

Halling View Winter 2019 – Christmas Decorations

When do you put up your Christmas decorations? I like to save mine at home until the weekend before Christmas. We always did that when I was a child, though I think that, when I was a child, I might have liked to put them up earlier. It was nice seeing other people's decorations from the top of the school bus on dark December afternoons and the Christmas tree all lit up outside the Smallholders' Club. But it was more special somehow to save our decorations until it really was nearly Christmas. One road near where we lived many of the residents put up amazing displays of Christmas lights every year. It was worth walking the dog that way just to see them. I like to see our churches decorated for Christmas from the carol services onwards (22nd December this year at 3.00pm at St John's Halling and 6.30pm at St Michael's Cuxton). Purists will wait till Christmas Eve to put up their lights and paper chains and to decorate the tree. Many people, of course, put up their decorations much earlier.

When do we take them down? Twelfth Night (5th January) is when my home decorations are put away for another year. We keep at least some of our Christmas things in church for Epiphany (the visit of the wise men on 6th January) and until Candlemas (2nd February when Mary and Joseph took the infant Christ to the Temple for her purification and to make the appropriate offering for the birth of a first born son).

But what do they all mean? Bright colours and glowing lights dissipate the darkness of our souls as well as the midwinter gloom. To me, light and warmth go together – another consideration as the temperature drops and all too often human hearts are cold, unable or unwilling to receive and to bestow love. The fact that many people do not enjoy warmth and light at this time of year or ever is a rallying call to us to love more, to be more thankful for what we have and to be more generous in sharing what we've got.

There may be a lot of fun and love, joy, in making and buying decorations and presents and in sharing them. Likewise in preparing food and drink, in family meals and partying with friends. Genuine love always flows outwards beyond our immediate circle. If we truly love our families and our friends, we don't neglect to care for the people we don't know, even the people we don't like very much.

The Christmas tree is definitely a Christian symbol. It is evergreen. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we have eternal life. The lights on the tree remind us that Jesus is the Light of the world and that all Christian people are also called to be lights in the darkness of this passing age for all the peoples of the world. It is said that the balls were originally discs to signify the communion wafers we use to celebrate the Eucharist. Jesus is the Bread of life. God is love. His love for us is so deep that He gave up His life for us on the Cross. He died that we might have eternal life through faith in Him. Our lives are nourished by our relationship with Him in prayer and in the Bible and in the Sacraments and in our relationships with one another. As Christians, our lives are lived in loving fellowship with Him and with one another. Our table fellowship with Him in Holy Communion is a foretaste of eternal life in Heaven, eternal love. God is love.

The triangular shape of the conifer reminds us that God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit: the One Who makes us; the One Who saves us; the One Who makes us holy; three persons, one God, ever to be worshipped and adored.

At St John's, we shall be holding a Christmas tree festival again this year, in which village organisations and individuals are invited to put up and decorate trees all around the Church, with decorations which show what Christmas means to them. Come along and take a look either at the services or when the church will be open between services.

Christmas Services at St John the Baptist Halling: 22nd December 3.00 Carol, Christingle & Crib Service. 25th December 8.00 am Holy Communion.

Christmas Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton: 22nd December 6.30 Nine Lessons & Carols. 24th December 5.00 pm Christingle & Crib Service; 11.00 pm Midnight Mass. 25th December 9.30 am Holy Communion.