

# THE OLD CHURCH NEWS



O P E N T O A L L - O P E N T O G O D

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## VICAR'S VOICE

We are now dipping into the season of Advent, a quiet and reflective period in the church year which is rich with meaning. But for most of us it probably feels as though we are already in the season of Christmas. It's hard to escape it; Christmas is all around and many of us are already caught up in the busyness and stress of shopping, wrapping, hanging decorations and squeezing in celebratory gatherings with family and friends.

Although still maintaining some of its religious roots, Christmas has, on the whole, become a secular festival. The traditions we have generally come to associate it, and those many of us now practice, barely reflect anything of the original biblical and liturgical context. Much of its deeper meaning has now been lost under the weight of the festive glitz and consumerism and, all of this, has made it increasingly difficult, for those of us who go to church, to fully enter into what Advent has to offer.

In their book 'Doing December Differently', Nicola Slee and Rosie Miles tackle this difficulty head on. They suggest a range of practical and creative ways that can help us to do things differently in the lead up to Christmas. The fact that they identified a need to write such a book, demonstrates how strong the pull is for us to reduce the importance of Advent and to 'big-up'

Christmas.

But, I think that when we begin to reduce the significance of Advent we are, albeit unintentionally, reducing the significance of Christmas at the very same time. Because it is through the opportunities Advent presents, with its invitation to wait and to hope, that we can begin to identify the ways that the birth of the Christ child can really impact on our individual lives and on the life of our faith community. In other words, it is by more fully entering into Advent that we can more fully celebrate Christmas.

We are having a number of services at Old Church during Advent this year, each helping us engage with its themes; each having at its heart this beautiful prayer written by Yvonne Morland:

God waits silently  
in our inner recesses,  
the chambers of our soul,  
gazing lovingly  
on our treasure,  
awaiting our response.

(Yvonne Morland)

So, in the light of this, I wish you a fruitful Advent and a joyous and hope filled Christmas - when it comes!

## LAST MONTH'S NEWS

November is traditionally associated with remembrance and we held various services reflecting this theme.

At the beginning of the month we joyfully celebrated All Saints' Day in honour of all the saints known and unknown.

In a more reflective tone at our two All Souls' Day services we recalled memories of loved ones who have passed away.

Those who sacrificed their lives in the two great wars of the twentieth century and in subsequent conflicts were commemorated at our Remembrance Sunday service.

As we are all too aware, conflicts and strife still afflict our world today. A Service of Prayer for Justice and Peace was held later on Remembrance Sunday that helped us to identify injustice as a root cause of conflict.

## ORIGIN OF THE TWELVE DAYS OF CHRISTMAS

The Christmas song, "The Twelve Days of Christmas" had a quite serious purpose when it was written.

Catholics in England during the period 1558 to 1829, when Parliament finally emancipated Catholics in England, were prohibited from **ANY** practice of their faith by law - private **OR** public. It was a crime to **BE** a Catholic.

The Twelve Days of Christmas" was written in England as one of the "catechism songs" to help young Catholics learn the tenets of their faith.

The song's gifts are hidden meanings to the teachings of the faith. The "true love" mentioned in the song doesn't refer to an earthly suitor, it refers to God Himself. The "me" who receives the presents refers to every baptized person. The partridge in a pear tree is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In the song, Christ is symbolically presented as a mother partridge which feigns injury to decoy predators from her helpless nestlings, much in memory of the expression of Christ's sadness over the fate of Jerusalem: "Jerusalem! Jerusalem! How often would I have sheltered thee under my wings, as a hen does her chicks, but thou wouldst not have it so..."

The other symbols mean the following:

- 1 Partridge in a Pear Tree = Jesus Christ, Son of God
- 2 Turtle Doves = The Old and New Testaments
- 3 French Hens = Faith, Hope and Charity, the Theological Virtues
- 4 Calling Birds = the Four Gospels and/or the Four Evangelists
- 5 Golden Rings = The first Five Books of the Old Testament, the "Pentateuch", which gives the history of man's fall from grace.
- 6 Geese A-laying = the six days of creation
- 7 Swans A-swimming = the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven sacraments
- 8 Maids A-milking = the eight beatitudes
- 9 Ladies Dancing = the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit
- 10 Lords A-leaping = the ten commandments
- 11 Pipers Piping = the eleven faithful apostles
- 12 Drummers Drumming = the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed



## DECEMBER

- 20th **Festive drinks & Mince pies** at the Vicarage (see invitation below)
- 20th 5.00 pm **Nine lessons and Carols**
- 23rd 11.00 am **Carol Service** at **Penmakers' Court**
- 24th **CHRISTMAS EVE**  
4.00 pm **Crib Service**  
11.30 pm **Midnight Mass**
- 25th **CHRISTMAS DAY**  
10.15 am **Holy Communion**
- 31st 8.00 pm **New Year's Eve Party** at the Dorothy Parkes' Centre

# Invitation

*You are invited for*

*Festive Drinks and Mince Pies*

*at the Vicarage*

*on 20th December*

*from 2.00 pm - 4.30 pm*

*All Welcome*

*Come and leave as you wish*