

## **MIDNIGHT MASS 2025**

It was a headline in a national newspaper last weekend. The 'Strictly' judge, Shirley Ballas, saying 'People want to bitch.'

She was talking of course, about people online or in the supermarket making impolite personal comments direct, either about the way she looks or the way she judges – and how so and so should never have been knocked out so early on in the competition.

But the headline is true of so many other big institutions as well as individuals: the deep and often understandable criticism of the BBC or, The Church of England, or the Treasury, or the Home Office – wherever difficult decisions are made – good or bad, depending what they are. People do want to bitch, usually at a safe distance!

But yes, there have been serious failings in safeguarding nationally, in racial or sexual tolerance, in economic security – for farmers or schools or those in the hospitality sector – you name it. This Advent I have mentioned the recent brave poster campaign in the Anglican Diocese of Leeds as one example of how to counteract misconceptions even around the meaning of Christmas itself. There are four inspiring posters (displayed of course on four of my Rectory windows) and so far, I have received no complaints! The combination of a deep icy blue background, and gold haloes surrounding the faces of the holy family, lodged in the safety of a busy bus shelter; and peered at through the surrounding glass by

people like you and me who have done their last-minute shopping...

This isn't 'woke'. It is The Gospel of Good News for our times and our generation. It is what St John says so starkly and beautifully: "The Word became flesh and lived among us."

That's what we celebrate tonight; that in all our muddle and mess, our 'highs and lows', God crept in beside us: to be our light and hope, and our salvation.

Bishop Arum, co-lead Bishop for Racial Justice, said: "As we recall the Holy Family's own flight as refugees, we reaffirm our commitment to stand alongside others in working for an asylum system that is fair, compassionate, and rooted in the dignity of being human. It is that same message which we tried to capture in Sunday's 9 Lessons and Carols, reflecting deeply on difficult Scripture certainly, but not ducking it or editing it out. Those of you who regularly read and pray through or sing the psalms will know what I mean. **Include** those angry passages that some commentators put in brackets! There is a place for anger, especially when war crimes are committed or when humanitarian aid is denied. There is a place to cry, 'Mercy'!

At the heart of our Christmas story is also the gift of humility, wonder and joy. You will have noted our use of the word 'Joy' throughout our service booklets and now here in Church: at the top of our tree, underneath the high altar, and by our crib - with hangings made by some of our residents in Grove Court. Tomorrow, the Salvation Army is hosting a Christmas

Day lunch again this year for anyone who has nowhere else to go. One of our parishioners is gladly helping out too and 'on call', which is really cheering.

Memorable for me, personally, has been the 'Grumpy Owl' nativity rehearsal at our Primary school this year for our Christingle earlier - and again, when Year 6 came out to Seckford Chapel to sing their carols to a very appreciative and emotional audience. Or think of the children who will be receiving our gifts tonight or tomorrow for East Anglian Children's hospices and Suffolk Refugee support – the joy they will bring to excitable and thankful hearts.

Our Christmas faith both challenges us and inspires us to be joyful (whatever our circumstances) and to be the very opposite of that headline with which I began. Let's concentrate on the good in others and for joyful and generous hearts in all our thinking and decision-making. Let's pray that our own nation, our places of work and the places we call 'home' will always welcome and celebrate the Christ-child's love for all of us and the joy He wants us to know and share.

I wish you all a happy Woodbridge Christmas and pray for a more peaceful New Year for those places and people on our hearts tonight.

May God richly bless you and keep you: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

