

Well, a belated happy new year to you all – where did January go? Christmas seems a long time ago now, but thank you to everyone who joined us for our Services, and to those who decorated our churches so beautifully for the Festive period. It was a joy to have a packed Findon church (we even ran out of seats!) on Christmas Eve for the Crib/Christingle Service.

The cold snap in January has made for lovely long walks with Tilly in our beautiful countryside around Findon. With the ground frozen, it has been lovely not to bring her home each day with black mud stockings! The exceptionally wet December had made the ground so wet, at least now it has had a chance to dry out again.

On the first fine day, very early in January, I took her out for a couple of hours, including walking through Wiston Woods back towards Cissbury and the Village. The puddles stretched right across the path in places and I noticed how the trees on either side of the wide bridleway were reflected perfectly in the still water, with the clear blue sky mirrored in the background. It made me reflect on how we are all made in the image of God, beautiful in his sight. How often do we forget this, failing to see God's reflection in the faces of people we meet! It saddens me to hear of all the ongoing violence in our world. All major world faiths teach tolerance and respect, the love of neighbour, yet so often differences in religious doctrine and practice are cited as reasons for continuing to persecute those of a different faith. Our prayers are so needed for wisdom and compassion for all world leaders, that they might use their power and authority with integrity, for the benefit of all people rather than for selfish gain; seeking peaceful resolution to differences through respectful dialogue instead of resorting to violence.

On February 13th, we will celebrate Shrove Tuesday at Lambstails in Findon Village Hall with some pancakes. Perhaps you will enjoy pancakes in your own homes as well! Traditionally, this was a means to use up any rich ingredients before embarking on Lenten fasting, as well as a chance to have some fun and frivolity (as in Mardi Gras carnivals and processions) before the solemnity of the Penitential Season. The 40 days of Lent, leading up to Holy Week, are an opportunity to reflect on our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for us on the cross, rising to offer new life that first Easter. Some folk like to 'give up something for Lent' (like wine or chocolate) which can be good for the waistline and save us money! I suggest trying to do something extra, rather than (or as well as) that. Why not try to set aside a short time each day to be quiet, giving thanks for all the good things we all enjoy and thinking of the many in our world who are suffering – I call this prayer, as I hold people and situations up to God. As Tom Paxton sang back in 1972, 'Peace will come, and let it begin with me', words as true today as when they were written.

Every blessing,

*Helena*