

Halling View Winter 2017  
Christmas Blues and Christmas Light

A couple of weeks ago, I read a newspaper column in which a woman was complaining about Christmas and saying how she would like to go abroad for the next few months to avoid it. My online comment was, "If you want to avoid 'Christmas', try going to Church." We'll respect Advent and, when we do celebrate Christmas at the proper time, we'll celebrate something worth celebrating.

I can think of three reasons why people might not like Christmas. The first is if they are unhappy and feel that everybody apart from them is having a great time. Maybe they remember much happier Christmases in times past and feel all the more sad because of what has been lost. It's a reminder to all of us to be sensitive to how other people are feeling and to treat them respectfully and kindly. It's also a thought that we have to decide ourselves what to make of how we feel. I've reached an age when I can look back on happy times spent with people now long dead and regret their passing. Nothing can take those times away, however. I'm thankful for what I have had in the past. I know also that my Christian friends who have departed this life are celebrating Christmas with me now in a better place. I also appreciate what I have now and am thankful for the very different Christmases we presently enjoy and I look forward to the future with confidence in God for my life on earth and in heaven.

The second reason some people dislike Christmas is the consumerism. In days gone by, when many people were poor and maybe hungry, a time of feasting and drinking and giving and receiving presents really meant something. It was a foretaste of heaven. But, for many of us today, the problem is not that we're hungry, but that we quite possibly eat and drink more than is good for us throughout the year. For people who worry about their weight, Christmas can be really stressful. And what do you give the person who has everything? One person I knew used really to frustrate her family. Every year they bought her a Christmas present which she would take back to the shop in January – and, being sale time, would get back less money than they'd originally paid for it. I think the answer to eating and drinking a lot at Christmas is to be sensible. Don't so obsess about "healthy eating" that you can't ever enjoy a good meal without feeling guilty, but also be wise and exercise moderation. Greed and drunkenness are not good things and don't make you happy in the long run. As for Christmas presents, it really is the thought that counts. Given that insight, we worry less about the object (the gift) and value more the subject (the person giving or receiving the gift).

Finally, there is the problem of "What does it all mean?" Most cultures have a midwinter festival. The days have been getting darker; the weather has been getting colder, but, around the end of December, there is a change. The year turns and there is a new beginning. The twelve days of Christmas, from the 25<sup>th</sup> December onwards, are a good way to enjoy those dark days and indeed to use up the meat of those animals which you can't afford to keep through the Winter. You then emerge in January to begin the natural cycle all over again. All this means a lot less in an industrial society with electric light and central heating and everything you want available in the shops all the year round. So what does it mean for us to hold a midwinter festival? Why should we care about the rhythm of the seasons?

Human beings, being what we are, have generally tied in their festivals with their religions. Non-Christian religions assign meaning to festivals, as does Christianity, but what would festivals mean if there were no God? We Christians celebrate the midwinter festival as the coming of the Light of the world. Jesus is the Light of the world. He dispels the darkness of evil and death. That is our reason for celebrating Christmas. The Birth of Jesus is the meaning of the festival and it is for this reason that I'm looking forward to eating good food and drinking at table with my family and my friends and giving them gifts and receiving tokens of love from them. I'm also looking forward to our Christmas services, especially our Christmas Communion, when we receive in a small piece of bread Him Who was born in Bethlehem (the very name of which means House of Bread in Hebrew) Jesus the Bread of life and Light of the world. Merry Christmas, Roger Knight, Rector of Cuxton & Halling.

Christmas Services @ St John the Baptist Halling: Carol Service, Crib Service & Christingle 3.00 pm Christmas Eve; Christmas Communion 8.00 am Christmas Day.

Christmas Services @ St Michael and All Angels Cuxton: Nine Lessons & Carols 6.30 pm 17<sup>th</sup> December; Crib Service and Christingle 5.00 pm Christmas Eve; Midnight Mass 11.00 pm Christmas Eve; Family Communion 9.30 am Christmas Day.