

First Sunday of Christmas 2020

Collect: Almighty God, who wonderfully created us in your own image and yet more wonderfully restored us through your Son Jesus Christ: grant that, as he came to share in our humanity, so we may share the life of his divinity; who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Isaiah 61.10—62.3: I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring up before all the nations. For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Luke 2.15–21: When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child; and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child; and he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

Reflection: I recently saw someone post on Facebook, "Well that is Christmas over for another year" and I had to bite my tongue. Christmas is most certainly not over. Christmas Day is only the first day of Christmas. Christmas is not a day it is a season. As we are probably all aware Christmas lasts for 12 days. Most people would only know this because of the song - Twelve days of Christmas.

Each day of Christmas we are encouraged to think of different aspects of the Christian Faith. This was done in the late 19th century using a song which has now become so familiar. For those of you who are not aware of the links between the gifts in the song and the Christian Faith:

1. Partridge in a Pear Tree – Jesus is the partridge and the tree symbolises his sacrifice through crucifixion.
2. Turtle Doves – 2 testaments.
3. French Hens – 3 Theological Virtues – Faith Hope and Charity.
4. Calling Birds – 4 Gospels.
5. Gold Rings – Pentateuch – First Five books of the Bible. These are the scriptures that the Bible refers to.
6. Geese a Laying – 6 Days of creation.
7. Swans a Swimming – 7 Sacraments.
8. Maids a Milking – Blessings in the Beatitudes.
9. Ladies Dancing – Fruits of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control).
10. Lords a Leaping – Ten Commandments.
11. Pipers Piping – Faithful Apostles.
12. Drummers Drumming – articles of the Apostles Creed.

We don't really know if this is why it was written and the symbolism is a little tenuous through our 21st century eyes. But I think it does offer a new dimension when singing.

For this year, the Church of England has a program of prayers called *Comfort and Joy*. If you are able it might be worth going online to the church of England website to see the readings, and reflections from a variety of sources.

But has the meaning of the twelve days of Christmas been lost? Has the Joy of the Christmas season been diluted down to one day? Possibly. But it is our responsibility as Christians to celebrate and share God's love for us for all the days of Christmas and, fundamentally, beyond that.

Some of you may have seen the Advent doors that I posted around the Easton-on-the-Hill or Laxton. These were intended to get people to engage with the Christmas Story and collect clues that build into a quote. There was a children's quote and a grown up's quote. It is not me to judge which people chose to solve.

Children's answers as four words: Advent, Family, Candle and Giving. These words were chosen as the key messages. Advent is a time of waiting, of looking forward, of getting ready. Family is about those who are important to us. Whether relatives, friends or Church Family. The Candle is the Light of Christ and finally, the most important message is that giving, sharing sending the light out into the world. This is our job. To give, share and become the light of Christ.

The Grown-up's answer is from Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*. "I will honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all year."

The message is clear – I will honour Christmas in my heart and will carry it all through the year. So can we keep the comfort and joy of Christmas in our hearts all year?

It goes on to say, "I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach."

There is one theory that the Past, Present and Future refer to the Trinity. The past is God the Father, God of the Old Testament, God the creator. The Present is Jesus, one of us, living in our hearts and actions today. And the Future is the spirit, the times to come, the glory described in the book of revelation, the end of times, the coming again in glory.

Although Dickens story can be understood without any biblical reference, the lessons taught by the three spirits of past, present and future are about taking the meaning of Christmas into our lives throughout the year.

So what are we to do. What embodies Christmas for you? Can that be done throughout the 12 days and then throughout the year. I am not suggesting a big turkey meal every day or presents under the tree etc but perhaps a focus Church services, prayer and praise? Making every effort to see friends and family? Celebrating the togetherness. Celebrating with others and sharing goodwill. Giving – to make other people and ourselves feel the sharing of love.

Are these the things of Christmas which need to be kept, shared and celebrated throughout the year. I will honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all year.