

Another year over, where does the time go? As I write to meet today's deadline for the magazine, I'm aware that we've just celebrated the Feast of Christ the King – the last Sunday of this Church year. Unlike the secular world, our New Year begins on Advent Sunday (27th November this year), not January 1st with the calendar! Advent literally means the arrival of a notable person or thing; we might speak of the advent of computer technology for example.

For Christians, Advent is the 4-week period before Christmas, a time of preparation to welcome the Christ child anew into our hearts on Christmas morning. In many homes, preparation for Christmas means frenzied activity. Spending money we may not actually have to spare, fretting over what present to buy for each relative or friend – will they like it? Will it fit? Christian Advent is, or should be, a time of prayer and reflection, as we think about how God loves the world he created so much that he gave his only Son as a ransom for many, giving thanks and seeking to serve our God better in our daily lives.

In the current financial climate, we all need to take stock, to think about how and where we spend our money. For many the choices are stark; food or warmth. As you consider gifts for loved ones, think about what they really need. Our gifts are a symbol of our love for other people, but love can be expressed in many ways, often not needing money at all! It is so easy to write a quick message on a card and stick it in the post – there, that's done for another year – but how much more meaningful it would be to make the time to pop in and see that person, have a chat and a cuppa perhaps. For many people, Christmas is a time to dread, lonely and isolated as the television promoted 'Family Christmas' from November onwards. Even a phone call can make such a difference to someone who is housebound. Yes, it is nice to receive cards with good wishes at this time of year (our first arrived yesterday, from Australia!) but how much better it is to be able to talk to someone!

Again, for many people, Christmas is over once the presents have been unwrapped. In the church, the Christmas Season continues until we remember the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, on February 2nd. In theory, our decorations could be left up until then, but it is a relief to get them packed away in early January according to the Twelfth Night tradition, our homes 'back to normal' again. This year, Chris and I will celebrate our Christmas as usual here, then again in early January, when we finally get to see our Grandchildren in Australia again. I look forward to sharing stories of my time away with you when I get back in April.

Wishing you all a reflective Advent, a peaceful and happy Christmas Season, and every blessing for 2023.

Best wishes,

Helena

PS Thanks to all who decorated Findon Church so beautifully for Remembrance Sunday. I was in Ferring Church that Sunday, as their Vicar retired in September, and the number of wreaths laid at the Village War Memorial was astounding! Perhaps next year our village organisations would like to think about taking part and laying a wreath as we remember those who have lost their lives or sustained life changing injuries in conflict, while seeking peace and justice between nations.