

CHRIST THE KING'25

Today marks the climax of our liturgical year. We celebrate Christ the King, Christ in Majesty. We are left in no doubt from our Gospel that this King died for us not with a crown of jewels but with a crown of thorns: on a simple wooden cross which proclaimed him as 'King of the Jews'. On this tree of shame and abandonment it is hard to see there any clear signs of kingship. So we have to turn to St Paul, who wants to take us to its theological meaning which transcends nationality, and any other kind of limitation or bias which most powerful rulers usually depend upon.

St Paul says to the community of Colossians as he would to the community of Woodbridgeans, to you and me:

"Christ is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."

St Paul articulates so powerfully what we all find so difficult, moving from the cross, to see there His promise of Glory. That glory we call redemption, forgiveness of sins – of the kind he showed to one of the criminals beside him on Calvary. Of the kind he showed in his Resurrection appearances where just his presence and humility was so much more effective than any claims of revenge over his killers; any claims of triumph at all.

He fulfils so much of the kind of Kingship represented by David, and inherited the Old Testament cry for someone

whose key unlocked the doors of a new kind of Kingdom which even David could not open.

He is for St Paul and for us, the head of the body and head over us and the one whom we seek again during our new year at Advent: to shine in our hearts, to show us a different kind of kingship and authority. We seek fresh understanding of His longing for our friendship, as we long to meet and encounter him: in our sacramental living, praying, and worship; in our faithful, joyful, Christian service to others.

Christ is not a King who keeps his distance or who stands on ceremony. He longs to meet us where we are and come beside us. Everything he does and says to us (when we listen and look out for Him) is invitational. That's why we try to echo that same sentiment in the four Sundays of Advent and say and sing, "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" – Come to us again in Woodbridge and Great Bealings and lead us closer to your outstretched arms of welcome, your sheer embrace of boundless love and care for every corner of the Church and the world. Today's Feast celebrates that catholic and transforming truth.

And next Sunday we begin to explore a little deeper those titles, those kingly characteristics of Christ, which were celebrated in the context of vespers (the night prayers of wakeful worshippers) since, we believe, the 4th century. We shall ponder and hear the 'O Antiphons' which were wrapped around the greatest Song which was and is, Mary's remarkable and memorable 'Magnificat'. I can't wait!

I have already seen too many silly adverts haven't you, (whether it is Waitrose or John Lewis) that don't take me to the heart of anything, except the deceit of over-consuming? I have also heard like you, so much said about the Budget so many weeks before the big day, that I am thinking we should let the Chancellor have the day off instead and move it to Lent!

What I am trying to say is that however out of synch our clocks or seasons may feel, don't miss out on preparing for the rich tapestry which is Advent. Find some precious moments and time to do what our Advent book encourages us to do...Begin with a short text from Scripture, reflect on it, make your own response to it – even if it raises more questions than answers. A lively faith does that, I believe. An **Advent** faith requires it!

Here's a prayer which I have stolen from page 61, which I invite you to make your own:

“Most high and holy God,
lift our eyes to your Son
enthroned on Calvary;
And as we behold his meekness,
shatter our earthly pride;
for he is Lord for ever and ever.
Amen.”