

Dear Friends

“How long before I can put up the Christmas tree ?” has been a topic of conversation since early October on Social Media. By now, I expect many of you will be either proudly looking at your beautiful decorations or wondering whether it is time to ‘Deck the Halls’ with boughs of holly. Others may be shuddering in a somewhat Scrooge like fashion, muttering “Bah Humbug” and privately thinking that Christmas Eve is quite early enough.

I confess I belonged to the latter group. That is, until very recently. Because the month of December, for me, for our family and church family is a time of preparation. A time for us, in spirit at least, to journey towards Bethlehem to help us prepare for Jesus’ birth. We think about the whole history of the coming of Jesus: God’s promises to Abraham; the words of the prophets still so beloved in works like Handel’s Messiah and our carols, the coming of John the Baptist, Patron Saint of two of our churches, and of course, our focus on Mary, mother of our Lord.

But decorations also tell a story. One family use their tree like an Advent Calendar. Each day a new decoration or object is hung up as the Christmas story unfolds, with the Angel arriving on Week 4 ... and Baby Jesus on Christmas Eve. It helps them to reflect on the small things, that end up being the important things.

Christmas is a time of great joy, but not everyone who puts up decorations is joyful. In full “Bah Humbug” mode, I asked one young friend of mine why she puts up her trees in early November. I was silenced by her response. “It’s because each of my three trees commemorates a baby that we lost in the autumn, and they give me hope, at a time when I am most sad.” The birth of Jesus is all about bringing hope into a world which sometimes can seem bleak and comfortless. The love of God brings light into the darkness.

So in recent years, we have placed a bare Christmas tree in the church in Hindon during Advent, so that families who have lost loved ones, can put a simple star on the tree, take a prayer card and know they are not forgotten. It remains bare until Christmas itself, when, together with the main tree, it is lit. Christmas brings hope, as we celebrate God’s wonderful gift in the light of Christ child.

Around the country, you will see trees of light: raising money for local charities and reminding us that Christmas is a time when we too should be looking to bring light into the dark places. As you prepare for Christmas, why not add a few pieces to the foodbank box, a decoration or two that remind you to pray for those who are in need, in war zones, or facing a different Christmas this year after bereavement. And If anyone wishes to buy a Tesco supermarket token for those in the Refuge this year: I’ll make sure they arrive in time. Bring a little light and sparkle into every place we can !

Every blessing, Jo revdjoannanaish@gmail.com