

Faith and wonder

The Revd Rob Eastwood Dewing is Team Rector at Portishead Team Ministry talks about St Peter's Church, Portishead Star Trail.



Children and adults alike take in the wonder of the Christmas story.

What happens at Saint Peter's the week before Advent?

The church is transformed into a series of stations representing the Magi's journey to Bethlehem.

Who visits the church during this transformation?

All the local primary schools come to explore each station and meet characters from the Christmas story. They meet someone who tells them about the Magi's journey. Their task then is to follow the star.

Why is this experience meaningful for children?

It introduces a "wow" factor, and a sense that spirituality has a sense of awe. At a time when children are faced with materialism and a consumer-based approach to Christmas this offers a contrasting narrative of wonder and faith.

We finish with that sense of God coming and being with us, which is, an extraordinary story.

Why is it important to share the Christmas message with children in this way?

For most families, Jesus is not at the heart of Christmas. This reminds them that is where He is. We're offering an alternative a much richer, deeper and more important story than the one that we are sold, which is that Christmas is primarily an opportunity to buy stuff.

How does the church continue this message beyond Christmas?

At the heart of the Christian faith and the incarnation at Christmas particularly is the sense of God being with, God comes to be with us. We would say that our aim in terms of mission is that we are with, not for, the community, because that's the model that Jesus gives us in Christ and so the importance of doing this with other people is an offering to the community which is telling the story of the incarnation of God coming to be with.

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Sharing the light of Christ

At Christmas we come together to reflect on the birth of Jesus, who arrived as the Light of the World, bringing hope and peace to all. Across Bath and Wells, church communities will mark this season with joyful gatherings, candlelit services, and nativity plays, welcoming everyone to join in celebrating the true meaning of Christmas.

The Revd Ian Rousell, Rector of the Waterside Benefice, can't wait. He says, "I just love Christmas. This year we've been asked to hold a Christmas service for the Scouts which I was delighted to say 'yes' to. Who am I to turn down a request to come and celebrate the birth of our Lord – it's a gift isn't it!"

The benefice is also holding its first Christmas Tree Festival, at St Peter's Church, Westfield from 29 November to 1 December. Ian says, "I am really excited about it. It's the first time we have done it and I thought we may get about 10 or 15 trees, but we've had a wonderful reaction from the local community and at the latest count we have 31. We are not quite sure how we are going to fit all the trees and people in the church, but what a lovely problem to have!"



As well as celebrating the joy of Christmas with throughout our diocese, there will also be space for it celebrated in the calm and quiet, in prayer and in moments of reflection. Church communities will also be reaching out to those who may feel lost, lonely or who are struggling, offering compassion and support and sharing the love that Christ brought into the world.

The message of Christ's birth is one of love and unity, inviting us to carry His light into the new year. As we gather with family and friends, and offer support to our communities, we hold onto the promise that, in Jesus, the world is filled with hope and the reassurance that God's love is always with us.

News in brief

The Holy thorn

The cutting of the Glastonbury Holy Thorn is a royal tradition that involves sending a sprig of the Holy Thorn to the monarch for Christmas. It is thought Joseph of Arimathea visited Glastonbury with the Holy Grail. He thrust his staff into the ground which then grew into a thorn tree. Each year a sprig is cut by the eldest child at St John's infant school in Glastonbury and sent to King Charles.



Grand organ experience

Brenda Staples, who regularly plays the organ for 5 churches in the Exmoor Benefice, had an unforgettable birthday when she was treated to the opportunity to play the Grand Organ at Wells Cathedral.

Youth Light Festival

Over 150 young people and youth leaders from across Bath and Wells joined the Youth Light Festival, at Bath Abbey. An evening of light, inspiration and worship. The group enjoyed the Luxmuralis light show and gathered to hear Bishop Michael in conversation with Diocesan Youth Voice Lead, Cesca Priestley about 'what light looks like in the world'., before joining together in worship.



Find out more on these and other stories at bathandwells.org.uk/news

The much-loved historic organ though, is in need of major care. The Wells Grand Organ Appeal has been set up to help pay for restoration work which will include the removal of 5,000 pipes.

The Organ Appeal
wellsgrandorganappeal.org.uk

Reimagining generosity

By Michael Beasley, Bishop of Bath and Wells

'All is calm, all is bright' may not be the words that many of us would use to describe our experience of either the run up to Christmas or the feast itself. Presents to buy and wrap, food to order and cook, events and church services to be part of. And that's before we've negotiated the big day itself. I saw one website recently that claimed that Christmas is considered as one of the six most stressful life events, along with divorce, moving house and changing jobs!

In the midst of such chaos, our churches offer an opportunity to find peace during this busy time – of stillness, quiet and the opportunity to stand back from all the pressures

that the season contains.

This year, the Church of England's theme for Advent and Christmas is Follow the Star: Calm and Bright. The theme draws on some of the lyrics of the famous carol, Silent Night:

"Silent Night! Holy Night!
All is calm, all is bright..."

To be calm and bright is to be invited into the still centre of the Christmas story. It's to contemplate Mary holding the new-born Jesus, the Light of the World. It's to open ourselves to the joy of the angels as they tell the shepherds one?

"Do not be afraid - Fear not!" It's to encounter the wonder of the wise men as they discover that the gift of this child is for the whole world.

May your Christmas 2024 be 'Calm and Bright'!

Bishop Michael



Information about Follow the Star: Calm and Bright can be found: www.churchofengland.org/follow-star-calm-and-bright