

All Saints' Church Benhilton

All Saints' Road, Sutton, Surrey SM1 3DA

Advent and Christmas 2021

28th November: 1st Sunday of Advent

8.00 a.m. Low Mass

9.30 a.m. SUNG MASS & Blessing
of the Advent Wreath

4.00 p.m. SERVICE OF ADVENT
MUSIC & READINGS

19th December: 4th Sunday of Advent

8.00 a.m. Low Mass

9.30 a.m. SUNG MASS

4.00 p.m. TRADITIONAL SERVICE OF
NINE LESSONS AND CAROLS
WITH BENEDICTION
followed by mince pies & mulled wine

24th December (Friday) Christmas Eve

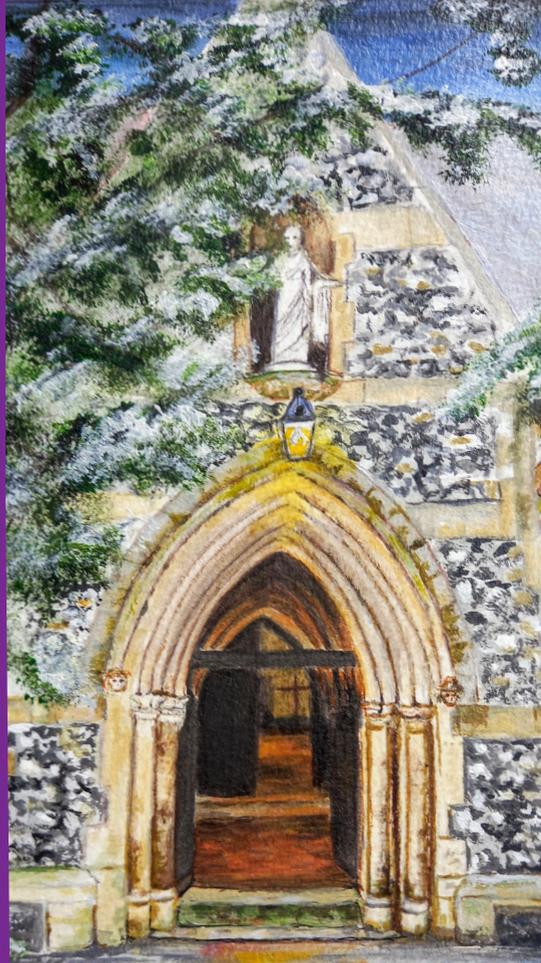
4.00 p.m. Christingle/ Crib Service

11.00 p.m. MIDNIGHT MASS

25th December (Saturday): Christmas Day

8.00 a.m. Low Mass

9.30 a.m. SUNG MASS



26th December (Sunday): Holy Family Sunday

8.00 a.m. Low Mass

9.30 a.m. SUNG MASS

Father David's 2021 Christmas Message

Almost two years! What a time we've had since COVID-19 struck. Those who are children now will tell *their* children and grandchildren all about it, just as our parents and grandparents would talk about the two World Wars (and - in some families - the Spanish flu of 1918 to 1920).

Back in June I was asked to write a few words for the Year 6 children's *Year Book* marking the end of their time at All Saints' Primary School.

It made me think about the stresses and challenges we faced because of COVID-19. I reminded the children that nobody really thought the pandemic would last so long. But I also reminded them that they got through with the loving support, not just of their families and teachers, but also the very real encouragement and strength they gave to each other.

WHAT WE LEARNED TOGETHER

It made me think about the other dimension that is so important at our school - the way we seek to anchor into God's love through worship, prayer, reading the Bible and even sometimes just sitting in silent reflection.

These experiences give us strength. And they help us to care for one another when we are really struggling.

Lest you think I'm being simplistic, I hasten to add that we learned all over again that our faith is not just a bit of decoration on the edge of our lives, or a kind of hobby to make us 'feel good'.

It is, rather, a deep seated instinct to cling on to the reality of God's presence and love, even in times of darkness and tragedy when there are many more questions than answers. We all have times like that!

So, I told the 2020-2021 Year 6 that while they may have missed out on a handful of the more predictable things that occur at school, the deepening of real faith and loving community that helped them through the pandemic and its lockdowns is itself a kind of education that will have strengthened them immeasurably for the rest of their lives.



And that's really what Christmas is all about.

THE PAIN AND THE GLORY

The joy of the Angelic choir singing over Bethlehem that first Christmas is balanced by the brutal fact that those God chose to share in this wonderful event actually had a hard time of it.

Mary and Joseph shunted from pillar to post, desperately seeking somewhere to stay; Jesus born in a cave where animals are kept; all little boys in Bethlehem less than two years old slaughtered by the power-crazy King Herod, their blood running red in the streets; the Holy Family living in poverty as homeless refugees in Egypt until it is safe to return to Nazareth in their own land.

The mystery of Divine Love - God in the flesh of little baby Jesus - coming into the *real* world, not some sentimental make-believe feel-good world, but the *real* world as experienced by most people.

Imagine that! God abandoning himself to us as the Baby of Bethlehem, the Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of Calvary who sheds his precious blood that we might be forgiven and set free, made NEW when we surrender to his love!

He is the Risen, Ascended Lord. He comes to us as our Bread of life in Holy Communion.

You and I will be reminded of these truths even in the shops when we hear over their loudspeakers '... man will live for evermore because of Christmas Day'.

Whatever our circumstances, our joys, our sorrows, our blessings or our pain, I pray that this Christmas we will all open our hearts anew to Jesus, and experience - more deeply than ever - the transforming power of his love.

"Faith is like a bird that feels dawn breaking and sings while it is still dark."

SCANDINAVIAN PROVERB