 2021

The Feast of the Epiphany

When Stuart and I went for a walk at the weekend, we passed a sad looking Christmas tree leaning against a wheelie-bin outside a house. Christmas was clearly over there. Many people put up their decorations earlier than usual to bring a bit of much needed brightness into their lives. Maybe they are now past their best. For others perhaps sitting surrounded by the trappings of Christmas but without the normal attendant festivities might emphasise their isolation.

Today, Twelfth Night, has become the customary day for taking down decorations. The origins of this are a bit confusing - some people asserting ancient superstitions making it necessary to do so; others claiming it has only happened since Victorian times. The date of Twelfth Night has caused confusion too. Is it the 5th or 6th January? It all depends on whether you count the night after the day or the night before! Our family tradition was that decorations had to come down before dark on 6th. The Church definitely keeps the feast of the Epiphany on 6th remembering the visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus - still very much part of the Christmas story as far as most people are concerned, so perhaps the decorations should stay up until the Magi arrive. On the other hand what should we do now that the feast is often celebrated on the nearest Sunday?



*The Adoration of the Magi
by Gentile da Fabriano*

Perhaps the answer is to revert to the tradition of keeping decorations up until Candlemas on 2nd February. That was the day when all the festive greenery was burned. Bonfires lighting up the sky symbolised the light of Christ being recognised by Simeon in the Temple.

Personally I always think it is a bit unfair on the Magi to dismantle our Christmas crib when they've only just arrived. They've spent the last couple of weeks walking round the house on the way to the stable in the sitting room. So most of the decorations will come down this week but the crib will remain. I've also just decided to move the Christmas tree (without decorations but still with lights) outside so for the next couple of weeks it can stand as a sign of the light and hope Christ brings even in the darkness of lockdown. Maybe there is something similar you could do.

As far as the Church is concerned Christmas lasts until Candlemas though it calls it either the Incarnation or Epiphany season! We continue to use white or gold vestments throughout January. I think it is important because the event we celebrated on Christmas Day is too important and momentous for us to absorb its meaning and significance in one day. We

shouldn't be as quick to move on as so much of the world is - have you seen the first Easter egg in the shops yet?

Might I suggest that over the next four weeks you take time to read again the different parts of the Christmas story and to reflect on it. Perhaps you might imagine the experience and feelings of the different people. Perhaps you might translate this into your own experience. The blessing which I used at our Christmas services attributes different characteristics to different people in the story. How might those characteristics be present in your life? Are you in particular need of one of them at the moment?

*May the joy of the angels,
the eagerness of the shepherds,
the perseverance of the wise men,
the obedience of Joseph and Mary,
and the peace of the Christ-child
be yours this Christmas;*

With love and prayers for a happy and healthy 2021.

Camilla

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