

Christmas in Halling

I wonder for how many years have people been celebrating Christmas in Halling? It was in the year 597 that St Augustine brought the Gospel to the people of Kent. King Aethelbert of Kent was married to a Christian, Queen Bertha, who already worshipped with her entourage at an old Roman Church in Canterbury (probably St Martin's). Most of the Saxons were pagans at that time but Aethelbert was obviously open to hearing the Gospel. He met Augustine and his monks where they landed near Ramsgate. A cross marks the supposed spot at Cliffe's End. The Christian missionaries quickly established their base at Canterbury and on Christmas Day 597, thousands were baptised in the River Stour. There's commitment for you! The message quickly spread throughout Kent and beyond and bishoprics were established in Rochester and London in the year 604. I don't know when people in Halling first became Christians, but we acquired the land on which St John's Church stands in 756.

People sometimes ask me how old the church is (meaning the building, not the people!). It's a hard question to answer. The original building was Saxon. I don't know if any of that survived, but the Normans effectively built a new church on the site in the C11. That has been added to and altered ever since. The Victorians enlarged it and redesigned the tower to give it its present shape. You can see pictures of what it was like before Victorian times in the vestry. The interior was re-modelled in the 1980s. If you want to know more about the building, go to <http://cuxtonandhalling.org.uk/> and look under Halling or come and see it for yourselves!

When I'm worshipping at St John's, I sometimes think of all those generations of Christians worshipping on this site for well over a thousand years. In many ways, their lives were very different from ours. Some of them still have descendants living in the village. Yet all Christians share the same faith in Jesus Christ. I think of those who worshiped Him on earth worshipping Him eternally in Heaven. They are in communion with us and our worship is joined with theirs. *Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we proclaim your great and glorious name, for ever praising you and saying Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.*

It is wonderful to think of our eternal fellowship with Christians who have been dead for many centuries but who worshipped where we do, but it is even more marvellous to think of those we love but see no longer, our family members and friends who worshipped where we worship now and now themselves worship with us in heaven in all eternity.

The strategy was to establish Christian worship at the places and times where pagan festivals had previously taken place. There was probably a pagan shrine at the crossing of the River Medway. There were certainly pagan revelries to mark the depth of mid-Winter and the turning point of the year. The idea was that the existing festival of light and generosity and plenty, the spirit of peace and goodwill, should come to celebrate the Birth of Christ, the Light of the World, the Prince of Peace, the One Who meets our every need, the One Who inspires us to love our neighbours as ourselves, Jesus Who makes all these good things possible. The risk is that Jesus gets forgotten in all the other things we do at Christmas. We've thought about people celebrating Christmas in Halling in the past. How we celebrate in our generation is up to us.
Roger Knight, Rector of Cuxton and Halling.

Christmas Services St John the Baptist Halling:

Sunday 18th December: 3.00 pm Carol Service & Christingle

Sunday 25th December (Christmas Day): 8.00 am Holy Communion

Christmas Services St Michael & All Angels Cuxton

Sunday 18th December: 6.30 pm Nine Lessons and Carols

Saturday 24th December: 5.00 pm Christingle, Nativity Play & Crib Service

11.00 pm Midnight Mass

Sunday 25th December (Christmas Day): 9.30 am Family Communion

A Puzzle

A few weeks ago, a very nice lady in Canada e mailed to say that a 1924 depicting the interior of Halling Church had just turned up among goods given to a church rummage sale in Montreal (St Matthias Westmount). Would we like it? She very kindly then posted it to me. It looks as if the C12 wall-painting on the chancel arch was then visible, which surprised me as we believed that it had only been uncovered in the 1940s. What is puzzling is how the calendar got to Canada. Several Halling families did emigrate to Canada between the two world wars and maybe somebody knows something about this. The inscription on the back says: *To Miss Cooper with best wishes for a Happy New Year from Annie.* Does anyone know who these people were?