

NEWSLETTER FOR JANUARY 2013

Hopping around the gospels

Easter is not just one day, but a season of fifty days ending at Pentecost (Whit Sunday), with readings from the gospels about Christ's resurrection appearances, and from Acts about the infant church. The Easter candle (a very ancient tradition) is its great symbol - and is lit at other points in the year, including baptisms, when we are celebrating resurrection and new life.

Christmas and Epiphany are also not just single days, but part of a season of forty days ending with Candlemas, celebrating the various signs of God's coming among us in Jesus, and the revelation of his glory. The crib (first popularised by St Francis) is its primary symbol. But the chronology of this season is not so neat! We start at Christmas with the newborn child; then (after a clutch of saints' days, including Holy Innocents, linked to the flight of the holy family to Egypt), his naming and circumcision at 8 days (on New Year's Day); the visit of the Magi at Epiphany (how old was Jesus by the time they arrived: perhaps a toddler?); then his baptism, and maybe the miraculous wedding at Cana (for both of which he was 30 years old); finally hopping back for his presentation in the temple on the 40th day after his birth. The Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (see below) adds a further twist.

Christmas trees were traditionally not put up until Christmas Eve (and no carols sung before then either), and stayed up for twelve days, until Epiphany. The modern anticipation of Christmas means that trees, in public and private, go up much earlier, and are often taken down before Twelfth Night, either because of boredom - 'we've done Christmas, what's next?' (hot cross buns, maybe) - or because their leaves are dropping. That's a pity, because one more link with the rhythms of the Christian year is lost.

But should the crib stay in place for 40 days? Your Rector used to be a liturgical purist and hold out for this, as recommended by the various handbooks, but has come to the conclusion that, given all this hopping around the gospels, this is rather artificial. So our crib will go some time after Epiphany, along with the decorations. Nevertheless, throughout January we should keep a sense of an extended celebration of those particular moments in the life of Jesus when his true humanity ('flesh or our flesh and bone of our bone') and divinity ('glory revealed among us') touch and inspire us.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity: 18-25 January

We hear about the 'big society' and wonder what it means. In 2012 **Churches Together in Britain & Ireland** (CBTI) has been researching what churches are doing, as pilgrims together, towards the 'good society' - a bit different - and say they have found a remarkable faithfulness to the call to act justly, to be loving, and to walk humbly with God (Micah 6.1-8). This fits with the international material for the 2013 Week of Prayer, compiled by the Student Christian Movement of India (SCMI), the All India Catholic University Federation and the National Council of Churches in India. (Indian Christians, of course, led the way for others in creating united churches in South, then North, India over half a century ago.) They have asked us to think about the legacy of the caste system in India which continues to affect the Dalits ('untouchables') who make up more than 80% of Indian Christians. They are socially marginalized, politically under-represented, economically exploited and culturally subjugated. 'Is Christ divided?' they ask us, and we shall share some of their experiences and prayers of hope - and maybe sing some Indian lyrics - in our service on 20 January. Our 'own' Ramanoop family share in the rich Christian heritage of India - via Trinidad! - and we regularly welcome Indian Christians to our worship. This service would be a good opportunity for you to invite friends and colleagues from all parts of India to join us.

Charitable giving 2012

Conscious that individual members of our congregation financially support - and in some cases work for - a wide range of charities and projects, and also that as a church we regularly support particular causes in other specific ways (including Christian Aid, Richard House, Water Aid and Whitechapel Mission), in 2011 we adopted this policy:

1. Our charitable giving will be 2% of unrestricted income
2. It will be allocated: one third locally, one third to international development charities and one third to specifically Christian charities or churches
3. To make our gifts meaningful we will support up to three in each category (but if a particular charity falls into more than one category, it could benefit twice)
4. We will publish our policy, and details past and future giving (on the website, to the congregation, and - as previously - in the annual financial report), with a reminder of the importance of responsible Christian stewardship.

In line with this, and on the basis of our personal knowledge and links, at the December PCC meeting we agreed to give £500 each to the following:

local: Providence Row and **Docklands Outreach** - both of which we know have strong and effective track records in serving homeless and vulnerable individuals and families through a variety of projects

church nationally and internationally: Church Army, the Church of England's major and long-established society of lay evangelists which did great work hereabouts in the past and continues to pioneer imaginative mission and training up and down the land

US (the United Society - new name for the United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel - leading worldwide Anglican mission agency with which past and present members of our congregation have served)

international Christian relief: Stephen's Children, working with desperately needy Coptic and other Christians in Egypt, named for the first Christian martyr's links with the region - Wilfred Wong, who has previously visited us to speak about his work with persecuted groups in the middle East, asked for our support through his friend Richard Powell, our treasurer, and has given us a beautiful Egyptian-made mother of pearl cross in gratitude for our offering; he has provided us with lots of information about the work

Hand in Hand for Syria (Bishop Adrian's wife appealed for sponsorship for emergency help for refugees, for which she walked the deanery to raise funds).

There are many similar causes we could have supported - apologies to those whose proposals were not included in this year's list - but we particularly wanted to support victims in Syria at this time, and the Egyptian project fits our links with the Coptic congregation which we host.

Recent events and congregational news

Twice nightly during the first week in December the Players of St Peter presented parts of the Wakefield cycle of mystery plays. Because of their change of venue, audiences were somewhat down - as they expected - but there were still a few near-full houses, and they were pleased with the response, and the welcome they received from us. They rightly insist that they are not simply using the church as a theatre, but are joining with us in presenting the challenge of the gospel in their particular way, and we certainly want to encourage them in this. They made good relationships with Soytyen Sen, the Bengali group with whom they harmoniously shared the premises on several Saturdays, and one of their number was invited to speak at the Victory Day celebration on 15 December.

The **News International** carol service on 13 December was the best-attended for many years, and thoroughly successful; congratulations to all who organised it. It included over 40 children from **St Paul's School**, who sang songs from their Christmas production (which was excellent, linking the complexities of homelessness to the Christmas story); the following week, having performed it in school in the afternoon, the same number of children - and some of their parents - attended our own **carol service**, making this also the best-attended for some years, and a thoroughly enjoyable occasion. Our warmest thanks to Darren Rubin and colleagues at school for his enthusiasm, and for making this possible.

Our continued prayers for **Linda's** sister and brother-in-law, both of whom are struggling with leukemia - the latter having recently had transplant surgery at the world-leading facilities in Vancouver ... Congratulations to **John and Rose**, married on 28 December in the presence of a good number of friends - a happy union, all agree, but we understand they plan to stick to their separate quiz teams at the *Town of Ramsgate* ... Thanks to **Annadale**, for lovely Christmas flowers, and all who made donations and to **Giles Munby** for restoring the vandalised bishop's chair. By coincidence, he is a distant relation of Denys Munby, one-time Rectory resident - see <http://www.stgite.org.uk/media/siteresidents.html>>