

Christmas Tree Festival

This will take place at St John's Church the weekend of 19th & 20th December. Village clubs and societies and individuals are invited to produce and decorate a Christmas tree. Be as imaginative and creative as you like. Trees may be real or artificial. They need to be set up on Friday 18th. On the Saturday, the exhibition will be open to the public and there will be refreshments on sale. The exhibition will also be open on Sunday with our usual service of Holy Communion at 11.00 and our Christmas Carol Service, Nativity Play and Christingle at 3.00. Please contact Phyllis Chidwick (243213) or the Rector if you would like to display a tree. It would be nice if you could leave them in church until twelfth night, but, if you need them for your own domestic festivities, you can have them back after the Carol Service. We hope to have an enjoyable celebration with plenty of things to see and to raise something for church funds by way of visitors' donations.

Christmas Services:

St John the Baptist Halling: Sunday 20th December 3.00 pm Carol Service, Christingle and Nativity Play; Christmas Day 8.00 am Holy Communion.

St Michael & All Angels Cuxton: Christmas Eve 5.00 pm Christingle and Nativity Play, 11.00 pm Midnight Mass; Christmas Day 9.30 am Family Communion.

The Story of the Christmas Tree

Boniface was an Englishman, probably born in Devon towards the end of the seventh century. His original English name was Winfrith. He came from a wealthy family and was intelligent and well-educated. His father wanted him to go into business, but Winfrith strongly felt called to become a monk. In time, he discovered that his vocation was to be a missionary in Germany. At that time, there were still many unbelievers in Germany. The Church itself was weak and disorderly. Many people who called themselves Christians weren't really so. The pagans often persecuted the Christians. Boniface laboured with others both to reform the Church and to convert the heathen. In this he was very effective. He also helped to bring peace and stable government to the warring German tribes. Today he is known as Saint Boniface and his martyrdom is commemorated on 5th June each year.

Like the ancient Hebrews and, no doubt, many other pagan or semi-religious cultures, the pre-Christian Germans regarded certain trees as sacred. One such was the oak at Geismar, held to be sacred to the god Thor. Boniface was moved to demonstrate that it had no real power and cut it down. The pagans were astonished that nothing bad happened as a result. The wood was used to build a Christian chapel. The legend goes on to state that Boniface told them to forget about sacred oaks and to look to the fir. Its evergreen leaves point to eternal life in Christ. Its triangular shape reminds us of the Trinity. The whole tree points upwards to heaven. Thus an Englishman gave the Christmas tree to the Germans and a German, Prince Albert, brought it back to the English. Unfortunately, while the story of cutting down Thor's oak is well documented, the part about the Christmas tree is much less certain. We do know, however, that evergreens did come to be used as Christmas decorations through the Middle Ages. The balls used to decorate them were originally apples, to represent the forbidden fruit. There might also be wafers to illustrate the bread of Holy Communion, Jesus the Bread of Life. Later on, candles were added. Christ is the Light of the world. Later still, these were replaced by electric lights – a sensible health and safety precaution! An angel or a star usually tops the tree – a symbol of heaven and a reminder of the wise men drawn to worship the infant Christ with their gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Often families have their own particular Christmas decorations which mean something special to them.

It was on 5th June 754 that Boniface gathered a group of new converts to Christianity at Dorkum for Confirmation. The heathens fell upon them and Boniface and 52 others died the death of martyrs. Martyr is the Greek word for a witness and martyrdom therefore is a fitting death for a Christian missionary and evangelist.

Roger Knight, Rector of Cuxton and Halling.

The Rectory, 6, Rochester Road, Cuxton, Rochester, Kent, ME2 1AF, 01634 717134,

roger@cuxtonandhalling.org.uk

<http://www.cuxtonandhalling.org.uk>